MULTI-PURPOSE FURNITURE

Inventors: Michael Eugene Ranck, Lake Worth, FL (US); Timothy Allan Harikkala, Greenville, WI (US)

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ABSTRACT

Multi-purpose furniture that can be re-deployed as play-themed structures usable by children is disclosed. The multi-purpose furniture, in one version, includes slab-like cushion elements (e.g., foam cushions). An ornamental graphic having the appearance of vertical wooden logs typical of a fort, large stones typical of a castle wall, or some other graphic is disposed directly on the surface of the foam (if foam is used), or a material encasing the foam (e.g., a woven or nonwoven fabric). These cushion elements may then be connected with one another to assume different configurations, e.g., a comfortable chair, or a structure having the appearance of a fort or other themed context.
MULTI-PURPOSE FURNITURE

BACKGROUND

[0001] Kids love to play. Many kids are creative and freely express themselves in and through their play. Often children imagine themselves to be in another world, or in another time or place. Some children may rearrange their immediate surroundings to help promote the presence, at least in their own minds, of an imagined world. For example, many children drape blankets over chairs or tables to make a tent, fort, or castle. Children may also use furniture cushions, or rearrange the furniture, to help make imaginary places.

[0002] Parents, of course, may disapprove. Continued rough play with furniture, or parts thereof, may reduce the useable life of the furniture, or mar its appearance. Furthermore, if conventional furniture is being used for play, then it is not available for its primary, intended purpose (e.g., to seat children and/or adults). For these and other reasons, a child's tendency to create imaginary play contexts using what is available, including using conventional home furniture in unconventional ways, may be in tension with a parent's or guardian's desire to maintain a certain amount of order in the home.

[0003] Different options exist to address this tension. Toy play areas provide a child with a miniature world or context in which he or she can create. Such sets include building sets or toys (e.g., LEGO®-brand building block kits), dollhouses, HOT WHEELS®-brand cars and play sets, and many, many more. A walk through any toy store reveals the vast number of such toys and play sets for children. A child using these miniature play sets and toys need not rearrange furniture to do so.

[0004] Alternatively, larger toy structures may be used. For example, children's furniture may reflect the tastes and interests of a child. Some children's furniture consists of rigid building blocks or pieces that can be assembled in various ways. Or the furniture itself presents a play context, such as a bunk bed with wooden fixtures that make the bed look like a fort. These larger toy structures, while useable by children, are typically not useable by adults. Also, these larger items are typically made of film or plastic, and do not promote comfort.

SUMMARY

[0005] We have conceived multi-purpose furniture that can be re-deployed as play-themed structures useable by children. For example, in one version of our invention, slab-like cushion elements (e.g., foam cushions) are used. An ornamental graphic having the appearance of vertical wooden logs typical of a fort, large stones typical of a castle wall, or some other graphic is disposed directly on the surface of the foam (if foam is used), or a material encasing the foam (e.g., a woven or nonwoven fabric). These cushion elements may then be connected with, or placed against, one another to assume different configurations, e.g., a comfortable chair (useable by children, adults, or both), or a structure having the appearance of a fort or other themed context. Thus, for example, one version of the inventive multi-purpose furniture includes a first cushion on which is disposed an ornamental graphic signifying a play context; and a second cushion connected to the first cushion. The first cushion and the second cushion are adapted to be reconfigured into a play structure displaying the ornamental graphic. Frequently, when deployed as a play structure or play context, one or more of the cushions are deployed in a substantially vertical orientation—often an orientation perpendicular to the orientation of the cushion when deployed as furniture (e.g., as part of a seat of a chair).

[0006] In some versions of the invention, the ornamental graphic that provides indicia of a themed context or structure (e.g., a fort or castle) is not visible—or easily visible—when the cushion elements are deployed as a piece of furniture (e.g., a chair), but are visible when the cushion elements are reassembled or reconfigured in the form of a play-themed structure (e.g., a fort). In this manner one representative version of the inventive, multi-purpose chair appears to be just that—a chair—when placed, for example, in a family room. But the chair can then be re-deployed or transformed into a play-themed structure in which the ornamental graphics, which are indicia of the play theme, are revealed and viewable.

[0007] In some versions of the invention, one or more of these cushion elements are releasably engaged to one another. For example, hook-and-loop fastening systems, snap fasteners, or other fastening elements may be used to connect two, three, four, or more of these cushion elements in various ways. In other versions of the invention, the cushion elements are attached to one another in a substantially fixed way (e.g., by sewing or stitching the cushion elements to one another; or by sandwiching two or more cushion elements between two pieces of fabric of sufficient size to enclose the two or more cushions; or other manner of attachment or encasement that allows each of the cushions to pivot or be moved relative to one another). Alternatively, both releasable and substantially fixed attachments are used to attach cushion elements to one another. It should be understood, too, that certain cushion elements may be included that do not attach to other cushion elements.

[0008] For example, a larger, rectangular-shaped cushion element may include an opening, such as a circular-shaped opening. When this cushion element is deployed as a play context, then the opening might serve as a window, portal, or other feature of a play context. Also, a separate cushion may be provided that can be inserted or removed from the opening. Thus a circular-shaped cushion element might also be provided, which can either be inserted or removed from a circular-shaped opening in the larger, rectangular shaped cushion. Note that any separate cushion may achieve a friction fit in the opening, or be attached in some way to the cushion comprising the opening (e.g., in the above version of the invention, a circular cushion may be attached to the larger, rectangular cushion comprising a circular opening, with the method of attachment serving as a hinge about which the circular cushion can pivot or move in order to “open” or “close” the opening in the rectangular cushion). This and other embodiments in which the contour of the cushion helps define an opening or recess that, in a play context, represents some feature of the play context (such as a window or door), are described below.

[0009] The cushion elements may assume a number of geometric shapes, including circles, triangles, rectangles, ovals, trapezoids, cylinders, squares, asymmetric shapes, and the like. In some versions of the invention, the multi-purpose furniture includes a variety of different shapes that facilitate the making of different furniture or play configurations.

[0010] In one version of the invention, two or more cushion elements are attached to one another to form an accordion-like structure that can expand so that the cushion elements can assume a zigzag pattern (e.g., “A”), with 3 cushions viewed
from the side) or a substantially straight segment (e.g., "---"; with 3 cushions viewed from the side); or be superposed, one over the other, to form a stack of three cushion elements (e.g., "[ ]"; with 3 cushions viewed from the side), thereby forming a parallelepiped-shaped stack (which could serve as a seat, either alone or in combination with other cushion elements). Typically this configuration is achieved by connecting each pair of cushion elements to one another, with each connection then serving as a hinge for a given pair of cushion elements. For example, for the 3-cushion configuration, viewed from the side as a zigzag pattern, the middle cushion is attached to two outer cushions, one on each side of the middle cushion. Whether the attachment is achieved through sewing, stitching, hook-and-loop fasteners, snap fasteners, zippers, magnetic fasteners, buttons, or other conventional elements for attaching fabric or other furniture materials to one another, the attachment acts as a hinge around which the cushion elements can pivot. It should be apparent that the cushion elements, attached to one another in this manner, can be arranged differently, whether deployed as a piece of furniture, or as a play context.

[0011] Or, in some versions of the invention, a plurality of cushion elements are sandwiched between opposing pieces of fabric. The opposing pieces of fabric are of sufficient size such that the cushions are able to pivot about those portions of the opposing pieces of fabric located between the two cushions. For example, in one version of the invention, two cushions may be sandwiched between two opposing pieces of fabric. At least some portion of these opposing fabrics are attached to one another (e.g., about the entire perimeter— with or without some portion of this attachment being releasably engageable, as with, for example, a zipper or a hook- and-loop fastener; or about 3-sides of the perimeter, thus providing an opening into which the cushions may be inserted or removed, etc.). The opposing fabrics are of sufficient size such that the cushions may be positioned in a laid-flat, end-to-end orientation; or in a stack of two cushions, one on top of the other; or in an upright, wall-like configuration (as might be deployed in a play context). More than two cushions may be sandwiched between opposing pieces of woven or non-woven fabric in a similar manner.

[0012] In some versions of the invention, one or more cushion elements include different materials of construction depending on placement in the multi-purpose furniture design. For example, a cushion element serving as a seat— either alone or as part of a chair or couch—may have different characteristics (e.g., a different compressive resilience or stiffness) compared to cushion elements that serve, for example, as the arm or back of a chair or couch. If, for example, foam is used in the cushion elements, then the compressive resilience of the foam can be selected depending on placement of the cushion element when deployed as furniture. Furthermore, cushion elements that form the seat of a chair may have different properties under pressure. For example, a first cushion element that rests on a floor or other underlying support may be stiffer and less resilient, while other cushion elements positioned over this first cushion element may be more compressively resilient for comfort (akin to the principle of a bed having a box-spring base, over which is deployed a less stiff mattress). Also, if one or more of the cushion elements comprises an opening into which a correspondingly shaped cushion insert is removably placed, then the cushion insert may have different physical characteristics compared to either the cushion comprising the opening, other cushion elements (whether or not they comprise openings), or both. For example, if the shape of the opening corresponds to a letter, number, or basic shape, the corresponding cushion insert may optionally be stiffer, and less resilient.

[0013] In some versions of the invention, a woven or non-woven fabric, or other material (e.g., leather or synthetic leather; or a polymeric material) is used to encase foam, feathers, a polymeric fill or stuffing, or other compressible material typically used in furniture or other cushions.

[0014] A graphic serving as a signal of, or being suggestive of, a play context is disposed on one or more cushion elements. A graphic may be incorporated into a cushion element by printing (e.g., digital printing) of a material making up the cushion element (e.g., foam; or, if the cushion element comprises a woven or nonwoven fabric, or other material, that encases a filling material, then on the fabric or encasing material). Or a graphic may be incorporated into a woven fabric using conventional methods of making such woven fabrics. In some cases a film or decal comprising a graphic may be attached to the cushion element. Note, too, that different cushion elements may comprise different graphics, with the different cushion elements, and their respective different graphics, operating together to present a visual depiction of a play context. Any method may be used, so long as a graphic suggestive of a play context is disposed on one or more cushion elements.

[0015] In some cases, opposing sides of a cushion element show different graphics relating to a common theme or play context. For example, a cushion element, positioned vertically, and serving as the front of a boat-themed play context, might depict the front of the boat on one side of the cushion element (i.e., the cushion surface facing outward from the depicted boat), and a wheel for steering the boat on the opposing side of the cushion element (i.e., the cushion surface facing the interior of the depicted boat).

[0016] In some versions of the invention, the multi-purpose furniture may comprise graphics suggestive of two or more different play contexts. For example, a graphic disposed on one side of a cushion may suggest a space ship, while the graphic disposed on the opposing side of the cushion element suggests a castle. Depending on how a child deploys the cushion element when seeking to build a play context, the cushion element may depict, in this example, either a space ship or a castle.

[0017] In some versions of the invention, the multi-purpose furniture may comprise a graphic that is received over a telecommunications network and disposed on a cushion employed in the multi-purpose furniture. For example, a graphic in the form of a digital file (e.g., a .pdf or other such electronic file) corresponding to a child’s drawing of a fort, or other such image, could be received over a telecommunications network such as the Internet and printed digitally on one or more cushions (e.g., on a woven or nonwoven fabric used to encase one or more cushions). In this way multi-purpose furniture of the present invention may comprise customizable graphics.

[0018] In some versions of the invention, the multi-purpose furniture may be deployed as different types of furniture in addition to a play context. For example, a plurality of cushions, when stacked one on top of the other, may form the seat portion of a chair. These same, stacked cushions, when re-deployed in a laid-flat, end-to-end orientation, can form a mattress-like pad on the floor. And, of course, these same cushion elements may be deployed in other ways as part of
play context (typically with at least some of these cushion elements deployed in a vertical fashion rather than in a laid-flat orientation, as when the cushion element forms part of a seat portion of furniture, or a mattress-like pad).

[0019] The multi-purpose furniture may be re-deployed into many different play contexts including, for example, but not limited to: a fort, a castle, a log cabin, a space station, a ship, a train, a house, a military base, a cave, a plane, a spaceship, a store, an office, an animal, a forest, water, mountains, desert, beaches, licensed copyrighted subject matter (e.g., graphics signifying environments, machines, characters, or other such subject matter originally disclosed in media such as books, films, Internet content, television programs, or the like), or some combination thereof.

[0020] These and other representative embodiments of the present invention, and methods for using the present invention, are described below.

**DRAWINGS**

[0021] FIG. 1A shows a perspective view of one representative version of multi-purpose furniture of the present invention.

[0022] FIG. 1B shows a perspective view of the furniture shown in FIG. 1A re-deployed as a play context for furniture.

[0023] FIG. 2A shows a perspective view of one representative version of a cushion comprising an opening.

[0024] FIG. 2B shows a perspective view of one representative version of a cushion comprising an opening.

[0025] FIG. 3A shows a perspective view of one representative version of a cushion comprising an opening.

[0026] FIG. 3B shows a perspective view of one representative version of a cushion comprising an opening.

[0027] FIG. 4 shows a front view of one representative version of multi-purpose furniture of the present invention.

[0028] FIG. 5 shows a perspective view of the furniture shown in FIG. 4 re-deployed as a play context for furniture.

[0029] FIG. 6 shows a front view of one representative version of multi-purpose furniture of the present invention.

[0030] FIG. 7 shows a perspective view of the furniture shown in FIG. 6 re-deployed as a play context for furniture.

[0031] FIG. 8 shows a perspective view of a representative version of a plurality of cushions employed in a version of multipurpose furniture of the present invention.

[0032] FIG. 8A shows a cross section of one representative version of a cushion employed in a version of multipurpose furniture of the present invention.

[0033] FIG. 9 shows a perspective view of a representative version of a plurality of cushions employed in a version of multipurpose furniture of the present invention.

[0034] FIG. 9A shows a cross section of one representative version of a cushion employed in a version of multipurpose furniture of the present invention.

[0035] FIG. 10 shows a side view of one representative version of a plurality of cushions of the present invention.

**DESCRIPTION**

[0036] In one representative version of the invention, shown in FIG. 1A, the multi-purpose furniture is a chair that includes 6 cushion elements. In this particular embodiment, 3 of the cushions—a bottom seat cushion, a middle seat cushion, and a top seat cushion—are stacked, one on top of the other, to form the seat of the chair. Bottom seat cushion is engaged to middle seat cushion by cushion attachment components 7 and 9. These cushion attachment components can be hook-and-loop fasteners (e.g., a strip of loop material may be sewn, fused, glued, or otherwise attached to each of the cushions; with a strip of hook material overlaying, and engaging, these strips of loop material—with the hooks directed toward, and engaging, the loops; or a swatch or strip of hook material may be attached to one cushion such that a portion of the strip freely extends from the cushion, with the freely extending end capable of engaging a swatch or strip of loop material attached to the other cushion; or a swatch or strip of loop material may be attached to one cushion such that a portion of the strip freely extends from the cushion, with the freely extending end capable of engaging a swatch or strip of hook material attached to the other cushion; or other such combinations that achieve a connection between the cushions); strips of fabric, leather, or other material, with opposing ends of the strip sewn, tied, snapped to, or attached to each of the cushions; zippers; snap fasteners; magnetic fasteners; buttons; or various other conventional attachment components used to engage or attach fabrics, foam, or other materials to one another, so long as the cushions are able to pivot, at least to some extent, around these attachment components.

[0037] Top cushion seat 5 is attached to seat cushion 3 in a similar fashion, but the attachment components are to the rear of the seat of the chair, and are not shown in FIG. 1A. As described above, these three cushions may be re-deployed in a substantially vertical orientation, with each of the three cushions capable of pivoting, at least to some extent, around the attachment components used to attach the cushions to one another.

[0038] The version of the invention shown in FIG. 1A also includes a first side cushion 11, a second side cushion 13, and a back cushion 15. These three cushions may be integrally formed together (to help provide integrity when the cushions are deployed to form a chair). If the side cushions and back cushion form one integral piece, then this U-shaped integral form, when re-deployed as a play context, could form a tunnel, a 3-walled structure, or other part of the play context. It should be noted that, whether the vertical cushions (i.e., cushions 11, 13, and 15) are integrally formed or not, the bottom portion of these cushions may be flared or otherwise shaped to be wider at the bottom of the cushion compared to the top of the cushion, thereby helping increase the visibility of the furniture (see, e.g., FIGS. 4, 5, 6, and 7 showing representative embodiments in which elements of the multi-purpose furniture are flared).

[0039] Alternatively, the side cushions and back cushion may be attached to each other; to the three cushions that make up the seat of the chair; or both. The same types of attachment components used to attach the three cushions forming the seat to one another may be used for this purpose. For example, each of the side cushions may be attached to the back cushion using hook-and-loop fasteners; straps; buckles; snaps; buttons; zippers; or other attachment components used to attach fabrics or other materials to one another. The side cushions may be attached to one or more of the seat cushions in the same or other manner.

[0040] FIG. 1B shows one exemplary version of a play context in which the chair of FIG. 1A is re-deployed. The three cushions forming the seat of the chair—i.e., a bottom seat cushion, a middle seat cushion, and a top seat cushion—become a castle wall, with a door, in the depicted play context. (Note: for ease of representation, FIG. 1B does not depict the precise manner by which the cushions are attached.
to one another. For versions of the invention in which the graphic disposed on cushions 1, 3, and 5 are not viewable when deployed as the seat of a chair, the manner by which the cushions are connected—if they are connected—would be in a manner such as shown in FIG. 1A.) As noted above, the three seat cushions, in this embodiment, are re-deployed in a substantially vertical orientation. Furthermore, the graphic signifying stone walls and a castle door, which is viewable when the cushions are deployed in a play context, are, in this embodiment, generally not viewable when the cushions form part of the chair. Thus the graphic serving as indicia of a stone wall on bottom seat cushion 1 faces the surface on which the cushion rests when part of the chair’s seat, and therefore is generally not viewable when the cushions are deployed in chair form. The graphic serving as indicia of a stone wall and a door on middle seat cushion 3 is disposed toward the downward-facing surface of top seat cushion 5 when the three seat cushions are deployed as a chair seat. But, like bottom seat cushion 1, when middle seat cushion 3 is re-deployed in a substantially vertical orientation as part of a play context, then the graphic is viewable. Finally, the graphic serving as indicia of a stone wall on top seat cushion 5 is disposed toward the upward-facing surface of middle seat cushion 3 when the three seat cushions are deployed as a chair seat. But when the top seat cushion 5 is re-deployed in a substantially vertical orientation as part of a play context, then the graphic is viewable.

[0041] Generally, for those embodiments of the invention where indicia of a play context are not readily viewable when the cushion elements are deployed as furniture, the indicia are disposed on one or more cushion element surfaces that are not readily viewable when the cushion elements are deployed as furniture.

[0042] For the embodiment of a play context shown in FIG. 1B, the back cushion 15 bears a graphic serving as indicia of a road. This graphic is on the rearward-facing surface of the back cushion, and is not readily viewable by an observer looking at the front of the chair. Of course such a graphic on the back cushion is optional, and for those embodiments in which a graphic signifying a play context is not viewable from any perspective when the cushions are deployed in the form of furniture, then the back cushion need not include such a graphic (or the graphic may be of such a nature that it may be viewed either as part of a play context; or as part of the ornamental design of the furniture). Note too that a graphic could be disposed on the lower portion of the back cushion that faces the rear portion of the three cushions that form the chair seat. In this way a graphic signifying a play context can be disposed on the back cushion, but will generally not be viewable by an observer until the furniture is re-deployed as a play context.

[0043] While the version of a play context shown in FIG. 1B shows one cushion element—cushion element 15—in a laid-flat, horizontal orientation, this need not be the case. For example, all 6 of the cushion elements shown in the multipurpose furniture embodiment of FIG. 1A may be re-deployed in a vertical orientation (e.g., in a substantially hexagonally-shaped enclosure—in which case all of the cushion elements could comprise a graphic signifying a castle wall). Or, alternatively, more than one cushion element may be deployed in a laid-flat, substantially horizontal orientation (e.g., for the version of the invention shown in FIG. 1A, 3 of the cushion elements could be positioned vertically, with each of these cushion elements comprising a graphic signaling or suggestive of a castle; and 3 of the cushion elements could be positioned horizontally in front of the castle wall, with each of the 3 laid-flat cushion elements comprising a graphic signaling or suggestive of a castle moat—perhaps one with alligators).

[0044] It should also be noted that different graphics can be disposed on different surfaces of the cushion elements. For example, for the version of the invention shown in FIG. 1B, the opposing sides of cushion elements 1, 3, and 5 (i.e., the surfaces of the cushion elements facing inward towards the interior of the depicted castle, which are not visible in FIG. 1B), may comprise graphics suggestive of the interior of a castle. So, for example, the opposing, inward facing surface of cushion element 3 can comprise a graphic that includes depictions of a doorway like that on cushion element 3’s opposing, outward-facing surface; torches on either side of the doorway; and irregularly placed stones suggestive of a castle wall. The opposing surfaces of cushion elements 1 and 5 can comprise graphics that include depictions of medieval furniture; wall tapestries; an armory; and numerous other items that one associates with a medieval castle and its trappings. Note that versions of the invention that include graphics on two or more sides of each cushion element may have one or more of these graphics viewable to an observer when the cushion elements are deployed as furniture.

[0045] As described above, one or more cushion elements in versions of the invention may include openings (e.g., suggestive of a window or portal) or recesses (e.g., the graphically depicted door shown on the outward-facing surface of cushion 3 in FIG. 1B could instead be an inverted U-shaped recess through which a child could crawl). For those versions of the invention in which one or more cushion elements comprise an opening or recess, other cushion elements may be inserted into the opening or recess. If the cushion element 3 depicted in FIG. 1B included an inverted U-shaped recess suggestive of a door, then a separate cushion adapted to fit into the recess could serve as a door that may be opened or closed by a child. This separate cushion could achieve a friction fit in the recess, or, using attachment components like those described above, the separate cushion could be attached to the cushion element 3 so that the separate cushion could pivot or move while remaining attached to cushion element 3.

[0046] The side cushion elements 11 and 13, in this embodiment, do not include a graphic signifying a specific play context. These cushions, like the seat cushions, are re-deployed in a substantially vertical orientation. It should be noted that even if one or more cushions do not include a graphic signifying a specific play context, the color, texture, or pattern of the cushion may be selected so that the cushion’s appearance is part of or is in harmony with the theme of the play context. Thus, for example, for the version of the play context shown in FIG. 1B, one or more of the back cushion and side cushions may be gray in color, consistent with the theme of the play context (or a color that is the same or similar to a color employed in graphics disposed on one or more of cushions 1, 3, and 5). Furthermore, the fabric may include a texture in harmony with the play context displayed in FIG. 1B. Thus, for the castle theme depicted in FIG. 1B, a rough textured gray fabric might be selected.

[0047] The version of a play context shown in FIG. 1B is one in which the cushion elements do not completely enclose an area. Of course the cushion elements can be re-deployed in an arrangement in which an area is substantially enclosed. For example, some versions of the invention may include six
cushion elements that can be re-deployed to make a play context. These six cushions can be arranged to form a hexagonally-shaped enclosure (i.e., from a top-down view, the cushion elements define a hexagonally-shaped perimeter; see, e.g., FIGS. 5 and 7 for depictions of representative play contexts into which the furniture may be deployed). It should be understood that six cushion elements are not needed to enclose an area. A lesser or greater number of cushion elements may be used to enclose a play area. Furthermore, it should be understood that not all available cushion elements need be used to enclose an area. Instead, some lesser number of the cushion elements could be used to enclose a play area, with other cushion elements deployed in a laid-flat orientation, or in a different position.

[0048] FIGS. 2A and 2B show representative versions of cushion elements that may be included in embodiments of the invention. As discussed elsewhere, embodiments of the invention may include cushion elements that have one or more openings. FIG. 2A shows a rectangular cushion 20 that includes a circular opening 22. An optional circular cushion insert 24 may be placed in, and removed from, the opening 22. For the version shown in FIG. 2A, the circular cushion insert has a size sufficient for the cushion to achieve a friction fit with the surface that defines the opening.

[0049] The rectangular cushion element shown in FIG. 2A may be used to help effect a number of play contexts. For example, the opening may serve as a window (e.g., in a house, castle, or other structure). Or the opening may serve as a portal in a ship, air ship, space ship, or other vehicle. Or other imagined context.

[0050] While FIG. 2A shows a circular opening, other shapes are possible including, for example, openings that are asymmetrical, rectangular, square, triangular, semi-circular, and the like. Any shape is possible, so long as the cushion comprising the opening may be used with one or more embodiments of the inventive multi-purpose furniture (i.e., the cushion comprising the opening may be deployed as furniture, or part thereof; or in a play context).

[0051] Also, while FIG. 2A shows a cushion insert, as noted above, an insert need not be present. Furthermore, the optional cushion insert may be attached or associated with the opening in other ways. For example, rather than relying on a friction fit between the cushion insert and the cushion comprising an opening, the cushion insert may be attached in some way to the cushion comprising the opening. Thus hook-and-loop fasteners; belt-and-loop attachments; sewn-in strips of fabric; snaps; and the like may be used to attach the cushion insert to the cushion housing an opening. The cushions may be attached to one another in such a way that the cushions are releasably engaged to one another.

[0052] FIG. 2B gives one exemplary version of a cushion insert that is releasably attached to a cushion comprising an opening. A rectangular cushion element 30 having a circular opening 32 includes a circular cushion insert 34. The cushion insert is attached to the cushion having an opening by an insert attachment element 36. In the particular version shown in FIG. 2B, the attachment element is a strip of fabric, with one end sewn on the cushion comprising an opening; and the other, opposing end sewn on the cushion insert. Of course, as noted above, other attachment elements are possible. Rather than sewing the strip of fabric to the cushion insert and the cushion comprising an opening, each end of the strip of fabric could be attached to the cushion insert and the cushion comprising an opening using snap fasteners (with a snap fastener typically comprising a male component, which is then inserted into [i.e., snapped into place in] a female component). If snap fasteners are employed, then a first snap fastener component is attached to the cushion insert, and a second snap fastener component—the one to which the first snap fastener component attaches—is attached to the cushion comprising an opening. Of course other fasteners, closures, and the like may be used to attach on cushion to another.

[0053] Note too that the cushion insert attachment element may be positioned at different locations relative to the cushion insert and the cushion having an opening. While FIG. 2B shows the cushion insert attachment element located at the top of the cushion insert, the attachment element may be positioned elsewhere (e.g., at one or more of the sides and bottom of the cushion insert).

[0054] Also, additional attachment features may be deployed that help hold the cushion insert in a given position. For example, in the representative version shown in FIG. 2B, the cushion insert includes a first fastener component 38 that mates with a second fastener component 40 on the cushion comprising an opening. When the cushion insert is removed from the opening (pivoting about the insert attachment element 36), it can be attached to the cushion using this snap fastener feature. Of course other fastening elements may be used.

[0055] FIG. 3A shows a rectangular cushion element 50 that includes a door-shaped opening 52. A door-shaped cushion insert 54 may be placed in, and removed from, the opening 52. For the version shown in FIG. 3A, the door-shaped cushion insert has a size sufficient for the cushion to achieve a friction fit with the surface defining the opening.

[0056] As with the version comprising a circular cushion insert as described above, the door-shaped cushion insert may be attached to the cushion comprising a door-shaped opening using various conventional fasteners. These fasteners may be placed at one or more different locations around the cushion insert. For example, a door-shaped cushion insert may be attached to the cushion comprising an opening at the side of the cushion insert. In this way the door-shaped cushion insert can be opened and closed in a fashion similar to the door of a room or home. See, for example, the representative version shown in FIG. 3B, in which the door-shaped cushion insert 60 is able to pivot about cushion-insert fastening elements 62 and 64. It should be noted, too, that openings in a cushion, and the corresponding insert which is removably placed in the opening, can be in the shape of letters, numbers, basic shapes (e.g., triangles, circles, squares, rectangles, etc.), primary colors, and the like. Some representative versions of the invention may include such features to help teach children about letters, numbers, shapes, colors, or other content typically emphasized in schools. In this way the multi-purpose furniture can be used as furniture, as a play context, and, optionally, as an educational toy.

[0057] In another representative version of the invention, a chair may be redeployed as a bed, or vice versa, in addition to the furniture's capability of being redeployed as a play context. For example, the three cushion elements that form the seat cushion in FIG. 1A may be extended in a laid-flat, end-to-end orientation to form a bed. The number of cushion elements that make up the seat portion of the chair may be greater or less than 3 depending on the length of the cushion elements when in a laid-flat, end-to-end orientation.

[0058] Of course these same cushion elements may be redeployed in a play context, as shown generally (and repre-
sentatively) in FIG. 1B. Furthermore, representative versions of the invention may include cushion elements that are not attached, such as a cylindrical cushion element. The unattached cushion element, as well as other cushion elements that make up the invention, may serve different roles, depending on how the cushion element is deployed. For example, a cylindrical cushion element may serve as a throw cushion for a chair, a headrest or pillow when the cushion elements making up the seat of the chair are re-deployed in a lid-flat, end-to-end orientation to serve as a bed; or as a cannon for certain play contexts (e.g., the cushion elements depicted in FIG. 1A could comprise graphics, textures, or other signifiers of a pirate ship or other vessel, with the cylindrical cushion element then serving as the barrel of a cannon in this play context—optionally to be inserted in any opening, such as that representatively shown in FIG. 2A, which for an imaginary sea-going vessel could serve as a portal, or gun portal, through which the circular cushion is inserted).

[0059] As noted generally above, many conventional materials may be used when making embodiments of the present invention. Typically the invention comprises cushion elements on which are disposed graphics signifying a play context. The cushion elements may either comprise a material such as foam on which are disposed graphics; or a material such as foam, feathers, fill, or other such materials which are encased in a woven or nonwoven material, with any graphic disposed on the woven or nonwoven material encasing the material contained therein.

[0060] FIG. 4 shows a front view of another representative version of the present invention. In this representative version, the back of a chair 70 is in the form of the front of a castle, with turrets 72 and an opening 74. For the representative version shown in FIG. 4, the back of the chair 70 may be integrally formed, or may comprise two or more pieces that are attached to one another. This representative version of the invention also includes a stack of eight cushions 76. These cushions may be stacked one on top of the other, as shown in FIG. 4, to form the seat of a chair. Or these cushions may be placed in a lid-flat, end-to-end orientation to form a bed or mattress. Pairs of cushions may be laid end to end, thus forming a mattress or pad that is, so to speak, four cushions in length, and two cushions in depth.

[0061] FIG. 5 shows a perspective view of the chair of FIG. 4 re-deployed as a play context. The back of the chair 70 now serves as the front of a castle through which a child can crawl. Each of the eight seat cushions 76 is re-deployed in a substantially vertical orientation to make an enclosure without a roof or top. As discussed elsewhere, a graphic may be disposed on one or more of these cushions to depict one or more features of a medieval castle.

[0062] Note that the back of the chair 70 as shown in FIG. 5 may be formed such that the turrets, or portions thereof, are of dimensions sufficient to serve as side arms, or cushions, that are proximate or adjacent to the stack of cushion elements 76. So, for example, the two cushions or sides identified as 76 in FIG. 5 may be attached, or be an integral part of, the back of the chair 70. If so, then the remaining 6 cushions shown in FIG. 5 (i.e., those 6 cushions other than the two denominated as 76) would form the seat of a chair when the play context was re-deployed as furniture.

[0063] Of course the dimensions of representative versions of multi-purpose furniture may be varied. For example, the height of a back of a chair relative to the height of a stack of cushions that are part of the chair may be altered. The thickness, width, and depth of the cushion elements may also be varied. The proportions and sizes of different components of embodiments of multi-purpose furniture may be selected for aesthetic or functional reasons. For example, the relative size of the back of the chair relative to the size of the cushions for the representative embodiment depicted in FIGS. 4 and 5 may be selected to emphasize, aesthetically, the scale of the entry to the castle. Alternatively, or in addition to, aesthetic considerations, the relative dimensions of the components of multi-purpose furniture, as well as the dimensions of any openings in a cushion, back, or other component of multi-purpose furniture, may be selected to facilitate ease of use by the age, size, and/or weight of a likely user of the furniture. For representative versions of the invention comprising arms when deployed as furniture, the height, thickness, and size of the arms may be selected, again, to promote comfort and use by the age group, size, and/or weight of anticipated users of the multi-purpose furniture. Thus the size and dimensions of individual components of multi-purpose furniture are considered both when the furniture is deployed as such, and for the play context into which the multi-purpose furniture may be transformed.

[0064] FIGS. 6 and 7 show another representative version of the present invention in which the back of the chair, and side arms, are integrally formed. In this representative version, FIG. 6 shows the back of a chair 80, again in the form of the front of a castle, with turrets 82 and an opening 84. In this representative version, the turrets each comprise a bottom portion that is flared outward toward the bottom of the turret. Furthermore, portions of the turrets extend forward from the back of the chair, thereby serving as side arms for the multi-purpose furniture (when deployed as such). This representative version of the invention also includes a stack of six cushions 86. These cushions may be stacked one on top of the other, as shown in FIG. 4, to form the seat of a chair. Or these cushions may be placed in a laid-flat, end-to-end orientation to form a bed or mattress. Pairs of cushions may be laid end to end, thus forming a mattress or pad that is, so to speak, three cushions in length, and two cushions in depth.

[0065] FIG. 7 shows a perspective view of the chair of FIG. 6 re-deployed as a play context. The back of the chair 80 now serves as the front of a castle through which a child can crawl. Each of the six seat cushions 86 is re-deployed in a substantially vertical orientation to make an enclosure without a roof or top. As noted above, in this representative version of the multi-purpose furniture of the present invention, the turrets comprise, in effect, both the side arms of the multi-purpose furniture when deployed as a chair, and as portions of the wall of the castle when deployed as a play context. As discussed elsewhere, a graphic may be disposed on one or more of these cushions to depict one or more features of a medieval castle.

[0066] Also, as discussed elsewhere, and as is true for various embodiments of the present invention (including, for example, the representative version depicted in FIGS. 6 and 7), the dimensions and sizes of various components of multi-purpose furniture may be selected for aesthetic and functional reasons (both for the individual components themselves, and when considering the size of these components relative to one another). Thus the back of a chair, any optional arms that are present, cushion elements, openings within cushions, and other components or aspects of the multi-purpose furniture may be dimensioned for comfort, aesthetics, stability, durability, and other product design characteristics.
FIGS. 8, 8A, 9, 9A, and 10 show different views of different representative versions of the present invention. FIG. 8 shows a plurality of cushion elements, of which three are shown. Each of the cushion elements are interposed between a substrate such as a woven or nonwoven fabric. Other materials of construction, such as plastic, may be used. The cushion elements may be separately encased in the substrate, with the separately encased cushion elements then releasably or non-releasably engaged to one another. Or a plurality of cushion elements may be interposed between a single sheet of substrate, such as a fabric (e.g., with the single sheet of fabric folded to enclose the cushion elements), or between two or more sheets of substrate. Regardless of whether one or more sheets of substrate or used, the substrate may then be attached around some or all of the entirety of the perimeter of the cushions; and some or all of material separating one cushion from another. Furthermore, as shown in FIGS. 8, 8A, 9, and 9A, a flange of material may extend beyond the plurality of cushion elements on none, one, or both sides of the series of cushions. Furthermore, as shown in FIG. 8A, these flange portions, if present, will typically be flexible so that the cushion, when positioned in an orientation perpendicular to the floor on which the cushion rests, will ideally be more stable in this position. Also, a flange portion, if present, may, as shown in FIG. 9A, comprise a design consistent with the play context into which the multi-purpose furniture deploys (e.g., a castle).

As noted earlier, a series of cushion elements, if attached to one another, will typically be attached in a way that facilitates deployment of the cushions both as a component of furniture (e.g., a seat portion of a chair; a bed/mattress portion; etc.) and as a portion of a play context. FIG. 10 shows one representative version of a manner of attachment that facilitates such transformations from furniture to a play context, and vice versa. The material, substrate, fabric, or attachment portion between individual cushion elements is of a configuration sufficient to allow the cushions to be deployed one on top of the other, and in other orientations (e.g., in a laid-flat orientation when the pluralities of cushions are deployed as a mattress; or in a substantially vertical orientation when the cushions are deployed as a portion of a play context (e.g., the wall of a castle).

It should be noted that representative versions of the invention may include components used to provide a top or roof for the play context. For example, clips, clamps, or other components may be provided that help anchor a blanket or fabric over some portion of the vertically oriented cushions. Thus U-shaped clips, pinch clamps, or some other mechanical connector may be used to releasably attach a blanket, fabric, or film to some portion of the castle depicted in FIG. 5. In some versions of the invention, the roof-like portion would also be provided (e.g., a plastic film that might include a graphic signifying a medieval roof; or in a fabric that includes a similar graphic; or a film or fabric that has a color or colors suggestive of a roof; etc.).

More elaborate assemblies may also be included. For example, some versions of the invention may include clamps (e.g., U-shaped clamps) that slide or fit over a cushion. These clamps would include recesses or other mechanical fittings adapted to receive a rod (e.g., the clamp might include a cylindrically-shaped recess into which a cylindrical rod may be inserted). Thus, for example, such clamps or fittings placed at the top of vertically oriented cushions like those in FIG. 5, with rods inserted into recesses or other fittings—and with the opposing ends of each of the rods connected together (e.g., with a fitting adapted to receive all 4 opposing rod ends; or other such connector)—could form a tent-like or teepee-like framework, which then would support a blanket, fabric, film, or other material (whether provided with the multi-purpose furniture, or not).

It is to be understood that the embodiments of the invention herein described are merely illustrative of the application of the principles of the invention. Reference herein to details of the illustrated embodiments is not intended to limit the scope of the claims, which themselves recite those features regarded as essential to the invention.

1. Multi-purpose furniture comprising:
   a back cushion; and
   a plurality of seat cushions comprising:
   a first seat cushion on which is disposed a first ornamental graphic signifying a play context, the first seat cushion comprising a cushion attachment component;
   a second seat cushion stacked on the first seat cushion, wherein a second ornamental graphic signifying the same play context is disposed on the second seat cushion, and wherein the second seat cushion comprises a cushion attachment component;
   wherein the first seat cushion and the second seat cushion are adapted to be reconfigured into a play structure displaying the first and second ornamental graphics.

2. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 1 wherein the play context is a fort, a castle, a log cabin, a space station, a ship, a train, a house, a military base, a cave, a plane, a spaceship, a store, an office, an animal, a forest, water, mountains, desert, beaches, licensed copyrighted subject matter, or some combination thereof.

3. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 1 wherein each of the plurality of seat cushions comprises foam.

4. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 3 wherein the first and second ornamental graphics are disposed on the foam.

5. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 1 wherein each of the plurality of seat cushions comprises a material encased in a fabric.

6. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 5 wherein the fabric is a woven or nonwoven material.

7. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 6 wherein the first and second ornamental graphics are disposed on the fabric.

8. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 1 further comprising a first side cushion and a second side cushion.

9. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 1 wherein at least one of the seat cushions, when reconfigured into a play structure, assumes an orientation substantially perpendicular to the orientation of the seat cushion before the seat cushion is reconfigured.

10. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 1 wherein the perimeter of at least one of the cushions defines an inwardly concave recess.

11. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 1 wherein the seat cushions are releasably engageable to one another.

12. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 9 further comprising components for supporting a blanket, fabric, film, or other material over at least one seat cushion assuming an orientation substantially perpendicular to the orientation of the seat cushion before the seat cushion is reconfigured.

13. Multi-purpose furniture comprising:
   a plurality of seat cushions comprising:
   a first seat cushion on which is disposed an ornamental graphic;
a second seat cushion connected to, and stacked on, the first seat cushion so that a portion of the ornamental graphic is not viewable; wherein the first seat cushion and second seat cushion are adapted to be reconfigured so that the portion of the ornamental graphic that is not viewable becomes viewable.

14. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 13 wherein the ornamental graphic signifies a play context for children.

15. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 13 wherein each of the plurality of seat cushions comprises foam.

16. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 13 wherein each of the plurality of seat cushions comprises a resilient material encased in a fabric.

17. The multi-purpose furniture of claim 13 further comprising a combination of a back cushion, a first side cushion, and a second side cushion, wherein the combination is integrally formed.

18-20. (canceled)

21. A method of transforming multi-purpose furniture into a play-themed structure, the method comprising the step of re-deploying a parallelepiped-shaped stack of seat cushions into substantially vertically positioned seat cushions, wherein each of the vertically positioned seat cushions are connected to one another.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein an ornamental graphic is disposed on each seat cushion, with both the vertically positioned seat cushions and the ornamental graphic disposed on each seat cushion signifying a play context.

23. The method of claim 21 further comprising a step of re-deploying a combination of a back cushion and two side cushions into the play context, wherein the combination is integrally formed.