

HOME FURNISHINGS

## 5 driving forces behind the branded furniture hype

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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*Bored with streetwear, hypebeasts are turning to furniture*

The Louis Vuitton furniture section of the site is tastefully named the "art of living." Art is the apt name since most pieces cost upward of \$100,000 and resemble works of art that can be sat on.

In a slightly edgier scenario, Rick Owens launched a popup store at the Berlin cult store Andreas Murkudis in 2019 that combined his ready-to-wear and his furniture designs exclusive to Germany.

Inspired by his partner Michle Lamy, like most of his creations, Rick Owens' furniture line comes across as a natural extension of the same aesthetic world that his apparel inhabits.

Gucci's chairs and couches in its Wooster Street store in New York are on offer along with the sunglasses, and a few years back Supreme adorned legendary Aalto's Tank chair with "FCK."

Not to be outdone, **Stamptd** partnered around the same time with IKEA on organizational storage and furniture named **SPNST** that also includes hoodies, shirts, hats and basketball hoop sets.

The expansion of fashion and streetwear into furniture has been years in the making.

The experience economy propelled brands to create the all-encompassing aesthetic universes to put forward, regardless of the category. Ethos is the product.

A brand's aesthetic world is its main product. Venerable fashion houses buy hotels, open restaurants, hold art exhibitions, brand their regions of origins and turn fashion shows into dance performances.

With a push towards experiential, a same concept can exist as a meme, a bag, a sneaker or a piece of furniture.

Having a brand galaxy is a legitimate growth strategy, taken from Ralph Lauren's playbook: invest in the atmosphere, setting and environment, and sell everything in there. To wit: Ralph Lauren's own furniture is sold in his flagships. It is the approach to global market growth through category expansion, where a brand becomes a player in an increasing number of verticals.

By increasing its market footprint, a brand also amplifies its role in culture by creating a link between a brand's symbolic value and its numerous products.

Supreme, Raf Simons, Rick Owens and Stamptd introduce new meaning in culture by linking their ethos with their products. They create cult objects Aalto's Tank chair, a Gucci rug that serve as totems in their taste communities. They are culturally innovative because they combine the aesthetic experience, identity building and social display.

A person does not buy Gucci shoes or a Gucci pillow. She lives a Gucci life.

In the branded life, anything is an accessory and an opportunity for modern consumers to flex their aesthetic muscles.

Similarly as an ethos can live as a sneaker or as a lamp, consumers are omnivorous in their aesthetic interests. Blame the modern aspirational economy: it decoupled taste from class and turned anyone with an Internet into a connoisseur.

It is not cool to follow trends, it is cool to develop and nurture one's own taste. The taste-first attitude fuels demand for the rare, vintage and limited edition, further fueling supply.

That said, there are five driving forces behind the furniture hype:

Status signaling. Taste is a boundary-making mechanism and a mechanism of distinction.

As the streetwear commercial machinery grows, the discerning tastemakers are moving into the less commercially charted territory of furniture, driven by the same hype around product scarcity and **insider knowledge**.

Rise of the curator. Knowing what to buy and where to shop is currency that, in the modern aspiration economy, makes curators more important than influencers. They guide their audience through culture by putting forward a selection of images, references, codes, product releases, or memes.

Curation gives even mundane objects value by connecting them with a point of view, heritage, a subculture or purpose that makes them stand out in the vortex of speed, superficiality and newness.

Niche-ification. Taste creates its own collectives with a shared ethos, style, vocabulary and leisure. For example, see **Lichen**, a Brooklyn-based interior design incubator, and its "lich-minded" community brought together by music, creativity and design.

In developing taste, the community is the necessary springboard: it includes knowledge, experience, mentors and reference points.

Artification of everything. In addition to pushing their taste regimes forward, modern brands actively artify our everyday life.

Products we buy, our faces and bodies, our experiences and leisure, our living spaces and bookshelves are all increasingly transformed into works of art.

"Everyday life is an art, as art is part of everyday life" is the modern branding's mantra, fed by the massive offering of Instagram inspiration.

Democratization of furniture design. Pioneered by IKEA 70 years ago, a slew of furniture direct-to-connect brands currently make great designs at attractive prices by working directly with manufacturers and selling the furniture without the middlemen.

*Named to Forbes CMO Next, **Ana Andjelic** is a strategy executive and doctor of sociology. She runs a weekly newsletter, **The Sociology of Business**, and is author of *The Business of Aspiration*, out from Taylor & Francis in the fall, available for pre-order [here](#). Reach her at [andjelicaaa@gmail.com](mailto:andjelicaaa@gmail.com).*