Opposites Attract at the Furniture Fair

Retailer Murray Moss, one of the most knowledgeable players in the design world and a board member of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, managed to play with both romance and grim reality. In his SoHo art gallery, he built a fantasy garden around historic glazed terra-cotta figures — a damsels sleeping, a boy with an accordion and the Four Continents — some designed for the Nymphenburg summer palace in Germany. There were also 21st-century garden chairs made of river stones embedded in silicone grout, a $120,000 Swarovski chandelier shaped like ripe bunches of grapes, and a wall of wood chips inspired by the slums of Rio and designed by the renowned Campana brothers of Brazil.

Next door, in the design shop, Moss put on a show called “Domestic Violence.” Stark’s gold-painted AK-47 lamps, unveiled in Milan in April, were joined by three other lamps with provocative decorations. One, a lamp called Addict, has images of needles, viruses and a cell phone. The $1,800 AK-47 fixtures looked like a perfect gift for that warlord who has everything.

The most compelling exhibition involved 49 avant-garde Dutch designers trained at the Design Academy Eindhoven. At a studio provided by Donna Karan, works from famous alums Jurgen Bey, Hella Jongerius and Job Smeets were assembled along with those of newer graduates as a Dutch Village. Erren Verhoeven devoted his senior year to a reinvention of the chain-link fence. A sample was woven into a fantasy of flowers instead of the ubiquitous industrial circuitry. His brother, Joep, took woodworking to a high-tech dimension with a laser-cut antique-styled table.

There was also a bright yellow chair made of recycled debris. The designer, Maarten Baas, gained fame by burning chairs until they achieved the status of charred skeletons. Baas’s startling success was an early indicator of the dark side. But his colorful recycled chairs show that even iconoclasts have a sunny side.

And Arad’s recent designs include a chair sculpted in layers of red Corian, which looks positively cheery, even at $205,000.

It is a sad fact of the cutting edge that American designers continue to be outnumbered by Europeans. Target Stores provided a stage for one consistently interesting designer from San Francisco, Christopher C. Deam. But the effort provided the weekend’s biggest disappointment.

To promote its fall home furnishings, the company commissioned five prefabricated trailers from Deam, a designer with Eames-like modernist instincts. But instead of setting off his clean-lined interior with appropriate furnishings, Target’s decorators covered walls and countertops with patterned contact paper (a not-so-subtle reference to the tackiness some people associate with trailer parks) and piled on furniture and accessories without restraint. The overall impact, from a retailer that has cast itself as a bastion of good design, showed less taste than the worst television makeover show.

Deam’s design deserved better. His version of the standard 400-square-foot prefab trailer is an airy holiday cottage, with shingle-like exterior, aged ceiling and a long wall of glass. The unit will go into production at Breckenridge in the fall. For $45,000, it will come with furniture designed by Deam.