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A CLEAR SUCCESS

Alexandra von Furstenberg Unveils Her Luminous New Furniture Line

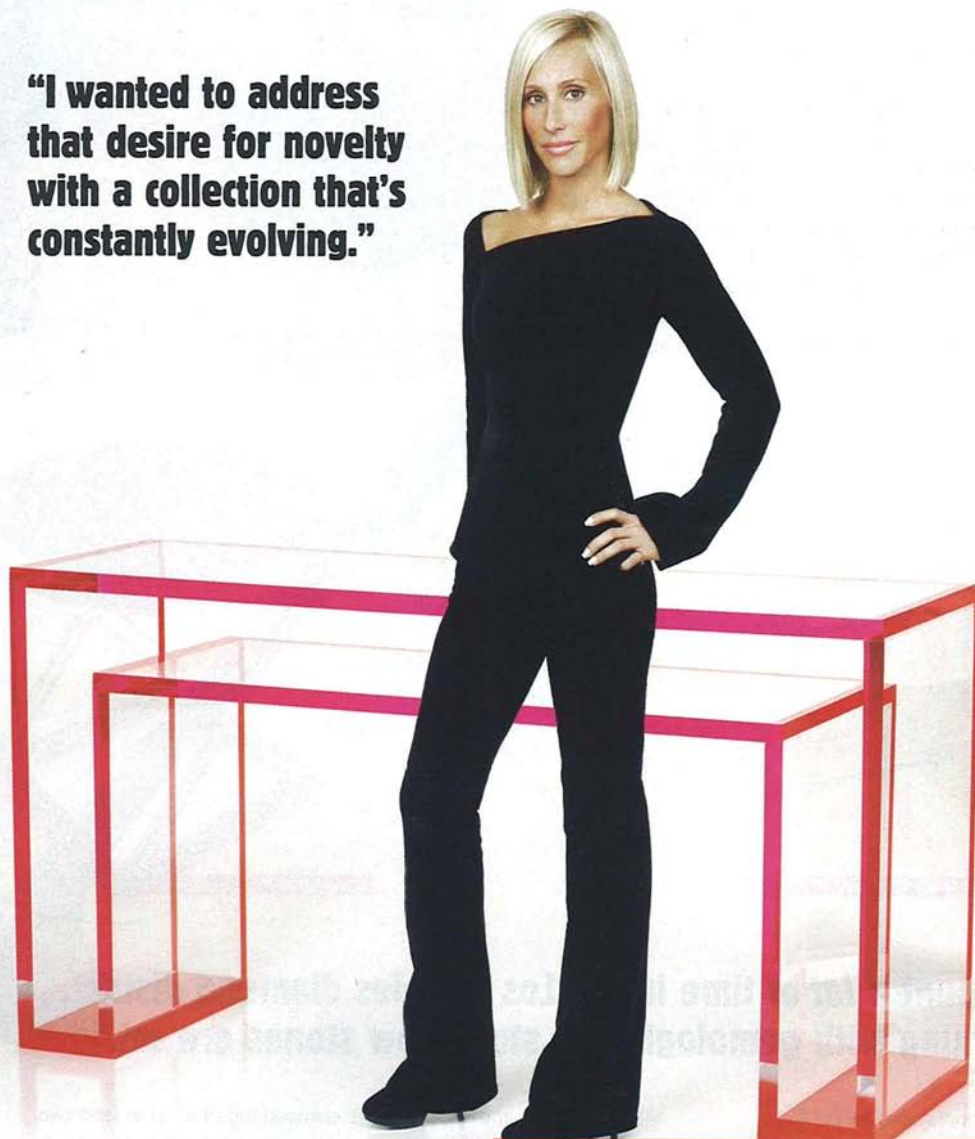
Alexandra von Furstenberg is decked out in a strappy black KaufmanFranco dress sliced down to her bum and sky-high Chloé stilettos so dangerous-looking you'd be afraid to bump into them in a dark alley. Like an exquisite bird, she flutters around her former mother-in-law Diane's Meatpacking District boutique, where assorted stylists have gathered to celebrate the launch of her debut collection. All eyes are on von Furstenberg as she proudly shows off her elegantly sexy creations, explaining the inspiration behind the bold neon hues and pointing to the careful detailing of the seams. "These are my candies," she coos, and indeed the pieces do have an addictively succulent quality.

Oh, by the way, we're not talking fashion here. The blonde-tressed jet setter—the former creative director of the Diane von Furstenberg brand, who helped relaunch the iconic wrap dress in 1995—is now channeling her creativity into furniture. More specifically, tables. Introduced this spring, the six-piece collection comprises a console, dining table, desk and petite side tables—all in crystal-clear Lucite edged in juicy hues to appear lit from within. The designs are available in four fluorescent pastels, one the exact color of a stolen kiss. "A client—female, of course—just bought all six pieces in that hot pink," von Furstenberg notes.

It must have cost her: Pieces range from \$4,500 for a chic X-based side table to an aerodynamic \$21,000 dining table that seems carved from a block of ice. Pricey? Sure. But the expense is justified. Every piece is made to order—an eight- to 10-week process that involves painstaking craftsmanship—and produced in very small quantities, some as few as 20. Von Furstenberg explains that the motivation behind such limited editions is not about tapping into the current hysteria for superexclusive art furnishings; these are serious pieces, meant to be used—not fetishized as hands-off objets. (She even gives clients an instruction kit—including a bottle of proprietary spray cleaner—explaining how to care for the material.) Rather, her concept is to unveil a new series annually and amass a stable of devotees who buy pieces from each line, as they would collect a favorite artist or fashion label.

The emphasis on seasonal offerings does beg the question: Why the switch from dresses to furniture? Fashion, after all, is in her blood—it's practically a birthright. She grew up one of a trio of oft photographed Miller heiresses who spent their formative years on the *Vogue* party pages, adorned in couture finery. She attended the Parsons School of Design and later transferred to Brown to study costume design. And she spent a full decade working for her fashion-

"I wanted to address that desire for novelty with a collection that's constantly evolving."



Alexandra von Furstenberg made her name in the fashion world reenergizing her mother-in-law's Diane von Furstenberg label. Now, she turns her eye to her own line of furniture, such as this Brilliant table in red, \$9,000.

legend mother-in-law, with whom she's still close. Was she tempted to return to the industry? Not really. "My brand began by asking myself, How can I do something different?" she recalls. "There's such an overabundance of fashion lines out there already." And after designing and furnishing the Los Angeles

home that she shares with her two kids—a white-washed backdrop for bold modern artworks and mod vintage finds—she discovered an untapped niche. "Trends move so fast in fashion, yet not in interior design. I wanted to address that desire for novelty with a collection that's constantly evolving. This way,

ALEXANDRA VON FURSTENBERG

clients can refresh their homes regularly." She believes more of us should treat our living environments as *living* environments—i.e., dynamic tableaux reflecting our ever changing tastes and interests.

Clever business hook aside, furniture is obviously a topic about which she's both knowledgeable and passionate. Von Furstenberg is a veritable sponge, sensitive to the visual stimuli surrounding her and doodling whenever and wherever the mood may strike. "Businesswise, I am *not* a procrastinator, I'm quite disciplined. But when it comes to designing, I tend to be very in the moment. As a result, my sketchbook is stuffed with bits and pieces of loose paper." And the occasional cocktail napkin: "Once an idea came to me while I was eating in a Parisian café, and all I had at my disposal was that and a pink lip liner!"

Her inspiration for this collection included luminous diamonds, how reflected light dematerializes the three-dimensional forms. Individual pieces are named after various cuts, such as trillion (a striking pair of triangular side tables) and brilliant (a clean-lined console). Her research process sounds like a girly girl's dream job: "I spent a *lot* of time in the Los Angeles diamond district, working with gemologists to



With her mother-in-law, fashion icon Diane von Furstenberg.



Radiant table in green, \$8,000.



Xoxo table in red, \$4,500.



Trillion tables in green, \$11,000.

"I spent a *lot* of time in the Los Angeles diamond district, working with gemologists to study how stones are cut."

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An ideal medium to convey her glittering ideas, translucent Plexiglas also had a retro appeal. "Lucite was huge in the 1970s, very cutting-edge. But then it disappeared. I wanted to bring it back because it spoke to my vision of the future." She drew out the material's luxurious side by using high-grade Lucite and collaborating with her Long Beach fabricator to envision seamless surfaces that appear sculpted from solid crystal. "There are no bolts or screws—it's all held together with glue," she explains. Although the use of invisible adhesive ensures visual purity, it also demands careful finessing and finishing. After glue is

applied, pieces are clamped together for at least two weeks to squeeze out air bubbles. Glue residue is scraped off with a nail-file-like tool and the tables are then buffed and shined. The result is evanescent. From certain angles, the tables look like luminous lines sketched in thin air.

The collection is sold at von Furstenberg's Melrose Avenue gallery, a few blocks west of Maxfield and the Pacific Design Center. She found the corner location by chance. "Passing by one day, I saw someone carrying boxes around an empty space—I didn't know if they were moving in or out!" Luckily, it turned out to be the latter. She gutted the 1,400-square-foot

storefront and drenched it in floor-to-ceiling white, a creamy backdrop to highlight the glowing neon hues. The storefront windows are frosted at eye level, with a teasing sliver of clear glass at the base. "People are constantly driving by with their heads cocked sideways, trying to sneak a peek," she laughs.

L.A.'s four-wheeled culture was, in fact, another influence on the artfully faceted forms. "I was thinking of luxury cars like Ferraris and Lamborghinis," von Furstenberg explains. "I love the sculpted bodies, the feel of them when they're freshly waxed." Something of a car nut, she also cops to an aggressiveness on the road. "I drive like a boy," she admits, a mischievous smile bubbling through her otherwise calm and polished demeanor. Better fasten your seat belt, because von Furstenberg has an infectious combination of talent *and* drive. "It's endless where this brand can go," she says enthusiastically. Blonde ambition, indeed. 