

Tattoo your couch

It's okay to draw on the furniture, writes **TANYA FARBER**

Human beings have been tattooing themselves for more than 5 000 years, for reasons that extend far beyond subcultural practice. Tattoos were once used to mark the member of a clan so that his or her body could be returned to its birthplace after death. They have also been used to ward off illnesses and other "evils" and are still used as a social marker in gangsterism. And they are increasingly being sucked into mainstream culture as a form of everyday body art.

Now two Cape Town designers have taken the concept of person-

alised imprints off the human body and into the world of interior design. Their business is aptly named Tattoo Furniture.

Neither Tracey Collis nor business partner Claire Letoret started out in the decor business; both of them hail from the film industry. Collis was an art director for 24 years and Letoret — a French national who "came to watch the rugby final and never left" — was a scriptwriter and assistant director.

While they still run a successful props-hire business, it is the unique couches, coffee tables, chairs and cupboards that keep them up at night as new designs invade their minds.

None of the designs are complete without the final element: the personal touch of the buyer. Much like tattoo artists who spend their



Personal touch: Buyers choose the art work that will adorn their furniture. Photographs: David Harrison

days adorning human skin, Collis and Letoret first ask clients what they would like imprinted on their new purchase.

Wood is etched, leather couches emerge with once-off, laser cut patterns, mirrors are sandblasted and metal is engraved. The end result is a piece of furniture or a home accessory that has no twin.

"Just as people personalise their bodies, we personalise furniture," says Collis. "Everything we do is about some kind of imprint."

It all began when Letoret needed a desk to work at while writing a script. James Bond iconography was engraved on to it and a plan was hatched. With a strong team of carpenters and joiners already at their disposal for their props business, they were all set to go.

It soon became obvious that their background in the film industry would stand them in good stead. When they suddenly found themselves having to produce a range of items for Decorex this year, their deadline-driven adrenaline rushes of the past came to the rescue. And then they walked off with the award for Best Decor.

"We're on a learning curve," says Letoret, "and it is very inspiring. Our

approach is eclectic and every item is custom made."

What will they do if approached by one of the mega furniture design stores, even though their business is driven by individual taste? They look at each other and shrug. That is not a question for today. There are tables bending over backwards to be immortalised.

For more info and contact details log on to www.tattoofurniture.co.za

Decorex 2007

The 14th Johannesburg Decorex expo takes place at Gallagher Estate in Midrand from August 8 to 12. This year's theme is *Embellishing Space* and the event includes a day-long *Conversations in Architecture* conference on August 8. Keynote speaker Leon van Schaik, professor of architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia, will speak about energising cities and Martin Beeh of Material ConneXion in Cologne, Germany, will look at sustainable materials for design. Go to www.decorex.co.za or call 021 913 2248 for booking details and the line-up.

