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The Taste-Maker

MURRAY MOSS TAKES HIS STORE-CUM-MUSEUM TO L.A.



Murray Moss and Franklin Getchell on a platform in their store, beside a Pluma Cubic suspension light, by Heike Buchfelder.

Do you hear about the chicken?" asks a frustrated Murray Moss, standing in the middle of his large shop, Moss, the industrial-design mecca located on Greene Street, in the SoHo district of Manhattan. In a matter of weeks, a second Moss is due to open on Melrose Avenue, in Los Angeles—trumpeted by its owner as "Moss goes to Hollywood." What is causing him his momentary distress in SoHo is *Paduaner Hahn*, a 22-inch-high Meissen porcelain rooster, designed circa 1734 by Johann Joachim Kändler, the father of European porcelain art. It is the current star of the gleaming, 9,000-square-foot store and the anchor of Moss's high altar: a 48-foot-long elevated platform that looks like a fashion-show runway, strewn with exquisite furniture and objects.

"You know what happened with the chicken?" says Franklin Getchell, Moss's business partner and his boyfriend of 34 years. "We sold it, and that *always* gets Murray bent out of shape. Personally, I like it when we sell \$16,000 porcelain chickens."

"I hate it," says Moss. "I'd like to be a museum. You don't have to sell anything. No one

touches anything. All you do is get grants." He turns to a team of display assistants—three young men in black T-shirts with the store motto PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH—and eventually they settle on a replacement for *Paduaner Hahn*: *Raven*, a \$5,580 Nymphenburg porcelain piece, which Moss places atop a cast-aluminum fruit crate called *Ortofrutta*, designed by Andrea Salvetti, and beneath a sprawling vine-like copper mobile called *Flora*, the work of Dutch designer Tord Boontje. The resulting tableau of juxtaposed styles and centuries—*Flora* and *Ortofrutta* are from 2004, *Raven* from 1911—is typical Moss.

The store is set up to look and feel like a museum. Near each object is a placard giving the name of the designer, date of the design, and details about the materials, as well as the price. The most expensive item in the shop is a \$190,000 Venini glass sculpture, *Cavallo di Leonardo*, designed by Ben Jakober and Yannick Vu. "Cheap is not in our business plan," says Getchell, who is the financial brains of the operation. Sales for 2007 are projected at \$25 million.

Murray Moss has become one of the most influential taste-makers in the design world. For



From top: Met chandelier, Maarten Baas burned chair, and Borge Mogensen sofa; Moss salesmen; Ultimate Art Furniture, by Constantin Boym.



years the ultimate stamp of approval for a work of industrial design was inclusion in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, and when Moss started out he looked to MoMA for inspiration. Ironically, MoMA, as part of its recent \$425 million makeover, patterned its design galleries after Moss. "That was flattering," says Getchell. "But what is strange is that Moss set up its store to resemble a museum, and MoMA's design department is now a museum resembling a store resembling a museum."

The market also takes signals from Moss, who was quick early on to showcase the work of Marc Newson, now the leading industrial designer of his generation. In 2006, the prototype of Newson's Lockheed Lounge chair sold for just shy of \$1 million at Sotheby's. It is now for sale at the Sebastian & Barquet gallery, in Manhattan, for \$2.5 million. "The Lockheed sale was a milestone," says Getchell. "It constituted a market validation of the work we've been doing for a long time."

Capitalizing on the explosion of interest in design art, Moss is starting a new company, Moss Limited Ltd., to commission limited-edition col-