

# designs for living

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photography by gaetano fasciana

## The Facilitator

Paula Metcalfe and furniture aficionados.



**Y**ou wouldn't sell an expensive painting by a renowned artist at a garage sale. Nor would you likely scan the free classified ads in your local trader newspaper if you were looking to buy a piece of designer jewellery.

What about your two-year-old sofa that is simply too big for your living room in your new luxury high-rise condominium? How do you sell it to someone who appreciates its true value? If that sofa is a streamlined English napa leather sectional with articulating backrests, bearing the label of Swiss modern furniture manufacturer de Sede, chances are you would want to target a very exclusive market of prospective buyers. After all, you originally paid \$40,000 for this piece. It was designed and crafted by

those who many regard as consummate artists rather than simply as furniture manufacturers or upholsterers.

A new virtual consignment store and consulting service is now offering both buyers and sellers of high-end modern furniture the convenience of buying and selling quality previously-owned pieces online. Revision Interiors is the brainchild of Vancouver-based industrial designer and modern furniture consultant Paula Metcalfe.

"I have been selling modern furniture in a specialty retail store for four years. I often had clients ask me the best way to liquidate their valuable used pieces. I used to tell them to list the pieces on eBay. Then I realized how impersonal that is. It's not targeting niche buyers. You are dealing with pieces

that a person wants to know details about. They want to know not only the condition, but the history of the piece," Metcalfe explains. "At the same time, I kept meeting people who loved modern design but found that a lot of the pieces were out of their price range. That's when I realized it was time to create a service that would bring everyone, buyers and sellers, together."

Metcalfe recognizes that buying and selling expensive contemporary furniture is not like ordinary shopping. She offers a highly personalized service to both sellers and buyers. Part of that service to sellers is recommending a list price for the sale of the used piece. That two-year-old previously owned de Sede sectional sofa is one of the pieces listed on Revision Interior's website for \$26,000.

A discriminating buyer stands to land a real coup with this piece, which is advertised as being in "excellent" condition. A 35 per cent discount from the original purchase price is a great bargain for a creation with this premium label. Meanwhile the seller, who is replacing the piece in her collection with a new contemporary sofa, will be recouping a good portion of her original investment in this piece of modern art.

Metcalfe says furnishing your home with modern furniture is not an exercise in one-stop shopping. "I encourage people to buy pieces over a period of time so that they can create their own identity in their space. You are really building a collection, instead of buying furniture." European modern furniture manufacturers like de Sede, B&B Italia, Ligne Roset, Giorgetti, Minotti, Zanotta pride themselves in creating furnishings that represent art as much as they represent functional pieces for the home or office. Often these modern furniture pieces are designed by some of the most famous architects and designers of the 20th century.

Timeless contemporary furniture pieces bear the names of renowned designers like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Marcel Breuer and Charles Eames. Modern day superstar architects like Frank Gehry, Philippe Starck, Michael Graves and Antonio Citterio are joining leading industrial and interior designers like Peter Maly, Didier Gomez, Paolo Piva, Carlo Cimini to create new pieces that have become the modern art of the contemporary living environment.

The modern aesthetic seems to be a design aesthetic widely appreciated but understood by few. Modern furniture is meant to be on display, much like art, complementing rather than overwhelming a room. Many argue that it is that artistic value that gives modern furniture its monetary value. Metcalfe says it is also the functionality and durability that comes from both the piece's design and its materials that creates value.

The modern design aesthetic also creates timelessness. Perhaps it is that timelessness that has propelled modernism forward and allowed it to survive to become a leading design trend today. Metcalfe points to the fact that modern furniture is the furniture of choice for many condominium dwellers, who represent a quickly emerging market segment, with the resurgence of downtown

living in many North American cities. "With the shift to condominium living we have seen over the last few years, for example here in Vancouver, modern furniture has become more popular because, with the smaller apartments people live in, modern furniture tends to make sense in a more compact environment."

Modern design spans a range of styles, according to Metcalfe. "You can have everything from cutting edge contemporary to something that is designed for your particular lifestyle. A lot of times with modern furniture there is a sense of whimsy. If it happens to make someone smile, then it is worth it."

Metcalfe says choosing a piece of modern furniture is very much an individual decision based on how you want to live and the space you want to create.



Paula Metcalfe: Not just another bright idea.

"It's really about blending pieces with each other, finding pieces that work harmoniously with each other and appeal as part of a big-picture aesthetic you are creating."

The concept behind Metcalfe's Revision Interiors is to be much more than simply an online second-hand store. Metcalfe is very hands-on. She deals with clients on a client-by-client basis, offering a range of services from identifying, researching and confirming the piece's authenticity to recommending the pricing for sale. "We offer a service a lot like realtors. We consult with the seller, prepare the piece for sale. We list it for sale online and expose it to an appreciative market of modern furniture lovers. Then we help bring the buyer and the seller together and try to complete the sale."

When a client first contacts Revision Interiors to sell a piece, the first step is authenticating the piece either with original paperwork or through inspections, photos and research. "Because we are talking about trading in a product that is very expensive

and very personal, you really do want to have hands-on confirmation that the piece is an authentic, original piece. Often you will get knock-offs. I can confirm the authenticity and guarantee it."

Revision Interiors first turns to the original documents, often still in the possession of the original purchaser, to confirm the purchase price, or she will research the first sale and then use the original price as a guide to suggest a re-sale price that will actually result in a sale.

They also arrange convenient viewing times with both sellers and buyers and they show the piece to prospective buyers, either in person or by e-mailed photos. Often Metcalfe will end up helping the two parties negotiate a transaction that sees the modern furniture piece trade hands.

Revision also offers referrals to professional upholstery cleaners and to cartage companies. Metcalfe is often asked to arrange storage for a buyer or seller while they are awaiting preparation of their residence. "We believe in providing each customer with highly professional and personalized service because they are dealing with a highly regarded product."

Metcalfe has started Revision Interiors in Vancouver and hopes to expand the personalized service offering to other major Canadian cities soon. Since her listings are online, she has the ability to offer her virtual ser-

VICES in the meantime to prospective clients, both sellers and buyers, who contact her from other parts of the country. "There are places across the country that don't have high-end modern furniture stores. So our consignment store can often be the only reliable place where you can purchase a modern furniture piece," she says.

Canadian modern furniture retailers like Vancouver's Inform Interiors welcome Revision Interiors' efforts in providing a service to modern furniture enthusiasts because it increases the overall trade in this kind of furniture.

Metcalfe, who has worked at Inform for the past four years, says her service helps to raise the profile and value of modern furniture among consumers who find the design style appealing but know little about the unique value of modern furniture.

The listings on Revision Interiors' website seem to confirm that there is something for every collector when it comes to the art that is modern furniture. ▽