

METROPOLIS

The Metropolis Observed



Lapidus Resurrected

furniture

Some of the architect's original furniture designs are now being put into production.

Morris Lapidus, renegade sensualist and devout believer in space as entertainment, has re-entered the building. The architect, who died five years ago at the misleading age of 98—"He wasn't old; he was never old," longtime collaborator and confidante Deborah Desilets says—is being resurrected in a line of furniture produced by New York-based distributor and manufacturer Dennis Miller.

Lapidus designed sets: his maximalist interiors were the stages on which the inner dramas of the social-minded visitor were played. The furniture was almost incidental, created as needed to fit into the grander glamour he'd developed. As Desilets explains, if Lapidus couldn't find a couch that would fit his curved wall, he would simply design it using his comprehensive Beaux Arts education, the material memory of a childhood spent sweeping his coppersmith father's floor, and a healthy dash of irreverent whimsy.

"A Morris building was always so modern," Desilets says. "And then you'd go in, and it'd be so different. There was a dissonance between the exterior and the interior, and the furniture was a whole other thing." She describes Lapidus's tendency for imaginative planning, using flow and the natural

meandering paths that people tend to prefer—and that his contemporaries would so often bar, designing instead within the reigning obsession for clean lines and order. The furniture was both a prop and an instigator of fun disorder.

"Lapidus falls into my interest in twentieth-century architecture and midcentury Modernism," Miller says, explaining why he chose to be the first to mass-produce Lapidus's furniture. "Although he's obviously an iconoclast." The first five pieces, which Miller expects to roll out this spring, were chosen because of their contemporary appeal as well as their adaptability to contemporary manufacturing realities: much of Lapidus's Beaux Arts-inflected molding and carving proved too archaic (read: expensive) for current capabilities. The as yet unnamed line will include a curved lounge chair created originally for Miami Beach's Eden Roc hotel, a Lucite-armed sofa designed for his apartment, an S-shaped bench, an armless barrel lounge chair, and a wood-framed upholstered armchair borrowed from the Fort Lauderdale Sans Souci.

Miller hopes the furniture will put Lapidus on the popular map. "I think he's an important archi-



Among the architect's designs being produced by Dennis Miller is this red armchair, circa 1955, for the lobby of Miami Beach's Eden Roc hotel.

tect for people to know about," he says. Reminiscing about his childhood visits to Lapidus's well-known Florida hotels—including the Eden Roc (this year celebrating its 50th anniversary and a possible setting for the new furniture) and the famous Fontainebleau—Miller remembers that despite critical failure the spaces were "admired for their experience, if not the architecture."

"He didn't care what the architectural community thought," Miller says of the criticism so often leveled at Lapidus for creating architecture that operated for people rather than theory. His buildings offered up just enough Modernism to mask the interior voluptuousness. Yet their relative stealth hasn't been enough to save many of the structures from the roving bulldozers of greedy developers, aided by the blind eyes of critics. Lapidus's furniture, once a supporting actor, might soon have to play the starring role. —Eva Hagberg