CHICAGO — As a flight adviser, Ron Liebmann's official duty is to evaluate the skills of a pilot preparing to fly an airplane for the first time. He starts by talking about experience.

Then Liebmann morphs into something of an aviator psychologist, which he insists is necessary to deal with “homebuilders,” amateurs who construct their airplanes in garages, basements, even a firehouse.

Too often, the devotion needed to make such a craft can blind a do-it-yourselfer to potentially fatal mechanical flaws, Liebmann said. The pilots can become a little obsessive.

He knows. In 1991, after spending 1,300 hours building a gleaming, red and white, 65-horsepower Kitfox _ mostly in the Hoffman Estates, Ill., firehouse where he worked _ Liebmann accelerated down the runway in Marengo, Ill., for its test flight and stopped, unable to take off.

“In my mind, I’d given birth to it,” said Liebmann, a retired firefighter/paramedic. “My personal attachment to the airplane was so strong it fogged my judgment and that’s what happens to everybody."

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One key to collecting art for your home: affordable, original works

Stacy Downs

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Original art, in addition to family photographs and heirlooms, makes a home personal and individual.

But making the leap into collecting art can be intimidating, even to the bright and the bold. Perhaps that fear factor forms early, after you've visited art museums and spotted security guards standing on alert. Or maybe it comes from the notion that you have to be an art insider to even step inside a gallery. And, of course, there’s the price tag issue.

“You don’t have to have a lot of money to buy art,” says Cortney Novogratz, who along with her decorator —

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Faux fur, for real: Thanks to new techniques, it looks better than ever

Melissa Magsaysay

LOS ANGELES – A funny thing happened on the way to the fur salon: The fur was forgotten. Designers instead turned to polymer chemists for a substitute that could please fur-coveting consumers and possibly assuage a few concerns of animal rights activists.

This fall, some of the most eye-catching jackets and accessories incorporate realistic fake fur or are made from other materials with textures reminiscent of fur.

“It's really about the tactile nature of the season,” says Colleen Sherin, fashion director of Saks Fifth Avenue, speaking about the fall trend. “We're even seeing things happening in knitwear where the yarn is cut specifically for a furry effect.

Stores and online sites, including high-end designer brands and mass-market retailers, are full of garments with materials that look like mink, chinchilla or beaver.

Even at the high end, fake fur is being used widely by designers who note the improved quality and realistic nature of materials coming from Europe and Japan. These imported materials allow for more versatility in design, not to mention lower costs compared with real fur.

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92% of homebuilts are kits
$15K to $20K, without engine, price of a kit plane
$250K price of a factory-built plane

3,000 hr is the average time it takes to complete a kit plane
33,000 kit planes are registered each year with the EAA

123% increase of flight time in homebuilts in the past 15 years
98 deaths were caused by mistakes in homebuilts in 2009

With the high price to buy new, more and more people are choosing to build their own airplanes.

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