



## Spark of genius

A FURNITURE LINE FROM A NEW COMPANY OFFERS A FAMILY OF PRODUCTS THAT CO-MINGLE BUT ALSO STAND ALONE. BY PATRICK REVERE

Sparkeology came about just as its name suggests — in a flash.

The new company is a spinoff of Worden, a 60-year-old library furniture maker based in Holland. Seven months after initial discussions about how furniture solutions for libraries also could be used in cafes, lobbies and more, Sparkeology lit a fire in June at NeoCon 2010, the massive furniture trade show in Chicago.

A Facebook contest launched interest in the new line and had people lined up outside the booth. “We were taken aback by the reception,” said Robin Lane, a marketing executive with Worden.

The design concept emerged quickly through a partnership with Valerie Schmieder of architecture and design firm Via Design in Grand Rapids and her brother, Scott Sikkema, of product design firm Viable. The goal was daunting: Each piece needed to be light and mobile and interact well with the others. “It’s a family of products,” Schmieder said. “They all stand alone, but they need to all relate to each other in effective ways.”

The furniture also needed to be sleek yet very durable.

With product names like Ty, Ben, Stu and Flip, these crowd-pleasers carry an image as tough as a varsity starting line. “You have to assume that anyone will stand on it, kick it, throw it, or

do just about anything they can do to destroy it,” Sikkema said.

Ty is the case product that carries the power source and hookups. Add a Ben for a bench or a Ty Pad for a booth. Stu, the modern study carrel, can easily sidle up. Add bookcase Phil for shelf space, or ottoman Manny for heavy-duty lounging. Pete is a café-style table with a resin top.

“It looks like it’s all done for design, but it’s actually highly functional,” Sikkema said. “Those metal tabs are what anchor the base to the top. You couldn’t pull it apart if you tried.”

But the real star of the show seems to be Flip. “It’s a table, a stool, a resting place for your bag,” the website explains. “It’s made to flip upside or down.” Made of cold-rolled steel with a resin shelf (left over from the surface of Stu), the Flip sells for \$375. All of Sparkeology’s offerings are moderately priced.

With eight original products, Sparkeology is nearing the completion of five more, including a new chair, at least one lamp, a coat-hat rack, additional book shelving and outdoor versions of its central pieces. Fitting its style, Sparkeology is uninterested in awaiting next year’s NeoCon to introduce the new products.

“We don’t want to wait,” Lane said of the mid-year launch. “We’d rather keep the momentum going.”

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