

# A match made in Canada

**Kimberley Seldon designs for Brentwood Classics**

BY SUSAN CORCORAN

Collaboration between talents may not be quick or simple, but it still can result in a job well done. It proved so when Guy Sisto, president of Brentwood Classics, partnered with top interior designer, writer and TV personality Kimberley Seldon to produce a new furniture collection.

After 30 years manufacturing top-quality, award-winning furniture at his Toronto factory, Sisto likes to stay ahead of the market. He says he realized a couple of years ago that modern consumers were watching more design television and becoming more decor-savvy. Knowing the growing importance of name recognition, but seeing a lack of Canadian designers doing furniture lines, he decided to remedy that by joining forces with Toronto designer Kimberley Seldon.

Internationally recognized from her HGTV show, *Design for Living*, Seldon is a regular guest on City-tv's *CityLine*, hosts numerous design workshops, and writes a monthly column as decorating editor of *Style At Home* magazine. She and Sisto were introduced through a mutual friend and a partnership was forged.

It proved a good balance, and what Sisto terms "a learning experience for both of us." Sisto understood the production aspects and the marketing for store owners. Seldon had a wealth of experience in face-to-face designing for clients.

The resulting gallery line includes a range of sofas, chairs, ottomans and upholstered benches. The Cooper



CARLO ALLEGRI, NATIONAL POST

Toronto designer Kimberley Seldon and Guy Sisto, president of Brentwood Classics, are working together to produce high quality, yet affordable pieces.

collection (named for Seldon's son) features clean, sleek lines with sophisticated choices such as an armless sofa. The more traditional Raleigh collection (named for her daughter) boasts graceful, sensuous curves and rich fabrics.

Seldon says she had been approached to design a furniture collection quite a few times in the past but declined because, in the other offers, the production would have been overseas. With Brentwood, the line is almost entirely Canadian-made, which appealed to her.

It was "time for somebody to step up to the plate for Canadian-made goods," says Seldon, who was at a recent party where a female guest was perched on the arm of a sofa. The arm fell off, resulting in an embarrassing moment for both host and guest. On closer

inspection, Seldon says the interior of the sofa arm was composed of little more than cardboard. Neither she nor Sisto wanted to produce a collection that had a designer name but no substance. As a result, buyers get exceptional quality in features such as solid maple frames, web and coil springs, seat cushions with 2.6-pound foam (the usual is 1.5 pounds), and toss cushions with a mix of feathers and down.

Seldon says she kept the customer firmly in mind when creating the collections and choosing the fabrics. "It was my job to be extremely disciplined in making the fabric selections," she explains, "to choose fabrics with great appeal and staying power."

She definitely did not want to go for "trendy or flavour-of-the-week" designs, as she puts it, but wanted classic pieces that are more timeless, understanding that average buyers can't just go out and replace their furniture if their current pieces go out of vogue in a year or two.

Both partners decided it was important to keep the collections attainably priced for the mainstream buyer (sofas

retail for about \$1,699). The high-end look and construction, however, make the pieces popular in many settings.

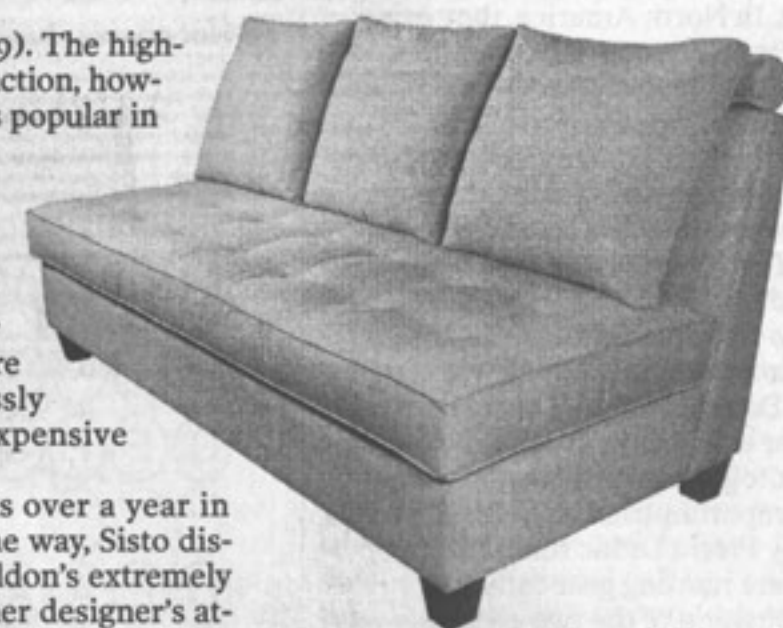
Seldon admits even clients with an extremely high budget are happy to include the sets in their finished rooms, where they blend seamlessly with much more expensive items.

The collection was over a year in the making. Along the way, Sisto discovered firsthand Seldon's extremely high standards and her designer's attention to detail. He admits, with good humour, that there were frustrating moments.

"I didn't see why having the arm of a sofa an inch higher or lower mattered so much," he says, "but to her it really did."

As such, some frames had to be produced three times over before she would give them her stamp of approval. He was glad to concede, however, saying that she has earned her excellent reputation for good reason.

Both partners say they look forward to working together again. They even have a few new designs "on the drawing board," ready to be implemented when the time is right.



The collaborative effort appears to have paid off. To date, there are already 18 galleries across the country, including Ottawa's Ormes Furniture, carrying Seldon and Sisto's collections.

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Susan Corcoran is a Toronto writer.

