

The inside scoop

BY SYDNEY SCHWARTZ HARDIMAN

Anytime I can spend five days alone, luxuriating in a hotel without the children or a husband is pure bliss. Combine this trip with five days of focusing on nothing but custom home furnishings and I may be tempted to never return.

Return I did, though, after five days in Philadelphia at the Custom Home Furnishings 2004 Educational Conference. The Custom Home Furnishing School, (CHFS) based in South Carolina, is the premiere school for custom furnishing professionals. Every year, the school holds an intensive five-day educational conference that focuses on improving attendees' techniques for a variety of custom furnishings: window treatments, slipcovers, bedding and even upholstery. In addition to taking classes on cornices, box cushions, roman shades, and workroom tips, I was able to visit approximately 80 vendors to see the latest and greatest in window treatment fabrics, trims, and hardware.

My favorite new product comes from a company called Adaptive Textiles. Imagine creating your very own design and having it come to life on as many yards of cotton or linen fabric as you'd like. Rather than using a screen printing process, Adaptive Textiles prints the fabric on a huge machine similar to a computer printer. The possibilities are endless! A client can create drapes from their children's hand-drawn pictures or feature their business logo on a table cover used for trade shows. Adaptive Textiles sells to the trade only. (www.adaptivetextiles.com)

Another great new product comes from a company called Chic Cleats. When owner Sandra Nash couldn't find anything other than unattractive metal and plastic cleats to tie off her roman shade strings, she decided to create her own. Chic Cleats come in a variety of designs made to look like leaves, decorative rope, wood, and more; they offer coordinating shade pulls, hooks, drawer pulls and other accessories. Chic Cleats can also create custom designs, so why settle for ordinary? (www.chiccleats.com)

Unlike jewelry, fakes in drapery accessories can sometimes be better than the real thing. Two companies showcased fabulous fakes so realistic you had to pick them up to know the difference. The new Tropical Collection from Iron Art by Orion mimics real bamboo rods and rings and leaf finials, yet without any worries of the iron drying out and splitting like real bamboo can. Check out their products at their Web site; they too sell to the wholesale trade only. (www.ironartbyorion.com)

Helser Brothers' *Tableaux* collection of custom decorative motifs look like wrought iron, but are made out of resin. The decorative motifs come in 30 different designs and can be customized to any shape or size to fill your windows or skylight niches or simply decorate your walls. Helser Brothers sells to the trade only. (www.helserbrothers.com)

All the great classes and new products have me so energized I wonder if I can convince CHFS to make next year's conference twice as long! *

Sydney Schwartz Hardiman is the owner of Everything In Its Place, Custom Fabrications, a retail and wholesale workroom based in Pittsburgh, PA. Sydney designs and fabricates soft furnishings and is currently working on the book *The Business of Being Creative: How to Make Money and be Successful as a Custom Fabrication Workroom*. She is vice president of the Women's Business Network.