



# *The* STATE OF THE UNION ★

How American designers are weathering the tough economic climate—and what they'll show at ICFF.

by  
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**Once primarily** a venue for homegrown talent, the International Contemporary Furniture Fair today draws international firms and serves as the North American stage for Europe's rising stars. Visitors to ICFF are now just as likely to see new materials, office products, lighting, kitchen cabinets, and bathroom fixtures as furniture. But its impressive growth notwithstanding, the show's core strength has always been the presence of domestic designers. This year we decided to check in with ten companies—based from Brooklyn to Beverly Hills, and producing everything from rugs to bar stools—to see how they are managing two years into the recession. Refreshingly, they see the fiscal situation as an opportunity and are taking advantage of the less than ideal circumstances to introduce more affordable products, refocus their efforts, form strategic partnerships, and affirm their commitments to staff and craftsmen. One enterprising young designer, recognizing that manufacturing resources are currently underutilized, seized the moment to launch his own business. Consider this an unscientific survey of the state of American design at a time of peril and promise. ■ / +

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The way the economic downturn has affected my practice is that I have begun to keep in mind that the end product will be a rug when I start to make the artwork. In other words, there is a bit more practicality in my process, as opposed to just making the artwork and sending some off to be made into rugs. This year's work is also more pared down than in the past in terms of the complexity of the image and the color palette. Partly that's just an outgrowth of my artistic practice over the last number of months, as I've been working a lot in black and white in my studio. But I'm also hoping to make more connections with architects and designers and possibly appeal to a wider audience than in the past.

—Amy Helfand