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Pre-Fab Furniture



Bill Jackson

Designer and designs. Grabe displays living room chairs, the convertible table . . .

Because some women once wanted something good for practically nothing, people now can buy a set of neat, modern living and dining room furniture for less than \$200.

A little more than a year ago, a woman's magazine wanted to show its career girl readers how to furnish a room on a shoe string. The editors had only \$25 of their budget left and still hadn't completed the room. So they took the money to Klaus Grabe, a New York architect, and, like a child who wants a pound of candy for his penny, waited for magical results. They got what they wanted. Grabe designed patterns for a table and two chairs that could be made for \$25.

Like That! So many people wanted the table and chairs that Grabe became the man-with-the-furniture-pattern-business. He kept adding new designs. And now there are 23 of which some 40,000 have been sold, at 75¢ apiece.



. . . dining room table and chairs

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... and the walnut-front storage cabinet.

But Grabe soon found he could sell the furniture itself, knock-down style, cut out and ready to be put together, for the same price a customer would pay for pattern, materials and labor. He put the furniture pieces into cartons and began selling them by direct mail.

Snowballing. That was last January. Since then, orders have doubled every month. And last week in New York prospective buyers could go have a look at the whole Grabe line, all assembled and on exhibit at Gallery Fifty-Six. Also there, in the back room, were flat boxes containing the furniture in its knocked-down form. Some people left with whole living room sets strapped onto their cars. (When ordering by mail, shipping charges are Railway Express collect.)

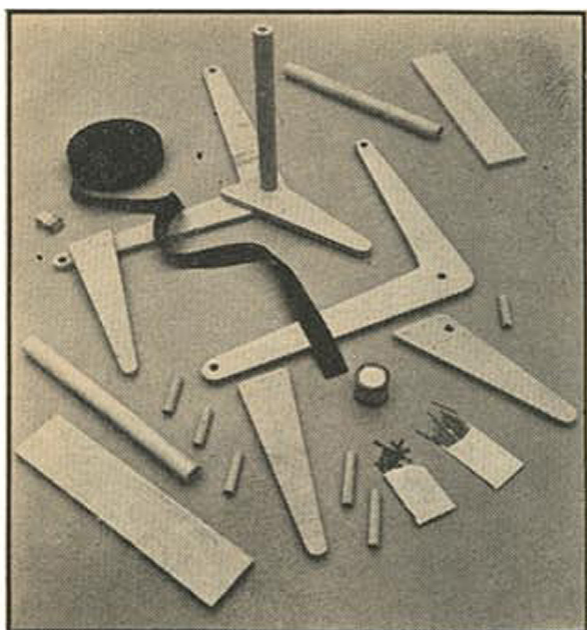
Newest and 13th in the line of pre-fabs on display was a 72-inch storage cabinet (see picture). Its case and base, like the other pieces, are made of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch, 7-ply birch plywood. Its three sliding doors, however, are made of walnut plywood. The price: \$57.50.

There are six kinds of chairs: two with arms (child's size, \$6.45, and adult's, \$16.85); three without arms (one each for dining and living room, both \$13.45; and a lounge model, \$18.85); the sixth, a straight bench at \$10.85. Seats and backs are made of two-inch cotton webbing in red, gold, gray, black or green.

Tables range from two low coffee models, (one rectangular, at \$9.85; the other, round, at \$12.80) to a 33- x 54-inch dining table, costing \$29. Priced in between is a \$19.85, square-topped, convertible table that stands 20 or 30 inches above the floor, depending on which way the legs are turned (see picture).

Another double-purpose piece is the storage cabinet (\$29.85) with adjustable shelf inside. It can be used separately or

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Pre-Fab



Unassembled. *This makes a chair like the one Grabe is sitting on.*

shelf inside. It can be used separately or combined with another cabinet and a 6-foot top board (\$12) and used as a desk or dressing table.

Assembling any one of these pieces takes one to three hours, Grabe says. Only tools needed are screw-driver and hammer, sometimes a small hand drill. All the wood pieces are precision-cut and machine-sanded, and screw holes are already drilled. With the cartons go webbing, plastic wood, hardware, tacks, glue, sandpaper and illustrated instructions. There is no advice on finishing, however. There are so many possible finishes that Grabe suggests seeing the local paint dealer for suggestions.

Though he still has more furniture patterns than knock-down packets, Grabe expects to add more of the latter in the next month or two. Eventually, his customers should be able to assemble their own furniture for any room in the house.