

THE HOME FRONT

A Touch of Glass



CLEAR SOFA by Pascal Bauer from Italian designers Sturm und Plastic



CHAIRS by designer Zuzka in Luminex fabric



A Clear View

Some homeowners are decorating with transparent furniture. A sampling of what designers are offering.

ITEM/PRICE	WHAT IT IS	COMMENT
Luminex \$330 to \$540 a yard www.zuzka.com	Sheer fabric woven with fiber optics	Fashion designer Zuzka uses this new material for clothes and home furnishings (her work is sold at Neiman Marcus and boutiques). If you want visual impact from this fabric, use it in a dark room.
Winged Chair \$7,900 212-758-1773	Lucite and Ultrasuede chair	Designer Geoffrey Bradfield describes this chair as a twist on classic 19th-century furniture. His coming furniture collection has about 15 Lucite pieces.
'Aquarius' \$45 a square foot www.interstyle.ca	Glass tiles with embedded colored gems	Introduced in 2001, it's primarily used as inserts, bands and borders on walls, the company says. Sales are up 25% from last year.
'Pavilion' \$8,000 to \$10,000 www.tre-piu.com	10-foot by 10-foot sliding glass partition with aluminum frame	New York designer Ken Foreman uses these in residential and commercial work, most recently in the redesign of fashion designer Elie Tahari's Manhattan office.
Geo Brick \$62 a brick www.sturmundplastic.com	Curved plastic "bricks"	This Italian company's building blocks can be combined to make wavy see-through walls and shower cabinets.
Glass Panels \$25 to \$30 a foot 248-554-0482	Laminated glass embedded with flow-ers or ribbons	The designers say the decorative panels are popular (sales are up 20% in the past year) because while the material is transparent, it still has texture.

tions. In Chicago, architect Lucien Lagrange recently completed that city's first all steel-and-glass residential tower since Mies van der Rohe's 1948 "Twin Towers." Frank Gehry is planning a 60-foot-high glass window and glass roof for the Art Gallery of Ontario in his native Toronto.

For nonprofit director Jann Stulberg, glass additions helped transform the whole look of what had been a dark Chicago apartment. Between a new soft green glass backsplash in her kitchen and glass-covered doors in her bedroom, Ms. Stulberg no longer feels "closed off" when she's at home. "Now, it's all open and light, and we're much happier in it." In New York, designer Mr. Noriega-Ortiz was going for a floating-cushion look with his custom-made Lucite sofa. "People do a double take when they walk in," he says, but "it's actually quite comfortable to sit in."

But the see-through look has its detractors, from those who don't like the minimalist message to practical folks who think about design in terms of how family- and pet-friendly it is. Other issues: Lucite's once-tacky image, upkeep (you need a special antistatic cleaner to wipe down Lucite) and faddishness. "Glass tiles—I don't really love them," says New York designer Paul Siskin. "Too trendy. You might get sick of them after a while."

'James Bond' Look

Or, like Valerie Zucker, homeowners may see it simply as a chore—and a painful one at that. The Miami publicist bought a townhouse for its huge ceiling-to-floor windows and sliding glass doors. Not only does she have them cleaned weekly, but she's suffered bruises after running into the sliding door that she thought was open. "I have bumped into them many

times," she says. "When you hit a window, it's pretty substantial."

Still, fashion-conscious homeowners like the completely different look of glass and Lucite. Allison Sarofim, daughter of investment adviser Faye Sarofim, was recently featured in *Vogue* with Lucite furniture that creates a "James Bond" look in the basement of her New York townhouse. And in the February issue, *Architectural Digest* chose to highlight an apartment designed by Geoffrey Bradfield that included a Lucite console and chairs in its foyer. "There's a lot in our culture which is heavy," says AD editor Paige Rense. "To see something light and transparent is uplifting."

Designers say the look can also solve layout problems. "The new floor plans in modern homes are more open," says Florida designer Dawn Causa. "But people still need rooms. Glass and transparent walls are a way to create separation and still keep an open feeling." She estimates that she's put up about 40% more glass walls in clients' homes in the past two years, compared with the two years before that.

But even design mavens like rocker Lenny Kravitz can have second thoughts about the see-through look. Though Mr. Kravitz recently commissioned custom-designed Lucite dining-room chairs for his Miami home, he later opted for a different look: He hired a graffiti artist to come in and spray-paint over the set. "I guess you can see it as a blank slate," says Mr. Noriega-Ortiz.

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a wear-and-tear and a cleaning perspective. "It's a major fingerprint attractor," says Los Angeles interior designer Chris Barrett, who's doing a house in Manhattan Beach with glass or transparent materials over three-quarters of its surfaces. "You'd probably need a storage closet for your Windex alone."

New materials can be fragile, too: Palo Alto developer Mr. Ward complains his Lucite cocktail bar was scarred within the first week it was installed.

Rocker Lenny Kravitz bought dining-room chairs of Lucite, only to later have a graffiti artist spray-paint them.

Plastic and Lucite aren't new, design experts are quick to point out. Lucite became popular in 1940s Art Moderne furniture; by the 1970s nearly every home had at least a coffee table made of it. There was plenty of glass used in mid-20th century modern architecture, too, with Philip Johnson building a famous all-glass house in New Canaan, Conn., in 1949. But now, the old materials are being updated, used in new ways, or turned into high-tech statements, thanks to the help of innovations like ultraviolet glues that allow glass to be attached to walls and furniture with no supports showing.

Open and Light

Luminex, for example, is the new translucent fabric with fiber optics woven in that's being pushed by the Italian electronics firm, Caen—which teamed up with Stabio Textile, a Swiss fabrics firm—while Birmingham Glass & Mirror in Royal Oak, Mich., has products like glass panels with ribbons and rice embedded in them. Elsewhere, designers like Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz are creating Lucite replicas of 17th-century antiques and glass walls as parti-