



Future forces

Trend observer Milou Ket predicts what's coming in fashion and homewares. **Jenny Brown** reports.

THEY used to be derided as spinsters and relegated to society's margins. But today, cashed-up single women between 20 and 40 who live alone are emerging as a new and considerable force in the consumer market. Their tastes are beginning to dictate major directions in fashion and homewares.

Milou Ket, an international trend researcher and forecaster who is due in Melbourne shortly as a keynote seminar speaker at Furnitex, says single women have spending power but they are not necessarily into items for their homes that denote status or power.

She says: "They collect for meaning, warmth and comfort, and often for the long term."

This new feminised direction is already influencing European manufacturers and has two expressions.

On one hand, "they like old pictures, antique products, crystal chandeliers and baths with feet". The colourations they go for tend to be soft; "they like greys with highlights of mauves, blues and lilacs".

On the other hand, Ms Ket says, there is a more modern take that has a fresher but no less feminine approach. "Into contemporary interiors they mix elements that are vintage or about finding a treasure in a second-hand market," she says.

"Single women are personalising their homes. It is light, not heavy and it is about mixing things."

At 57 and based in the Netherlands, which has become a leading design nation, Ket (who started 35 years ago as a stylist and fabric designer) is known as a trend guru with a lifetime's experience sensing the coming consumer directions.

Aside from travelling and

consulting world wide, each year she handmakes a series of seasonal Trend Books that are snapped up by a select group of furnishing, fashion, textile, glassware, cosmetics and car manufacturers, including Volvo, Revlon, Ericsson, Body Shop, Rosenthal and Swarovski.

These books predict the strongest directions of global taste frames and she has just completed her summer and winter 2009-10 advisories.

Although she has an inborn sense of the new, her predictions are not based on guesswork, rather, on a great deal of shopping and homework "on trends that are already visible and emerging. I project those trends forward in time, so there is some logic to it. I'm always hunting for new things, or old things that are new to our perception."

Since the epoch-altering 9/11 attacks on New York's World Trade Centre, Ket says politics have a greater influence on global trends. "Political circumstances give trends extra speed. Since September 11, there has been a real trend towards home-based lifestyles.

"People have tended to hold onto colours and items that they feel comfortable with."

She says a sense of "slowness" is becoming apparent in interior approaches.

And whereas in the 1990s there was a muted gesture towards sustainability, that trend has become all-dominant in 21st century design to the degree that Germany has recently made solar power capacities compulsory in all new housing.

Ket says German manufacturers are beginning to create housing in which the whole structure works as a solar gathering and power generating unit.

"Sustainability is the topic for industrial design right now. Global

warming, sustainability and recycling concerns are driving consumers to disputing goods made so cheaply and disposably that instead of cleaning them, we tend to throw them away."

New product lines are increasingly displaying what she calls a "cradle-to-cradle" life cycle, where well-designed product is purchased not for up-to-the-minute fashionableness but for comfort and sound craftsmanship.

"Couches that last 20 years or more. Held on to for the long term," she says.

"Holding on to something you love for a long time" is OK and is beginning to spell the death of brand-power purchasing. She calls it "wishful thinking buying".

Buying the brand is another trend that should start to go away.

"Fashion for interiors should start to slow down and status should become less important in the future."

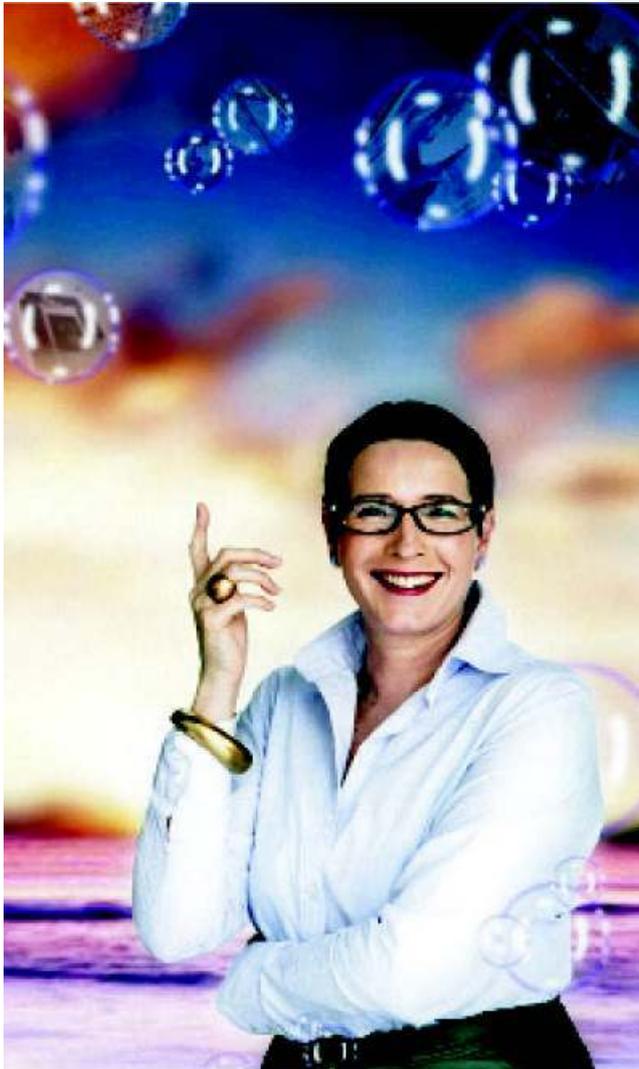
Recyclability is another huge consumer concern. There are now disposable potato flour spoons that dissolve after use. And Nike has released a totally recyclable running shoe.

"That's quite exciting," Ket says. "That's very modern."

Milou Ket will present two seminars at Furnitex, which runs from July 17 to 20 at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. "Emerging Themes in Colour, Style and Design" will be held on Friday, July 18, at 9.45am and is open only to trade visitors. "What's Hot, What's Not and What's Coming" is a public event to take place on Sunday, July 20, at 3pm at the Exhibition Centre. Tickets are \$35. To book, phone Australian Exhibitions & Conferences on 9654 7773.



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International trend researcher and forecaster Milou Ket is coming to Melbourne to address the Furnitex seminar on such matters as home lighting (below left).



Coming trends

- Sustainable, recyclable or long-term products.
- Craftsmanship, including knitting and crocheting.
- Antiques and reproduction modern classics.
- Femininity.
- Blond woods.
- Natural light.
- Anti-brand name buying.
- Holding onto things in a modern way.
- Slowness and comfort in household interiors.

COLOURS

The pales ("Nordic Lights"): white, light grey, pebble grey, blond, honey, transparent, neutral.

The high keys ("Paradise Lost"): greens and blues.