

# MARIO'S

Forum / The substance of style

Fall '06 Fashion:

**COZY UP  
TO FALL**

Rich, Rustic, Romantic!

Suits To Suit Your Life

FROM HIPSTER BARS to customized game rooms, the board game is back in vogue. While barhoppers are reliving a not-so-distant childhood with games like Connect Four and Twister, classic abstract strategy games and sleek updates are connecting with executives and other unlikely players.

"There is a big-time revival in board games; we see it in so many areas," says Joe Jones, publisher of *Knucklebones* magazine, a new publication dedicated to the board game. "The number-one reason is it's a very social thing, and that's huge right now."

The trend may have started following 9/11, when people were cocooning and looking for at-home activities, and reflects something of a video game rebellion as well. But it's also part of a renaissance for the finer things in life, from handmade shirts to artisanal cheeses.

"What I tried to create, initially, is a re-connection of people to people," explains Bruce Alsip, creator of a new strategy game called *Canoe*, with a fan base that includes senior executives at Microsoft and Starbucks. "I wanted to get people away from television, their Blackberries, their fast pace." Equal parts backgammon and Stratego, *Canoe* is at the heart of "game nights" around the country.

"I'm always interested in new games, especially those that look well made and are designed for two players," says Ben

Baldanza, president and COO of Spirit Airlines. "*Canoe* fits both categories, and became a 'must-play' very quickly."

Baldanza, who plays a lot of games, also credits the influx of so-called "German Games" with the board game revolution. These quick-play strategy games out of Europe, such as *Settlers of Catan* and *Lost Cities*, "bring the joy of board games we all liked as kids, but with a sophistication and mental challenge that meets today's active and intellectually curious adult brain."

The boards also have a decorative appeal, as game rooms have become a popular addition to home design. *Canoe* is crafted in cherry, leather or mahogany, and looks as good displayed on a fireplace mantle as it does being played at a winebar. Or check out the customized, handcrafted "art games" from Matthias Mauser, which can run to \$30,000, according to Jones. *Outrage*, a British game, features pieces crafted in sterling silver, and studded with rubies, emeralds and diamonds. That game will set you back about \$15,000.

If great design and intellectual challenge aren't enough to convince you to roll your dice and move your mice, game playing is now also sexy. "*Canoe* is a great dating game," insists Alsip. "I designed it so you play elbow-to-elbow, rather than seated across from one another." ●

## CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Board games make a stylish comeback.

