

# WEEKEND JOURNAL.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## HOME FRONT

### The Low Life

Furniture Goes Super-Short, But Strains Boomers' Backs; 'Knees Up to Your Chin'

By LACRIN MICHLENO

WHEN IT CAME TIME to furnish her 17-foot-high Manhattan loft, Duna Barnes wanted a look that was down-to-earth—literally. The fashion designer outfitted her space with chairs a scant 18 inches off the ground and paid about \$11,000 for a custom clear walnut table that's only slightly higher. "It's just kind of floats along the floor," she says. "It's brilliant."

How low can it go? To the surprise of homeowners, the popular look in furniture these days is barely off the floor, from platform beds and sunken-bottom chairs to ultralow coffee tables. E&B Italia has platform drawer units that, at 15 inches off the floor, really make you work every time you want grab a pair of socks, while Washington's tony Vega home shop is pushing a squashed coffee table that looks more like an ottoman. Then there's Roche-Bobois, which is bringing back "chairs" that are actually oversized cushions for your guests to sit on the floor (at as much as \$2,500 each).

Designers say low furniture is partly a reaction to years of heavy nesting, when homeowners gravitated toward comfortable—and bulking—overstuffed sofas. But makers have another reason for pushing it: The short, modern



pieces tend to look better in matched sets—which makes it easier to tempt shoppers into buying more than one. Indeed, Ikea says buyers of its floor-bugging Malm bed (under 5 inches ground clearance) are twice as likely to buy a matching nightstand or other accessory than customers who purchase standard-height beds. "It's allowed us to create a lot of accessories," says Rodney Sexton, Ikea's U.S. bedroom-

sales manager.

Of course, just above the floor isn't necessarily the most comfortable place to sit. In San Francisco, interior designer Jay Jeffers usually tries to talk clients out of an ultralow couch. "If you're really tall, the depth is fine but your knees are up to your chin," he says. By forcing the knees up, a low-rise position also causes

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