

# The ultimate chairman

Designer creates eco-friendly furniture for greener living

BY MIREYA NOVO

mnovo@MiamiHerald.com

"If you just want a chair to sit on, this is not for you," says Bannavis Andrew Sribyatta, referring to a piece of his iconoclastic furniture.

And he is right. You are unlikely to find pieces like his in a typical suburban showroom. His curvilinear, hand-crafted furniture is made of water hyacinth, liana, bamboo and rattan, and the result is one-of-a-kind furniture intended for green living.

"These materials are often cut down and destroyed because they are considered harmful to the environment," explains Michelle, his wife and business partner, over lunch at Books and Books in Coral Gables.

A graduate of Pratt Institute and Columbia University, the 33-year-old Bangkok-born architect-turned-designer began his career working for prestigious architectural firms in Los Angeles, New York and Miami. But it was in Los Angeles that his life changed course: He had an epiphany of sorts the moment he walked into the cutting-edge, hyper-modern CA/Boom Design Show in 2004.

"CA/boom literally caboomed in my head," he recalls excitedly. "Everyone was young, everyone was independent and I thought of doing something new myself, so I started designing furniture."

Invigorated by the experience, he decided to participate in the CA/Boom show the next year. Not only was



**HIS WORK:** Above, aluminum steel tongue; right, the spoon lounge (\$1,800), a steel frame covered with the vine liana; below, a chair fashioned from rattan poles (\$1,100).

their company, PIE (Project Import Export), born that year, but so was their first child, also named Pi (minus the "e"), now 15 months old.

Where does he get the ideas for his decidedly unorthodox furniture?

"I get my inspiration from everything around me, but mostly from things that don't inspire others," he explains. "That slice of tomato you're eating could get my creative juices flowing."

Indeed. A piece of sushi was the inspiration for one of his chairs. "I was sitting at a Japanese restaurant watching the chef mold the rice, leaving enough space for the wasabi," he says "I went through the same process, only using clay instead of rice and creating an indentation for the human body."

One of his most popular creations, Spacehog, shaped like a womb, was inspired by



CANDACE WEST/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**ALL NATURAL:** Bannavis Andrew Sribyatta and his wife Michelle sit in plant-based chairs sold by their PIE company.

the birth of his son. But is this furniture or art? He has clearly thought about this before. "Someday I would like to hang my furniture on the wall and have people sit on the floor," he says.

A cheerful workaholic by nature, Sribyatta also teaches at Florida International University and Miami Dade College and works on architectural and interior projects.

On his plate right now is

an ambitious undertaking: He will design a San Francisco restaurant, named Rain, from the place settings to the waiters' uniforms.

"As you approach the central space, 300 strings of fiber optic lights, the Rain, cut through the ceiling. The experience is like dining under the sparkling rain," he adds. Complicated logistics, but a treat for a man who enjoys a challenge.



SMART  
BOX

#### MORE INFO

Access PIE's website at [www.projectimportexport.com](http://www.projectimportexport.com) or call 786-325-3537. PIE furniture is on display at Biltmore Domicile, 1700 Alton Rd., Miami Beach, 305-604-0059; and at Space Modern, 2335 NE 26th St., Fort Lauderdale, 954-564-6100.

*Florida finds is a weekly feature about purveyors of home products in south florida. to suggest stores, craftspersons or manufacturers to profile, e-mail [newhomes@miamiherald.com](mailto:newhomes@miamiherald.com).*

