

Antiques

Rita Reif

AT THE TURN of the century, the arts and crafts movement filled the offices and dens of America with robust furniture—some of it was called mission style—as well as stained-glass lamps and weighty art pottery. Now it is back and booming. This week the revival of the style seemed headed for success with the opening in SoHo of the Jordan Volpe Gallery, 457 West Broadway.

This development marks the first time since Princeton University's pioneer exhibition in 1972 that the arts and crafts style, which reigned between 1876 and 1976, has been surveyed comprehensively and can be viewed in a proper setting. The antiques establishment is headed by two serious-minded collectors turned dealers, who are offering only quality examples of the period. The hours are 11 A.M. to 7 P.M., Tuesday through Saturday.

The impact of the handcrafted pieces of furniture here—rooted in William Morris's 19th-century arts and crafts movement in England—is heightened by the way they are arranged in the gallery. All are profiled starkly against the chalk-white walls, and punctuating the sprawling space are dramatic pools of warm light cast by lamps with bronze bases and glass shades.

Vance Jordan and Todd Volpe, who share the responsibilities of this venture, are not the only young merchants of the American arts and crafts style to emerge over the last five years. But, from the look of this gallery and the inventory stored in its back room, they are probably the biggest and unquestionably the best.

The partners, who are cousins, explained that they made the decision to switch from collecting to dealing out of desperation. "Each of us had floor-to-ceiling stacks of chairs and other artistic piles, and they kept growing," Mr. Volpe said, producing photographs that showed that both of their apartments could have passed for homes of the Collier brothers.

Several months ago, Mr. Jordan, who runs a theatrical talent agency, and Mr. Volpe, who worked until recently on sets at the Metropolitan Opera, looked around at their antiques-choked homes and began sorting out the tangles of ledge-arm settees, Morris-style chairs

with adjustable backs, sturdy and squarish umbrella stands, glass-door bookcases and boxy desks and chests. They started counting and decided they had enough furniture to fill not only a gallery but a warehouse as well.

Those furnishings designs that are for sale, at from about \$100 to \$1,500, were personally refinished by Mr. Volpe, who used sandpaper or steel wool and gallons of oil to restore luster to the richly grained oak and mahogany. He also refinished some pieces that the partners are reluctant to sell—two desks and a corner cupboard. "We'll sell them when we find replacements," Mr. Jordan said.

"A lot of this furniture was destroyed by overuse or misuse," he observed. "From what we've been able to find out, we assume that much of it started out in the living room or the den inside the house, and when it was no longer in fashion it was moved to the porch or the basement."

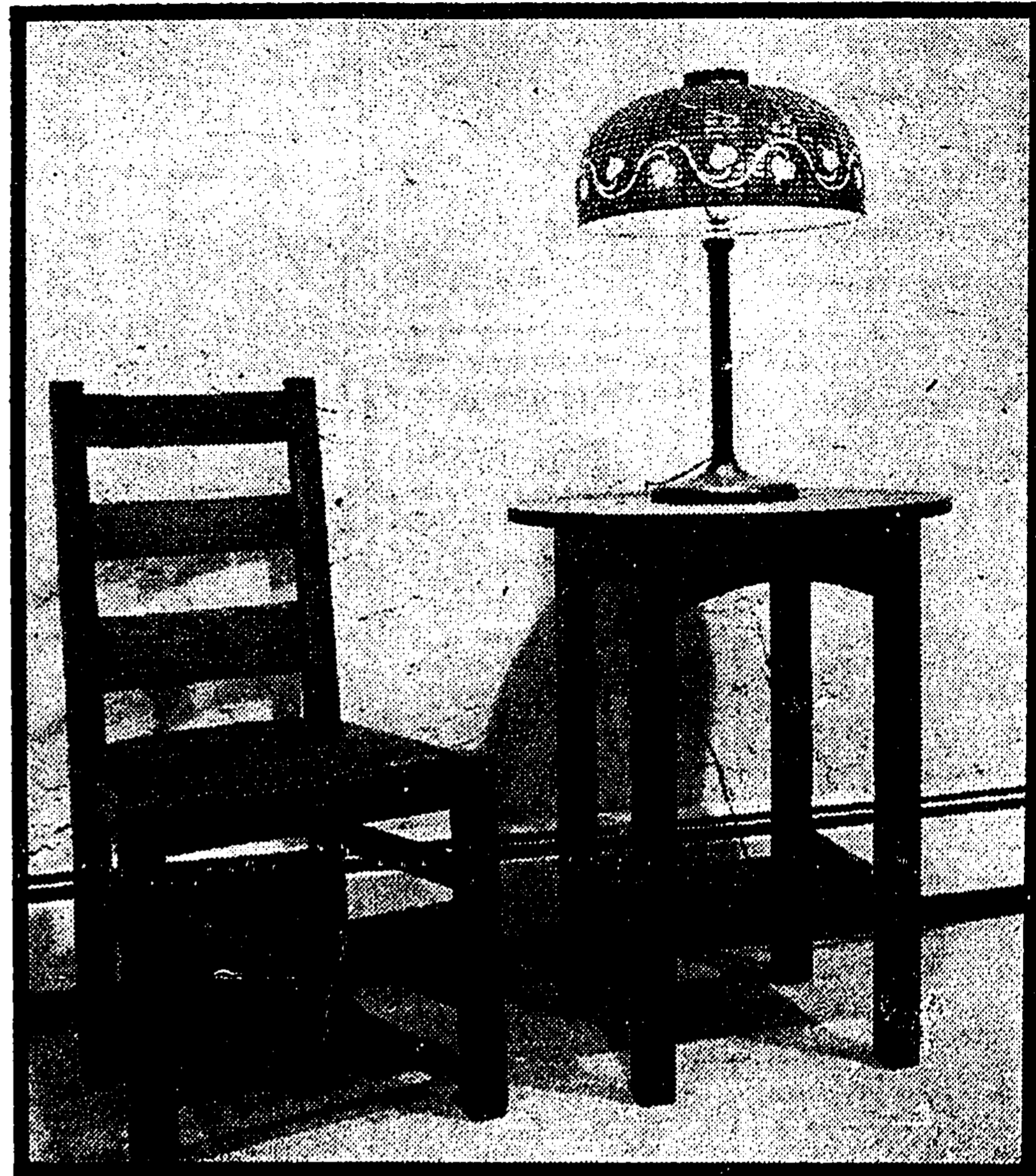
That explains, Mr. Jordan went on, why most of the chairs required new leather coverings and why the upholstery and springs were frequently worn out. Still to be explained, he said, is whether there ever were many arts and crafts pieces made for the bedroom. So few have been uncovered that some experts assert they never existed.

More than half of what is offered for sale at Jordan Volpe bears the original labels and was handcrafted in upstate New York or in Grand Rapids, Mich., by Gustave Stickley or his brothers (who had several companies), by Elbert Hubbard of Roycrofters or by the Lifetime Bookcase and Chair Company.

The pottery is equally extensive and includes the work of George Ohr, who achieved some wonders in seemingly squashing the clay bodies into crushed shapes and twisting spaghetti-like arms into contorted handles.

William Morris Shows

William Morris's influence on most turn-of-the-century developments in the decorative arts is readily acknowledged these days—and has been for decades. But the British designer's actual work is rarely exhibited here. This



The New York Times/Robert Walker

A mission-style table and chair and a stained-glass lamp at Jordan Volpe Gallery in Soho

season, however, Morris's extraordinary achievements in book printing are documented in a superb show at the Morgan Library, 29 East 36th Street, through Nov. 28. (Open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:30 A.M. to 5 P.M., Sunday from 1 to 5 P.M.) And his more commercial and earlier graphics are the subject of a smaller show of 80 wallpapers at the Rheinhold Brown Gallery, 26 East 78th Street (Tuesday through Saturday, 10 A.M. to 6 P.M.), through Nov. 7.

Although Morris also designed furniture, carpets, rugs, textiles and stained glass, it was his wallpapers that were the most technically innovative and ex-

ercised the greatest impact on late-19th-century design.

The selection at Rheinhold Brown is comprehensive and includes many of the best-known floral studies that date from 1864 through 1894, two years before Morris's death. Although the show is not arranged chronologically, it is possible to see his design evolution from naturalistic interpretations to the much later stylized Gothic.

What the woodblock patterns lack in originality—most demonstrate Morris's partiality to common flowers and conventional colorings—they make up for in familiarity and in the quality of the printing.