Furniture Does Double Duty
Even in Spacious Homes, Making the Most of Each Room; a Treadmill Is a Desk, Too

BY HELENE MITCHELL

Sometimes a table needs to be more than a table. Ditto for the sofa, the bed and the bureau.

Helene Cahen wants that from her furniture. Her five bedroom home in Oakland Hills, Calif., should be plenty big for her family. But like many families, hers tended to hang out in a few rooms a lot while other, more formal spaces gathered dust. If the furniture worked double duty, she would get more from her 5,000-square-foot space, advised her interior designer, Walnut Creek, Calif.-based Shannon Kirby.

Ms. Kirby introduced the Ms. Cahen to Clei, an Italian multifunction furniture company. Soon the crib her third child had just outgrown was replaced with a treadmill and bookshelves that rotate to reveal a queen-size bed. The room now is both a workout space and an occasional guest room.

"Now we actually use the space we always had," says Ms. Cahen, 47 years old, a lecturer on innovation at the at UC Berkeley Haas School of Business. She even gave multifunction makeovers to two other rooms in her home. She transformed a wine cellar into a kid's room and storage room, and another unused room into a music room and occasional guest area for when her mother visits from France.

In an effort to make every square inch of their homes matter, more people are turning to furnishings that do double duty. These pieces combine the basic concept of generations of drop-leaf tables and foldout sofas, and with a higher standard of style.

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Finding Furniture That Does Double Duty

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and ease.

"We've seen this for years in Asia and Europe, where they've used to small spaces, but multi-functional furni-
iture) is only newly arriving here, and not just in tiny apartments," says
Steve DeVan, executive vice presi-
deent of the National Home Furnish-
ings Association, which represents
some 1,500 American companies.

After falling during the financial

crisis, furniture sales are starting to
recover. In 2010 to 2011, sales of fur-
nishings started to grow at an average
of almost 5%, says Lobby Bierman, an
analyst at the private-sector monitor-
ing firm Sageworks. "People who put
off furniture and decorating pur-
chases are focusing on their homes
again," she says. As a whole, U.S. re-
tail furniture companies did around
$45 billion in sales in 2011, Mr. De-
Haan says.

Some of the demand for flexible
furniture originates with consumers
becoming accustomed to phones that
also function as televisions, and from
music players that double as remote
controls, says William Harris, one of
four principals at the New York-

based Avroko, an architectural firm
that specializes in custom, high-de-

sign projects. Mr. Harris says people
see a perceived value in objects that
have multiple functions: "It looks
great," they may say, "but show me
what else it can do." Why not make a
couch that turns into a rug? Why
not have postal boxes that dou-
ble as wine locker?" Boston-based
Lauren Rotten, founder of Rotetur Studio, encourages
her clients to keep a formal dining
room for a home office with a desk
that can double as an occasional
guest bed, for that rare event
calls for one. "One day they're
eating at the table for breakfast,
lunch and dinner, so why waste
the space," she says.

Steven Gatble, an interior deco-
ator who sells custom furnishings,
has seen many designers move into
this niche. "Designers are acutely
awake of space limitations, and

his e-commerce site, Deering Hill.
He sells a piece by Richard Shenton
that is a coffee table with storage
and a top that can be removed for
extra sitting, if needed. It retails for
nearly $3,000.

Because the technology to create
these pieces is often complex, it of-
ten costs more. Ms. Caban's Cleo Lo-
isiert bunk beds retail for around
$6,650. The Asmuth dining room ta-
ble, which slides open to reveal a
pool table, goes for about $30,995.
There are 17-inch lacquer side tables
manufactured by Ozalo that pull out
up to 135-inch dining room tables
that sell for $3,995.

Steelcase has a hydraulic desk
with a treadmill beneath so you can
work out while you work. Turkish de-
signer Feyzi Karahan is developing
an apple green credenza that opens
to reveal a kitchen sink, a stove
top, even a candy cart. Japanese de-
signers have brought to life a coffee
side table that becomes a four-person
and chairs (by Kehli) as well as book-
shelves that are also jungle gyms (by
Keichiro Hoshino). Anders Lin-
dqvist's GOES Work Table adjuts
from 28 inches to 47 inches so you
can dine, work and write at it.

Retailer Restoration Hardware has
a Hemmingway-style steamer trunk
for $4,495 that can serve as a seat at
the foot of a bed, then unfold up to a
fully functioning office, filing cabinets,
computer desk and all.

Mr. Harris, of Avroko, recently
created a morphing kitchen-appliance
wall, complete with refrigerator and
even, which rests on a track and can
be pushed (gently) after dinner to re-
veal a guest room with a Tempur-
Pedic bed, leather soundproofed
walls and integrated lighting and out-
lets. The concept grew out of a desire
for increased utility and convenience.
The kitchen sold out as soon as they
hit the market, Mr. Harris says.
The biggest retailer in the multi-

functional space in the U.S. is Re-
source Furniture, which launched
in 2000 as a traditional furnishing dis-
tributor. In 2007, however, found-
ers Steve Spert and Ron Barrich
discovered a few innovative European brands
and decided to focus instead on
multi-functional furniture. Since then, Resource Furniture's sales have
increased more than sevenfold. The
company says multi-functional furni-
ture sales made up 9% of the 53% sales increase it experienced in 2011.

Demand for the furniture also
seems from children moving back in
with Mom and Dad after college and
from more people working from
home, says John B. Brennan III, execu-
tive vice president of Merchandise
Mart Properties Inc., which manages
large design marketplaces, including
Boston Design Center and LA Mart.
"Consumers are refurbishing or
redesigning, and placing smaller or-
ders: a cool-room remodel, for exam-
ple, rather than a complete design
for a new house," Mr. Brennan says.

Sarah Susanka, a Raleigh, N.C.
-based architect and author, has been
championing the "not so big" concept
for 30 years. The new space-saving
solutions aren't only for urban areas
or for bohemian coastal lifestyles;
as she says, they work well in places
like New England, where homeowner-
s are reluctant to give up their
rarely used formal dining rooms.

Ms. Susanka suggests creating
spaces that can grow and change as
people age. In her Not So Big Show-
house in Libbyville, Ill., Ms. Susanka
created an "away room" with a fold-
down bed, an office and soundproof-

ings so owners can escape children
boggling the airwaves. The "away
room" could become a ground-floor
bedroom for an aging owner who
could no longer climb steps to the
master bedroom, for example.

"Fold-down beds and multifunc-
tional furniture are the best way to

"I'm so comfortable, her mother plans
to stay for six weeks. "Now we can
use the space so much more effi-
ciently, and never get locked into the
idea that one room serves only one
function," she says.