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# FASHION

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**30**  
YEARS

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IT'S  
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A new generation of Canadian men is turning out some supremely sexy furniture. **Murray Whyte** considers the new heat in national design.

**SITTING PRETTY**  
LARS (LEFT) AND  
JASON DRESSLER  
WIT- THEIR  
"ANOT-ER TIME,  
ANOTHER A RPORT"  
CHAIRS. BELOW:  
THE DUO'S ONEDGE  
ROCKER

In the early '90s, twins Lars and Jason Dressler took to the Ontario woods to help build the family cottage. Glancing around at the leftover materials (odds and ends, mostly wood), the pair chafed at the notion of letting them go to waste. "We thought it should be used for something," recalls Jason. "Why not furniture?"

In the ensuing years, Lars and Jason finished their engineering degrees (chemical and mechanical, respectively) and spent a year playing pro basketball in Germany. But the woodworking seed had been planted and began sprouting. Lars took furniture courses at George Brown and Humber colleges. And around 2000, frustrated with his job and finding the engineering grind stifling to his creative impulses, Jason turned to furniture for good, going back to school at Sheridan College.

"We realized it could be more than a hobby," says Jason, now 33.

After honing their craft at wood-working shops in Toronto, the duo launched their design company, Brothers Dressler, in 2003.

Like their work—a seductive collection of artistically engineered feats, such as the blithely curled parallel slats of a perfectly unique rocking chair, or the organic curves of a dining chair that looks moulded from a single slab of wood—the brothers have an understated charm. Though they are nature boys by, well, nature, the Dresslers' work is just as at home in urbane quarters as it is in the elegantly rustic rural homes they work on in concert with their architect clients.

The brothers may find some affinity with Tyler Jones, 34, of Vancouver, whose eponymous design shop on the city's budding hip Main Street was, until very recently, the city's best destination for a bit of rustic urbanity. Jones surrendered the storefront in the fall, when the rent shot up—

in fast-forward Vancouver, Main has gone from the next place to *the* place in a heartbeat—but he's still the most notable purveyor of clean, simple designs coaxed from the roughest of materials. "The inherent imperfections are much more interesting—barn wood, weird stuff," Jones says.

Calgary's John Greg Ball, 31, might agree. Take his Spine 6.0 chair, an array of wood slabs stacked along a curving backbone, or his Hoodoo floor lamp, a collaboration with artist Shoko Cesar. The Hoodoo is a slim, ghostly apparition of a light fixture that curls upward like its namesake—the natural sandstone formations carved by erosion in Alberta's badlands. It won a Best of Canada award from Canadian Interiors magazine in Toronto last fall.

Calgary's overflowing wealth has provided a boon to many in Ball's field, but that's hardly his only reason for being there. Ball's outdoorsy nature informs much of his work. "You can be out of the city and into the mountains in an hour," he says. "That suits me fine."

Swinging back east to the notably more citified aesthetic of Montreal's Scott Richler, an urbane take on old-meets-new prevails. Richler, 32, is the design sage of his semi-eponymous firm, Jennifer Scott (wife and business partner Jennifer Kakoa is the marketing whiz). Their showroom in Griffintown provides an apt setting: The gritty, industrial neighbourhood is on its way to becoming a hip fusion



of past and present—much like Jennifer Scott's luxe handmade decor line.

Rife with subtle aesthetic counterpoints—polished marble slabs set atop rough yet elegant steel bases; sleek modern chairs clad in discreet black and white graphics—the work manages a nifty feat: moving forward while still looking back. The result is a clean, modern blending that evokes notions of 21st-century Victorian luxe.

"Our line is contemporary," says Richler, an architect by training who handles the design chores for the firm's furniture, fashion (along with Kakon) and interior design. "But we invest the pieces with a little bit of heritage character as well."

**T**ooking back not quite so far is Toronto's Keyvan Foroughi, 36. "I saw everything going lightweight," says Foroughi, whose family fled to Paris from Iran in 1978 during the revolution, and arrived in Canada in 1984. "I wanted to bring back the feel of the masters, like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair—heavy, quality things," he says.

His Kizmet table, a muscular piece with a glass slab perched atop two gleaming steel pedestals, cross-braced with a four-by-four walnut beam, is certainly that. But as a recent observation by an intimidatingly foxy woman at the Toronto showroom of Klaus by Nienkämper would indicate, it's a little more than that, too. "You just want to crawl up and have sex on it," she purred.

Ahem. Foroughi may not have had that in mind when he first sketched Kizmet, with its hand-polished—never plated—steel and warm matte wood. "I like the juxtaposition of materials," he says.

But the, er, bringing-sexy-back part? "I wanted sleek," he says. At least one young woman would enthusiastically agree. And at the rate that the table is

"You just want to crawl up and have sex on it," purred one intimidatingly foxy woman, eyeing the new Kizmet table at the Klaus by Nienkämper

flying out of the showroom, she's far from alone.

Back in Vancouver, Omer Arbel entered an exclusive club at the tender age of 27, as the maker of a piece of iconic seating. Created in 2003, his 2.4 chair, a lithe, flexed plane of multi-coloured striped cast resin, racked up a handful of international design nods, and landed in the collections of private galleries and the esteemed Chicago Athenaeum design museum. Arbel made only 20 and sold them for \$3,000 each; they now trade for many times that amount. "It's hardly even design anymore. It's more like speculative art," Arbel laughs.

And it is funny, given that Arbel, now 30, meant to mass-produce the 2.4. "But I was too broke, so it never happened." Not that that's a problem anymore. Arbel, a graduate of the University of Waterloo's school of architecture, turns down more work than he accepts. Small wonder, given his increasing profile across the design disciplines: architecture, interior design and product.

"It keeps me fresh," he says. "Architects used to be product designers, but they've lost ground to other creative professions. I wanted to invert that."

Sometimes the cross-fertilization bears unexpected fruit. His 14 Series Pendant Lights, a collection of fist-sized, illuminated crystalline spheres dangling at different lengths in an otherworldly cluster of light, were made as part of an exclusive Vancouver penthouse interior. The chandeliers are now mass-produced in both North America and Europe. "They sell like crazy," he says. "It's an interesting synergy. It was made for a building, but it has a life of its own."

As for the 2.4, expect no more. "I kept one. I wish I'd kept more," Arbel laughs. "It's in the living room. We sit on it. That's what it's for, right?" □

**FORM AND FUNCTION**  
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: FOROUGHI'S SEXY KIZMET TABLE; ARBEL'S AWARD-WINNING 2.4 CHAIR; RICHLER'S CHIC SETTEE; JONES' ELEGANTLY RAW TABLE

