

Student Designers Face Up to Reality

By JANE GENIESSE

“WE have an opportunity to do something here that was done only once before — at the Bauhaus,” said David C. Levy, executive dean of the Parsons School of Design. Recalling the esthetic collaboration of the famous Weimar school of art and architecture, Dean Levy said the goal of the new Design Resource Center at Parsons is to provide a meeting ground for young talent and mass-market manufacturers.

Although it actually opened in 1977, the center is still in an embryonic stage. An office was opened only last spring and a director, Kenneth V. Stevens, was appointed. Now the school is announcing that it has some results to show.

A group of lamps called “Slices of Light,” manufactured by Westwood Industries, was recently featured in a Bloomingdale’s window display. The lamps, constructed of panes of white acrylic in brass plate bases, were designed by two Parsons graduates, Gloria Rubino and Kenneth DiFalco.

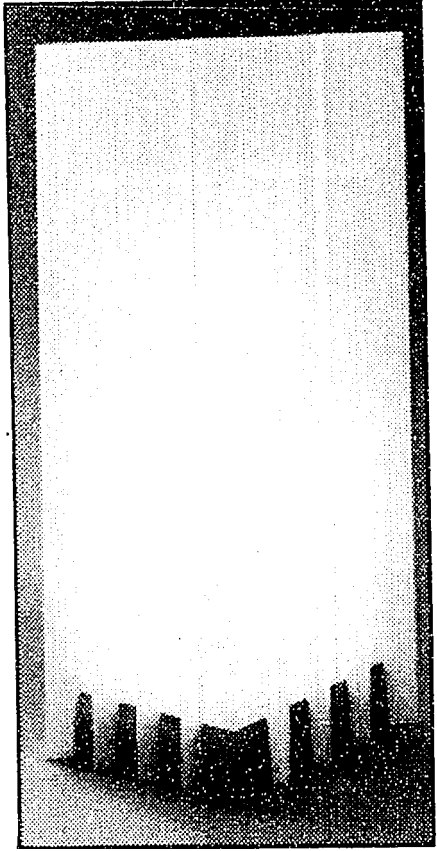
Burlington Mills has distributed sheets, matching pillowcases and quilts done by Ricky Schultz, Sophie Gorek and Karni Krikorgan, also graduates. Other companies, including Jakson International for bath accessories and a major furniture manufacturer, whose identity the school will announce later, will soon bring out further products. Several more contracts are in the final stages of negotiation.

According to Dean Levy, the program is directed to problems of mass marketing, not to “the special, rarified thing” that is too expensive for mass production.

“We have to involve students in thinking toward retail — it helps prepare them for reality,” said Allen Tate, chairman of the Department of Environmental Design, admitting that the faculty had initially worried about the appropriateness of the school endorsing a commercial enterprise.

However, far from exploiting the school’s talent pool, Dean Levy said, the program protects both students and the institution. In the past, he explained, the usual way to bring young talent to the attention of manufacturers was through competitions.

“A company looking for good design might come in here offering \$500 as a prize,” he said. “If they’d gone to a design firm they would probably have had to pay \$20,000. But with a competi-



A ‘Slices of Light’ design by two Parsons graduates, manufactured by Westwood.

tion they could get 100 good ideas for their \$500.”

Competitions are now often regarded as potentially injurious to a school’s reputation because, as Dean Levy said, “The school can’t control who participates in a project with which the school then becomes closely identified.”

He explained that at the Design Resource Center, participating students, alumni or faculty are closely supervised by Mr. Stevens and the Parsons faculty. Because what is eventually marketed will carry the Parsons name, the school has retained the right to check on the various production stages in order to insure control of quality.

The usual agreement is for Parsons to pay the student a flat fee for the design. Every effort is made to insure that the student receives substantially more than he or she would in a standard contract. Any profit to Parsons goes toward expanding the program.

Mr. Stevens, who teaches a course in product development, noted that the challenges presented by the program are interesting because each design must be tailored to cost and production limitations.