

THE PLAIN DEALER

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Of Irish Descent

Contemporary Irish furniture draws on the clean but sometimes intricate lines of its Celtic heritage. It fits well in an urban loft or a lakeside cottage.

It is furniture with a timeless beauty, but often also a whimsical wink. Who else but the Irish would design a “mushroom” table and chair set that is perfect for seating leprechauns?

There are numerous sources of Irish-inspired furniture, furniture designs and accessories for those so inclined to indulge. Here are a few examples.

A good carpenter should be proud of his work, believes Gabriel McKeagney, owner of Irish Furniture in San Juan Capistrano, Calif. McKeagney is a fifth-generation craftsman who grew up in County Fernamagh, Northern Ireland. But in his troubled native land, McKeagney felt creatively suppressed. That changed when he moved to California in 1996.

“My work here isn’t a political statement,” McKeagney said. “But it is the acknowledgment of my heritage’s strength and beauty that wasn’t in our daily lives in Ireland and hadn’t been there for hundreds of years.”

McKeagney’s artistic side blossomed with his Bard’s Chair. The three-legged mahogany chair features an ancient classic Celtic design in subdued colors carved into its narrow back. A small shelf (available either on the left or right) extends from the seat of the armless chair and is just right for holding sheet music, a poetry book or a mug.

“Growing up in my village in Ireland, there were little resources. I never forget that. The shelf on the chair was born out of

my reluctance to cut off a beautiful piece of wood [that wasn’t really needed for the seat]. Other cultures couldn’t design furniture like that. But the Irish can and they can make it look good,” McKeagney said. “When one woman saw the chair, she was just mesmerized by it. She said she felt she had met the chair before.”

In addition to the Bard’s Chair (\$1,450), McKeagney has designed a complementary music stand (\$1,750). His Mushroom Collection includes a three-legged table

woodcrafters to help keep up with the demand for his furniture.

McKeagney believes the renewed interest in Irish furniture – as well as in the country’s music, literature and food – is the result of the restored sense of self-worth among the Irish.

“That has spread to America through entertainment like ‘Riverdance,’ and the Irish-Americans are becoming rejuvenated. It’s a whole new level of appreciation for Irish culture,” McKeagney said.



(\$825) that seats three. Mushroom Stools (each \$275) match the table and also can be used as footrests or side tables. The elm wood used to make the set was harvested from trees that had been cut down in the Los Angeles area. The artist now employs

