

THE LAW

## Interior Motive

Personalized china is generally the province of presidents and despots—and occasionally drug lords. Jose Santacruz's personal china service was not just a way for the Cali, Colombia, cocaine baron to express his questionably lavish taste, but apparently also how he laundered money. This spring, two San Francisco-based interior designers, Alexander Blarek and Frank Pellecchia, who created the china, were tried on money laundering and four other charges in Federal District Court.

Arrested in June 1997 when 30 agents unexpectedly "swooped down on their home," according to their lawyer Paul Sheckman, the

decorators were brought up on money laundering and RICO charges. Such racketeering charges require that the accused run an essential part of a criminal organization, and in Blarek's and Pellecchia's case, the prosecutor claimed the couple were "the heads of the department of lavish consumption," Sheckman says. The case, which he blithely calls "the oddest

federal case that's ever been tried," may also be the first case where a designer's tried to defend his client's excessive taste.

Explaining design schemes for the myriad projects they undertook for Santacruz between 1979 and his death in 1996, Blarek and Pellecchia hoped to show they were providing legitimate design services and following the discretion necessitated by any wealthy client. Still, after exhibiting all the color swatches and videos of the homes, Blarek and Pellecchia were found guilty of money laundering and are now awaiting appeal.

JENNIFER KABAT



Interior designers Alexander Blarek, left, and Frank Pellecchia stroll into Brooklyn Federal District Court.

WILLIAM LOPEZ

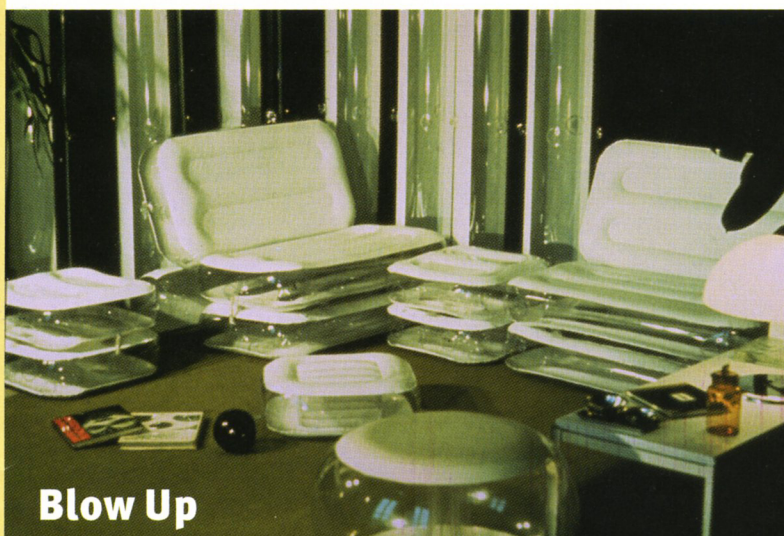


## Discover the Magic

Themed shopping and museum exhibitions converge in the Discovery Channel's recently opened flagship store, Destination D.C., as the outlet in the nation's capital is called, "treats products with the same sort of reverence and explanatory text you'd find in a hands-on interactive museum," Greg Moyer, the network's president and chief creative officer, explains. The store achieves this fusion with dinosaur skeletons and other relics, including a B-25 fuselage, as well as interactive kiosks commissioned from New York-based digital design firm RG/A Interactive, where visitors can play at being archaeolo-

gists and learn to operate the telescopes for sale.

Designed by Ron Pompei, who also worked on the Viacom store in Chicago and is responsible for Urban Outfitters' industrial look, the three-story store even has a "cosmology," as Pompei and Moyer call each floor's different theme. Increasing the store's theme park likeness, visitors ascend in an egg-shaped elevator with choreographed lighting and sound that changes to conform to each floor's motif. Indeed, according to Pompei, "the space is a cross between architecture, sculpture and media—the whole body is involved."



## Blow Up

Now that you can buy inflatable couches and chairs at Urban Outfitters and Ikea, it's only appropriate to celebrate the founding fathers of such blow-up furnishings. "The Inflatable Moment, Pneumatics and Protest in '68" at the Architectural League of New York, does just that, commemorating the 30th anniversary of Utopie, the Parisian student group that turned to blow-up buildings,

the making of an inflatable building and original blow-up furniture fabricated at the Perelli and Goodyear factories. Though Utopie was unacknowledged in its time for its forward-thinking philosophies, its design legacy is trickling down nonetheless to unsuspecting 20-somethings, drawn to the furniture's affordable retro hipness.

EUGENIA BELL

This inflatable living room from 1967 even has blow-up walls.

furniture and design as a way to dispel what they saw as overly formalist architecture. Like other student groups of the era, Utopie's members, who included architecture critic Hubert Tonka and a pre-postmodern Jean Baudrillard, were trying to upend bourgeois culture. From May 28–August 28 their efforts and manifestos can be found in "The Inflatable Moment," which includes a film documenting