

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: *Louis A. Lara, 40*

Wellington furniture designer a sculptor of practicality

By CAROL ROSE
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As a youngster, Louis A. Lara spent a lot of time designing and creating things. When he was 13, *Star Wars* hit movie theaters and Lara knew his career lay in the world of special effects.

He later learned that many of the people who worked with producer George Lucas' company were industrial designers and research led him to realize this "was right up my alley."

When it was time for college, the New Yorker didn't travel far. He chose one of the country's top design schools, the Pratt Institute in New York, with the idea that he would get into special effects.

Lara says college soon taught him that he was not a good collaborator, a quality needed for success in the film industry.

"I didn't like to compromise on ideas . . . I realized I had to be on my own," he says.

He broadened his scope and in addition to design, he added classes that included sculpting and welding. Lara started designing modern contemporary furniture and found that he loved combining "the sculpture aspect with practical products."

"I could marry the balance and the harmony you create when you sculpt something . . . I could bring these qualities to tables and lamps."

Lara says his main goal is to make products that are "appealing and easy to live with" and will last a long time. He notes that some furniture considered modern contemporary was designed in the late 1800s and early 1900s and wants his designs to last as long.

"If people are going to throw it out after five years, the design is a failure," says Lara.

Though he started his own business immediately after college, Lara says this was "the toughest way to go," and advises young designers to avoid this route. He was able to pursue his route successfully because his

wife, Delmar, worked to support him.

The Wellington resident designs mostly for private manufacturers. A flat-panel TV stand he designed for BDI will be honored by the Innovations 2005 Design and Engineering Showcase next month in Las Vegas.

His designs can be found in stores such as Scan Design and Sound Advice. Lara says he's finalizing work on a chair for Barcalounger that should be available in stores such as Burdines-Macy's early next year.

Lara loves the diversity of what he does and says it's a thrill to see his designs in stores and gracing the sets of TV shows and even movies.

"I'll be in the movie theater shouting, 'Hey that's my chair!' It's a hoot," says Lara.

One of the products he designed in collaboration with his buddy Al Glass is part of the permanent collection in the Chicago Athenaeum.

Lara says he's pleased when his design adds something to a person's life.

"When someone comes home from a hard day's work, it's nice to be surrounded by things that make your space a nice place to be," says Lara.

As for his source of inspiration, Lara says the possibilities are endless: "It could be everything and anything."

What are your hobbies?

"My work is almost like a hobby."

What is your most memorable moment?

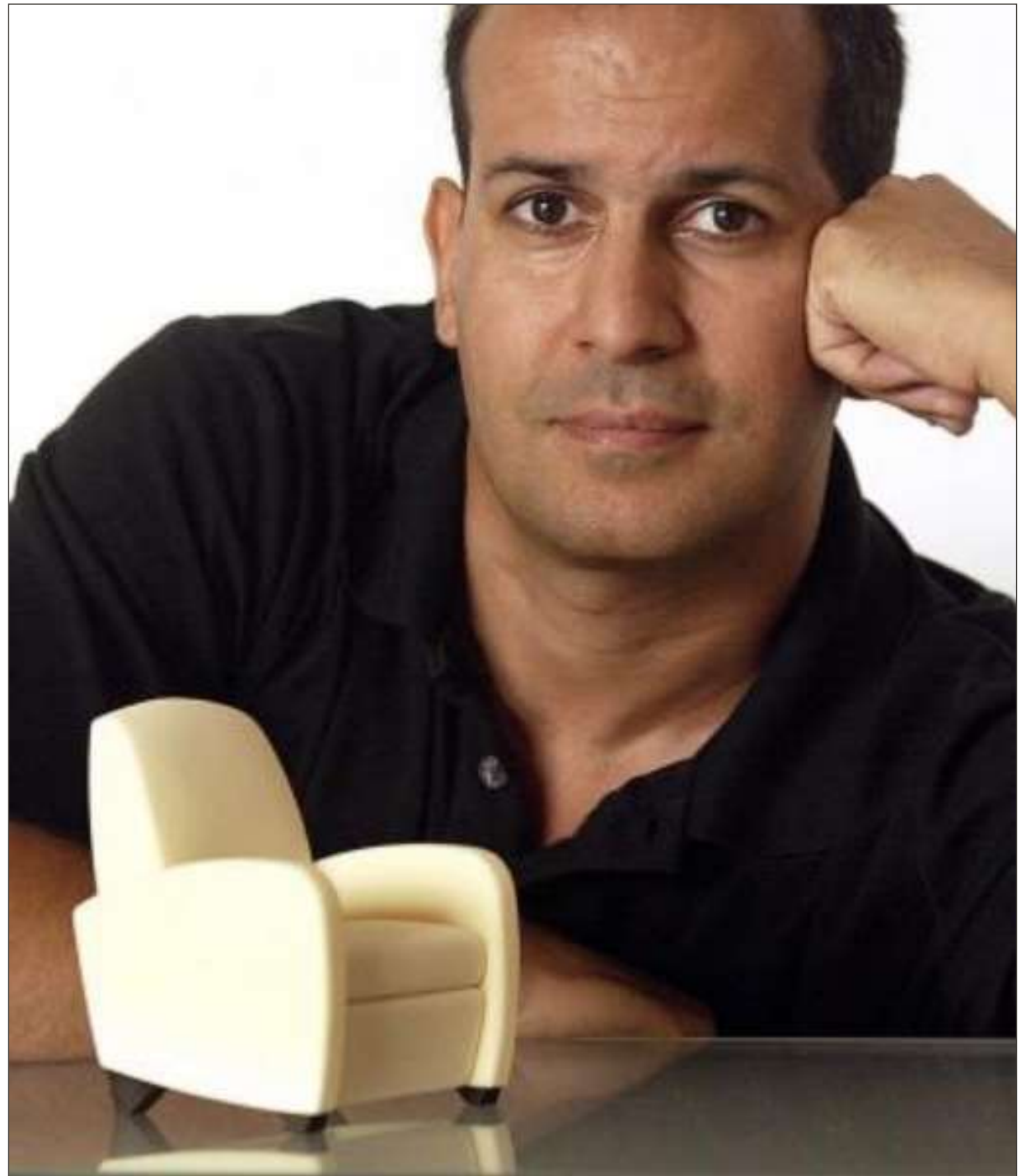
"The birth of my children." His son Alex is 14 and daughter Kristina is 11.

If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

"Philippe Starck. He is probably one of the greatest designers and he designs with an incredible amount of freedom."

For what would you like to be remembered?

"As a good husband and fa-



CYDNEY SCOTT/Staff Photographer

Award-winning furniture designer Louis A. Lara of Wellington designs pieces for manufacturers. The recliner pictured here is a design he did for Barcalounger, which will produce it for retailers such as Burdines-Macy's.

ther."

What do you do when you want to get away from it all?

"We travel, usually back to Spain, or (go to) the beach." Lara's parents are from Spain, as is his wife.

What is the best advice you've received?

"Stay focused on my goals whether they be family or career."

What's your favorite book?

"*The Complete Short Stories of*

Ernest Hemingway."

What is the most unusual thing you own?

"A Catalan poron." A poron is a hand-blown glass wine decanter.

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