



HEADS
SPLITTING







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Centre for Furniture Design, University of Tasmania,
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AN EXHIBITION OF CREATIVE DIVERSITY IN FURNITURE

F O R E W O R D



The *Splitting Heads* exhibition, in conjunction with the *Critical Vision* symposium form the inaugural 1991 Hobart Design Triennial.

The purpose of the Triennial is to provide a catalyst for constructive dialogue between designers and industry. Positive notions espoused at recent industry events indicate that design initiatives must become an integral part of the industry's future strategies. The Triennial - a Symposium and an Exhibition - is intended to create a common meeting ground.

Our aim for the Triennial is to contribute to a cohesive and stimulating period of development for the furniture industry over the next decade. As the planning process has unfolded, it has become clear that some fundamental issues must be addressed. Communication and co-operation between designers, manufacturers, retailers and teaching institutions need to be improved. An atmosphere of enthusiasm and confidence about the potential of the industry needs to be created. Designers need to be better educated about manufacturing and retailing concerns. Finally, we consider it necessary to develop an awareness of the 'design potential' through linking cultural and economic benefits.

William Stumpf, chief designer for Herman Miller, and Hans Peter Faessler, President of de Sede of Switzerland, have been asked to address the Symposium as keynote speakers due to their pursuit of design and manufacturing excellence which has been successfully translated into both cultural and economic achievements. Valuable input has come from the Furniture Manufacturers Association of Australia, the Tasmanian Development Authority and the Department of Industry Technology and Commerce.

A focus of the Triennial is the resource - both material and human - that is unique to both Australia and New Zealand. For our furniture industry to establish a more competitive domestic and export market, this point of cultural distinction, stemming from our unique resources and lifestyle, must seriously be considered.

The Symposium and Exhibition are intrinsically related in content and philosophy. The theme that runs through the Symposium is a consultation and learning process for the industry as a whole. The areas of discussion provide an insight into the design process, manufacturing concerns, utilization of designers, quality control, marketing strategies and government initiatives. The *Splitting Heads* exhibition provides a physical insight into the design process of a diverse group of designers. For both components of the Triennial, advice has been sought from industry, government and tertiary education bodies. This input has been essential in developing the Triennial and making it relevant to the future strategies of the industry.

A primary aim of the *Splitting Heads* exhibition is to demonstrate the process of creative design development. The

concept sketches and working drawings displayed together with the pieces themselves focus discussion on the merits of a creative approach to design, rather than to hold up a finished piece as the ultimate conclusion. The artists have been briefed in such a way as to encourage them to clearly demonstrate their individual approaches to the design process. The guide-lines for the artists' briefs were developed in consultation with representatives from the Tasmanian Guild of Furniture Manufacturers, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, and The Australian Academy of Design. Through these discussions, it was apparent that working drawings would be of considerable value in demonstrating the capacity of the designs for future manufacture.

Artists in the exhibition are drawn from a range of disciplines including fashion design, silversmithing, video, printmaking and architecture, as well as graphic, furniture, and industrial design. Backgrounds such as these are inevitably reflected in the work. By deliberately selecting artists of such diverse origins, we aim to demonstrate the benefits of broadening the parameters of design reference. The artists, therefore, were selected on two main criteria, that of 'creativity' and 'diversity'. This selection is intended to reflect the breadth and scope of design skills available to industry.

The exhibition catalogue will continue to serve as reference material documenting this diversity of design and as a contribution to a greater understanding of the potential within the industry.

Ross Straker and Peter Walker
1991 Hobart Design Triennial Committee

ESSAY

BY MICHAEL BOGLE

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The design vocabulary of furniture is diverse and extensive, suggesting a long tradition and continual refinement. In spite of the isolating seawater wall that surrounds the continent, Australia has become heir to the vast legacy of Western design history. As local 'design literacy' developed, national accents appeared, only to be shouldered aside in favour of a European-influenced Modernism that derided national and regional concerns as parochial. The zealous mid-20th century confidence faded as modern mechanisation began to devour its own progeny. Now, the dominance of post-modernism which demands furniture with 'something to say' has established eclecticism as a critically acceptable style. With careful study, the stylistic 'disorder' of Australian furniture appears to be the result of an historic 'order' that must be understood to be appreciated.

AUSTRALIAN FURNITURE: A LIFE IN PART

The nature of a colony is precisely defined: a settlement far from the homeland but ruled by its distant masters.

For much of its early history, Australia was a resource to be exploited. One of Governor Philip's first thoughts in 1788 was to forward samples of local Botany Bay clays to England for commercial assessment. These samples were experimentally fired by Josiah Wedgwood's Staffordshire Pottery in 1789 and a number of earthenware medallions moulded.

While a great deal is known of the design and production of British-made artefacts in the First Fleet (even the Commander's tent has been studied), little or nothing was recorded of local manufactures - whether improvised or made-to-order. But by 1803, enough Australian timber had reached England for Thomas Sheraton's 1803 *Cabinet Dictionary* to describe "Botany Bay Wood": "All the specimens of wood imported from thence, that I have collected, are of a hardish texture, and some of it is very ponderous...I have been favoured with only four specimens of different species at present...".

As soon as it was economically viable, Australian resources were sent to Europe for conversion to retail goods trans-shipped back to the colonies. Only the so-called 'Female Factory' in Parramatta, NSW, converted the coarse local wool into convict cloth for local consumption. Not one fragment of this cloth, the product of the nation's first manufacturing industry which operated from 1821 to 1848, has ever been positively identified. This example suggests the esteem with which the colonial milieu valued local products.

Looking at the world through English spectacles, the cultural models and aesthetics of the colony were confidently based on Imperial models. Naturally, the first Australian-designed products were within British traditions. The earliest signed and dated Australian furniture identified is a specimen cabinet (to display the valuable raw materials and curios of the colony) in Casuarina, Australian red cedar and pine, dated 1815 and made by Australian-born apprentice James Packer. With a block-front apron with fine stringing, it is a model of the prevailing Sheraton style of the time. Chronologically, the next documented furniture is the work of two convict cabinetmakers, John Webster and William Temple in approximately 1821. These cabinet makers created a suite of very fine armchairs in rose mahogany and casuarina in the very fashionable Gothic Revival style which was 'a la mode' during this period. In spite of the painfully slow passages, local designer-makers seemed to work fluently in a readily identifiable European style, equally fashionable to polite society 'back home'.

In elementary design education in the colonies, English

educational advances in instruction in the 'mechanical arts' (design) were quickly taken up. The first 'Mechanic's Institute' was founded in Glasgow by George Birkbeck in 1823 to provide greater opportunities for working (and literate) artisans. These advances were first noted and recommended for Australia by Commissioner Bigge in his Royal Commission on the convict colony in 1825. By 1827, the Hobart Mechanics Institute was offering instruction in drawing, science and technology. By 1833, the Sydney Mechanics Institute had opened in Pitt Street.

The achievements of these Mechanic's Institutes in Britain were summarised (for good or ill) by the 1851 Great Exhibition of All Nations in London's Hyde Park. This famed exposition of manufactured goods has provided a century's worth of historians with a mid-19th century stocktake of style. The reigning philosophy of design was a muscular historicism which insisted on a backward glance to earlier design traditions for a visual quotation and validation. In the 1851 exhibition, Australian manufactured goods were largely absent. The curse of the colony persisted and the familiar primary products of wool, timber and minerals were on display.

The well-documented displays of the 1851 exhibition illustrate the power of historicism in mid-century design. All contemporary 20th century design that relies on conventional forms such as furniture and furnishings provides an implicit criticism of the commodity's earlier style. Whether conscious or unconscious it is a comment on the past. Stylistic quotations from earlier furniture, for example, underwrote the mid-19th century experience. "...[T]he only universally valid laws of society must be the laws which link up successive periods", Karl Popper says of the historicists. "There must be laws of historical development which determine the transition from one period to another". (K.R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1961, p. 41 op. cit.)

Nineteenth century Australian designers and makers found little or no fault with their inherited past. This is clearly reflected in the furniture styles of the first four or five decades of the colony when local styles ran parallel to English trends. This was progress. "Forty years is a period in which Britons can work wonders", noted Sydney College of Art founder John McGarvie in the *Sydney Gazette* on 20 July, 1829 (see McGarvie's full address in *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia*, B. Smith, ed. 1975).

By 1851, however, a sense of Australian self-confidence can be noted in politics (convict transportation to eastern Australia halted under protest in 1852), in economics (the gold rushes swept away the 1840's depression) and in Australian-designed and made furniture. Local furniture used Australian timbers with some understanding, relying on shallow carvings, full-figured veneers and panels. The intrinsic forms, despite their exotic timbers and spare ornaments, remained Euro-centric.

The most powerful creative tension in 19th (and 20th) century design does not come from the traditional (and historicist) Australian/European dialogue but from polarities within Australia itself: the uneasiness between town and country - the friction between the rapidly expanding urban scene and rural Australia. This is also a major motif in Australian literature, and the visual arts as well as design (see M. Bogle, 'Drab Green and Desolate Grey - Urbanism in Australia', *Perth International Crafts Triennial* catalogue, Art Gallery of WA, 1989).

Whether a rosewood chiffonier or a handsaw, rural areas have traditionally assessed 'design' in the most simple terms. Does it work? Is it sound? Can it be made, repaired or replaced locally? Low technology production commands respect in this market. In the Macarthur papers in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, Elizabeth Macarthur writes from Parramatta to England on 7 June, 1824: "It is of consequence that that which we have for our personal use be appropriate and of superior quality, we wear our things out and therefore wear them long." In the city, however, a different hierarchy of value appears. Is it stylish? Is it fashionable? Can it be acquired handily? Does it present well (level of finish)? As a surprisingly urban nation with a bushland heart, this duality is one of Australia's greatest conundrums.

After mid-century, there were major gains in the development of a new language for 19th century Australian furniture. In 1879, the Sydney International Exhibition was held in an 800 x 500 foot cruciform-shaped Exhibition Hall built within the Sydney Domain. It was Australia's largest international exposition. Over twenty nations were represented when the exhibition opened on 17 September. Manufactured goods, handicrafts, primary products and fine arts were on display. As the Australian colonies were well-represented, it too provides a similar opportunity for an Australian aesthetic stocktake to the great Exhibition of 1851. It is of no surprise to find that historicist work still prevailed in 1879 but development of furniture in a wide range of local timbers is noteworthy. (see Linda Young's thesis *Let Them See How Like England We Can Be*, MA Thesis, Sydney University, 1983 or Kevin Fahy, et al. *19th Century Australian Furniture*, 1989 for summaries). NSW Beech (*Gmelina dalrympleana*), NSW ash (*Eucalyptus reganus*), Huon pine, Australian cedar, blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and other more exotic wood were in abundance. The critical summaries of the exhibits note with approval the exploration of indigenous timbers. "The beautiful wood of the colony appears to have incited a number of cabinet-makers to display their skill ..." (*Notes on the Sydney International Exhibit of 1879*, Sydney 1880, p. 217). More perceptively, John Plummer observed in a lengthy review in the *Sydney Mail* (3 Jan 1880), "...[T]he influence of climate and abundance of certain descriptions of wood is distinctly perceptible in the character of the furniture shown. There is no attempt at reproducing the antique styles which

prevail in the European courts; on the contrary, there exists a simplicity of design which runs on one hand into real elegance, and on the other hand into poverty of detail."

In this 1879 assemblage of Australian furniture and decorative arts, the tension between urban-based furniture and the rural environment finally begin to produce creative gains - the result being a more spare decorative style, relying on form rather than embellishment. In Sydney in 1879 and the expositions that follow in Melbourne (1880), and the Centennial Exhibition (1888), regional distinctions begin to surface that persist in contemporary Australian furniture styles. These stylistic regionalisms are largely based on the timber resources and technologies found in each state. This regionalism still survives because of the persistent difficulties of transport in a nation of 7.6 million square kilometres and a mere 16 million people.

The essayist and poet Gary Snyder (USA), a major thinker in the development of 'Green' philosophy, argues for this type of decentralisation and the formation of a geographic/ecological identity - what he calls 'bio-regionalism'. The politics and social concerns of a region (whether defined by political, ethnic or natural boundaries), he says, should always reflect that particular natural area (see Gary Snyder, *The Old Ways*, 1976). By the widespread use of regional timbers and the presence of some localised styles, a degree of bio-regionalism is clearly present in Australian design work. Some furniture can still be identified by timber source alone: West Australian jarrah or Swan River mahogany (*E. magiwater*), Tasmanian Huon pine, NSW and Queensland cedar (*Toona australis*) and Queensland maple (*Flindersia brayleyana*).

With Australian nationhood approaching toward the end of the 19th century, the creation of an indigenous style became a political priority. One of the most powerful arguments for a purely Australian form language and ornamental vocabulary came from an exiled French radical Lucien Henry, who had been expelled from France for his role in the 1870 Parisian political revolt. He served ten years of a prison sentence in New Caledonia, coming to Sydney in 1880 where he taught at the Mechanic's School of Arts, Sydney and became the first lecturer in art at the Sydney Technical College. His position was powerful and his converts numerous. He returned to Paris in 1889.

As an unrepentant radical, he saw in Australia an opportunity to develop a new design language using purely regional materials and local flora and fauna as the foundation for a new symbolic order of design and decoration. In a powerful centennial essay in *Australian Art* in February 1888, Henry argued for an Australian Decorative Arts that rejected "neo-Egyptian, neo-Greek, neo-Roman and neo-Renaissance".

One of his most active disciples was the lecturer and museum curator R.T. Baker. This industrious pamphleteer has

the greatest significance for 20th century designers, as Baker's landmark publication *Cabinet Timbers of Australia* (1913) was the first modern publication to formally identify local timbers for cabinetwork. His next publication, *The Australian Flora in Applied Art* (1915) presented tiles, electroliers, clocks, wallpapers and other decorative arts created from Australian flora. Baker's position as curator of Sydney's Technological Museum allowed him to encourage the use of Australian materials and motifs by his assiduous collection of work of this type. For designers and artists, the economic motif can be a powerful force in shaping one's style.

R.T. Baker's retirement from the museum in 1921 roughly coincides with the arrival of 20th century modernist art and design theory in Australia. Modernism has its own local champions and foremost amongst them was the editor and artist Sydney Ure Smith's publication *The Home* (b. 1920). His son, Sam Ure Smith, was the publisher of *Art and Australia* until recently.

In Australia, the most important modernists for the early 20th century were the imports Walter and Marion Burley Griffin whose plans for the new capital in Canberra captured the nation's imagination. Their uncompromising approach to local commissions also attracted some enthusiastic patrons. The radical 1915 designs for A.J.J. Lucas's 'Cafe Australia' was the nation's first 'designer diner' where the firm was given the opportunity to design the furniture, lighting and decor 'en suite'. Griffin's furniture for 'Cafe Australia' uses anti-historicist forms in dark, stained timbers, exposed joinery and plain, unpatterned upholstery.

Following the lead of the Griffins, the Melbourne artists Napier and Christian Waller designed the interiors of their own home producing furniture and furnishings. While the Wallers are best known for their graphic arts and sculpture, their foray into interior design helped introduce another element into Australian design: the increasing interdisciplinary involvement of painters, sculptors, jewellery-designers and print-makers into furniture design and interiors.

An exhibition, for example, held from 8-21 October 1929 at Sydney's Burdekin House in Macquarie Street, Sydney, illustrates this mixed-media approach to furniture and interior design. The catalogue introduction by Leon Gellert on 'Modern Interior Decoration' identified the participants with a new ideology: "[Modernism] eliminates all that is unnecessary and is in agreement with the whole world-movement toward simplification as exemplified in modern dress, modern architecture, modern art, modern hygiene..." (Catalogue, *Burdekin House Exhibition, 1929*, unpaginated). Artists exhibiting interior furnishing and furniture at the Burdekin include Adrian Feint, Leon Gellert, Roy de Mestre, Hera Roberts, Thea Proctor and the designer Dorothy Wager.

In spite of the strength of the design activity in Sydney, one of the first retail shops to offer modern Australian design opened in Melbourne in 1932. Its owner, Cynthia Reed (first wife of painter Sydney Nolan) established her showroom 'Modern Furniture' in Little Collins Street. This area was the heart of Melbourne's Bohemia with Cafe Petrushka, Risties, The Leonardo Bookshop and other art student haunts nearby. One of Reed's first shows was the work of Sam Atyeo, a painter who also designed furniture. Commercial outlets like 'Modern Furniture' provided more exposure for contemporary designers under the banner of modernism. And a measure of the movement's success can be gauged by the eagerness of the big retailers to follow this lead.

As early as 1927, Grace Bros. asked Roy de Mestre and Thea Proctor to design interiors and furnishings for their Sydney showrooms. Then in 1932, Fredrick Ward (a noted designer who later headed the Design Unit at the Australian National University, Canberra) was asked to design furniture for the Myer Emporium, Melbourne. In his role as staff designer, Ward invited the young refugee Fred Lowen to produce 500 Ward-designed chairs for Myer. This proved to be the launch of Fler, the well-known furniture firm.

Then Sydney's Farmer and Co. invited Thea Proctor in 1932 to develop the nation's second 'designer diner', the famous Lacquer Room with furnishings, decor and lighting by the artist. And other retailers like David Jones used designers like Gordon Andrews to develop retail lines. Department store galleries like Anthony Hordern, Farmer and Co.'s Blaxland Gallery and the David Jones Gallery also exhibited new design and architecture.

As the 1940s approached, Australia had developed a core of Bauhaus-inspired designers who practiced in the major urban centres. Unlike the generation before them, these modernists rejected all regional issues for international styles. Richard Haughton "Jimmie" James (1907-1985), an English-born advertising art director who came to Australia in 1939, was one of the more active 'Bauhausers'. In the art critic Bernard Smith's autobiography, *The Boy Adeodatus*, Smith described James as the "eminent modernist publicist", giving perhaps the first public lecture on the organisation and curriculum of the Bauhaus in 1939 (see p 238). Jimmie James also helped establish the Design Industries Association in Sydney in the same year.

Another Sydney designer who also lectured frequently on similar subjects was John Oldham (1907-?) who like many modernist followers, combined left wing politics with the modern design movement. As an active member of the Communist Party, he spoke frequently to workers' and artists' groups. As a designer for the firm Stephenson and Turner, Oldham was given responsibility for the Australian Pavilion for the 1939 World's Fair in New York. (*Aspects of Perth Modernism*

1929-42, Centre for Fine Arts, Perth, 1986). By controlling the Commonwealth's patronage of the World's Fair project, Oldham was in an excellent position to support modernist followers.

Other influential Bauhaus connections come from Victoria's Geelong Grammar School where Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack taught. Hirschfeld-Mack had been a student, apprentice and finally a form master at the Bauhaus. His most influential pupil at Geelong was David Foulkes-Taylor (1929-1966), the well-known West Australian designer. Foulkes-Taylor first designed furniture in modernist tubular steel but as his design interests broadened into ceramics and other media, he began to explore the possibilities of West Australian jarrah with Gio Ponti-inspired furniture work. His best-known work is the 'Poona Chair', a reworking of the British Army's canvas and timber demountable easy chair. (See *The Foulkes-Taylor Years*, Exhibition catalogue, W.A.I.T. 1982).

The post-war generation's tastes reflect the near-universal acceptance of modernist principles in interior design, housekeeping and decor and in the late 1940s, the momentum of the design movement continued to build. The Society of Industrial Designers was founded in 1947, Fred Lowen launched Fler in 1946 and Frances Burke (a designer herself) opened the 'Good Design' retail shop in Melbourne. Many furniture designers of the period command recognition amongst furniture connoisseurs and collectors with artists like Gordon Andrews, expatriate Clement Meadmore, Grant Featherston and Fred Lowen producing 20th century classics.

Postwar prosperity helped encourage these achievements but perhaps most important for Australian design was the severing of the close links with England after the 1939-45 war. Drained of resources after six years of war, Britain's economic dominance of Australia was weakened and local manufacturers filled these supply gaps with locally-designed and manufactured goods.

Recently returned from the United States, Douglas Snelling (d.1985) formed a postwar partnership to produce what his company, Functional Products, called 'The Snelling Line'. They were one of the first to convert the modernist ergonomic lines to timber furniture by using Australian timbers like silver ash and Queensland maple and synthetic fibre webbing. The timber was lightly varnished without staining or painting. The line was promoted to retailers in *The Furniture Trades Review* (October, 1948, p.35) as "Contemporary Furniture designed by Douglas B. Snelling from his experience of Modern Design in California." 'Functional' and 'modern' are keywords in the vocabulary. (Sarah Payne's survey of Functional Products in *Craft Australia* 1988:1 is an excellent source on the firm.) Just as Snelling was withdrawing from commercial furniture design in the 1950s, Melbourne designer Grant Featherston was

releasing his 'Contour' line of upholstered furniture for production. After beginning with timber furniture, the designer had arrived at the use of moulded plywood and plastics. Featherston's work combines a modernist line with button-tucked upholstery and high density cushions. The style of the shell-based chairs has proved so durable that they have been recently re-released by Gordon Mather Industries.

When Australian design's most severe critic in the 1960s, Robin Boyd, was given the task of coordinating the Montreal Expo '67's Australian Pavilion, Boyd commissioned Featherston to design the well-known audio chair to transmit programmes on Australian topics in French and English. Two hundred and forty of these Expo '67 chairs were made. The design of Boyd's pavilion, Featherston's work and other by furniture designers like Kjell Grant whose Expo chair was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, made the Montreal Expo a design success for Australia.

Along with a sense of independence in postwar society, there was also a rediscovery of Australia by its own inhabitants. Manning Clark had established the first year-length Australian history course in 1946 while poet A.D. Hope created the first in-depth course study of Australian literature in 1954. These cultural notes underscore the development of an Australian identity as separate from the Euro-centric vision.

Once again, after a generation of modernism, local timbers reappeared, especially in the work of the Melbourne designer-maker Schulim Krimper (1893-1971) whose one-off works were collected by the National Gallery of Victoria as early as 1948. By 1951, Krimper had been given an exhibition at George's, Melbourne's posh retailer. In 1959, he was even granted a retrospective by the National Gallery of Victoria, which seems to be the only retrospective ever given to a furniture designer-maker in Australian history. His work, surveyed in Terry Lane's *Schulim Krimper, Cabinet-Maker* (Gryphon Books, 1987), reveals his use of blackbean, silver ash, Australian cedar and Jarrah.

Krimper's work, always carefully crafted, if not well-designed, was the first step in the craft revival in late 20th century Australia. Although Krimper indulged his personal fetish for wood-turning (multiple knobs, etcetera), he was dedicated to functionalism and modernist furniture forms.

In the years before the Australian universities with major studies in furniture design took their first students, the philosophy of the contemporary designer-maker was dominated by craft theory and practice: integrity of materials, the sensuality of making (smell, touch, vision), extraordinary emphasis on technique and finally, the urban-centred cult of the hand-made object. When the Crafts Council of Australia was founded in 1971, it was responding to a need - almost a demand - for a centralised organisation.

Some years later, as the crafts movement began to weaken, a number of universities presciently established furniture and wood programmes for potential designers. Two programmes were initiated in Tasmania alone (Hobart and Launceston), West Australian Institute of Technology (W.A.I.T.) offered courses, while RMIT and Canberra Institute for the Arts (formerly Canberra School of Art) developed workshops as well. The Launceston and W.A.I.T. courses did not survive. A number of designers in this exhibition come from these programmes.

For these new university-trained designers, furniture provides an opportunity to develop theory and the greatest challenge for the designer-maker is the marriage of concepts and construction. The critical environment awaiting emerging artists demands a command of theory as evidence of credibility. In the historicist past when furniture was 'fact' enough, it was sufficient to copy pre-existing styles as painting students once painted the Old Masters. If a designer copied well with good technique: mission accomplished.

Modernism, however, required clean (even 'moral') lines, devoid of quotation or reference to the past. Function was considered paramount. But now, modernism has stumbled and the outbreak of theory that characterises post-modernism has led to eclecticism - an anarchy of choice. As a style, eclecticism presents no fixed ideal but in an era where concepts are more critical than execution, some designers are drawn toward the ease of conceptual immediacy. Post-modernists like D-4, Michael Trudgeon and Tony Masters design for a cultural milieu in which a year's passage can overturn a new movement in decor: colour, form, texture, lighting. This is the cultural compression of the urban scene where nuance and gesture are critical. To succeed requires constant adjustment of one's style to retain credibility. Wedded to Euro- and Anglo-centric visions that rely heavily on magazines and video-culture, they are the heirs of modernism's failure to evolve.

But in the midst of this stylistic diversity, certain trends remain constant in contemporary Australian furniture. National and regional qualities are an unarticulated but ever-present issue for designer-makers working in wood. Their medium, local timber, still suggests a 'Bio-regional' quality similar in concept to that of the mid-19th century. Leslie John Wright's work, for example, using natural materials often evokes a uniquely West Australian sense of place.

A certain Romanticism can also be seen in contemporary design - not 'Bush' romanticism associated with found objects but a textbook romanticism associated with art theory. In this romantic route to creativity, nature remains an inspiration and beauty is a tangible, articulated goal. Helmut Lueckenhausen's work has consistently sought to be beautiful within the terms of his own aesthetic; achieving wider appreciation outside of

Lueckenhausen's own eccentric aims. Like the 18th century world, he considers that surprise is the general principle of beauty.

The development of a strong international style of modernist furniture amongst university graduates still seems hampered by the lack of access to metal- and plastic-forming equipment. And, I might note with admitted self-interest, an absence of design history training. At RMIT however, where modernist styles predominate, the vocabulary of design in metal is well-developed. The restrictions that a lack of conceptual ability in metal and plastic media place on the younger design community continues to push artists toward timber. This restriction affected modernism's development in Australian furniture in the 1980s. The exceptions like Robert Foster's experiments in aluminium and thermoplastic resin come from his experience in metal-forming and holloware.

To summarise, the development of Australian-designed furniture for the nation's marketplace parallels developments elsewhere, with the welcome exceptions of a regional character that is related to the indigenous timbers, local eccentricities, university training and predominant faculty masters. Many Australian themes have persisted for decades; this is a positive achievement often noted by visitors but largely unrecognised by Australians. Australian furniture has developed a style that favours what Robert Venturi, the jester of post-modernism, calls the triumph of "Messy Vitality over Obvious Unity". ■

Michael Bogle, the co-author of *Modern Australian Furniture* (Craftsman Press, 1989) with Peta Lohman, is a writer and historian in the decorative arts. He has lectured at a number of universities in Australia and the USA. Currently, he teaches design history as a part-time lecturer in the Design Faculty, University of Technology, Sydney and works as a curator for the Historic Houses Trust of NSW.

T H E D E S I G N E R S

D 4

DIANA FIRTH

ROBERT FOSTER

PATRICK HALL

MACGREGOR KNOX

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HELMUT LUEKENHAUSEN

TONY MASTERS

MICHAEL TRUDGEON

LESLIE JOHN WRIGHT

D4 Design was formed in 1987 by Bill MacMahon, Stephen Roberts and Michael Scott-Mitchell. Since its inception, D4 has been involved in a variety of work including presentation and graphic work, furniture, stage and film, lighting, domestic interior design and restaurant fitout. Recent commissions include the Rockpool Restaurant in Sydney.

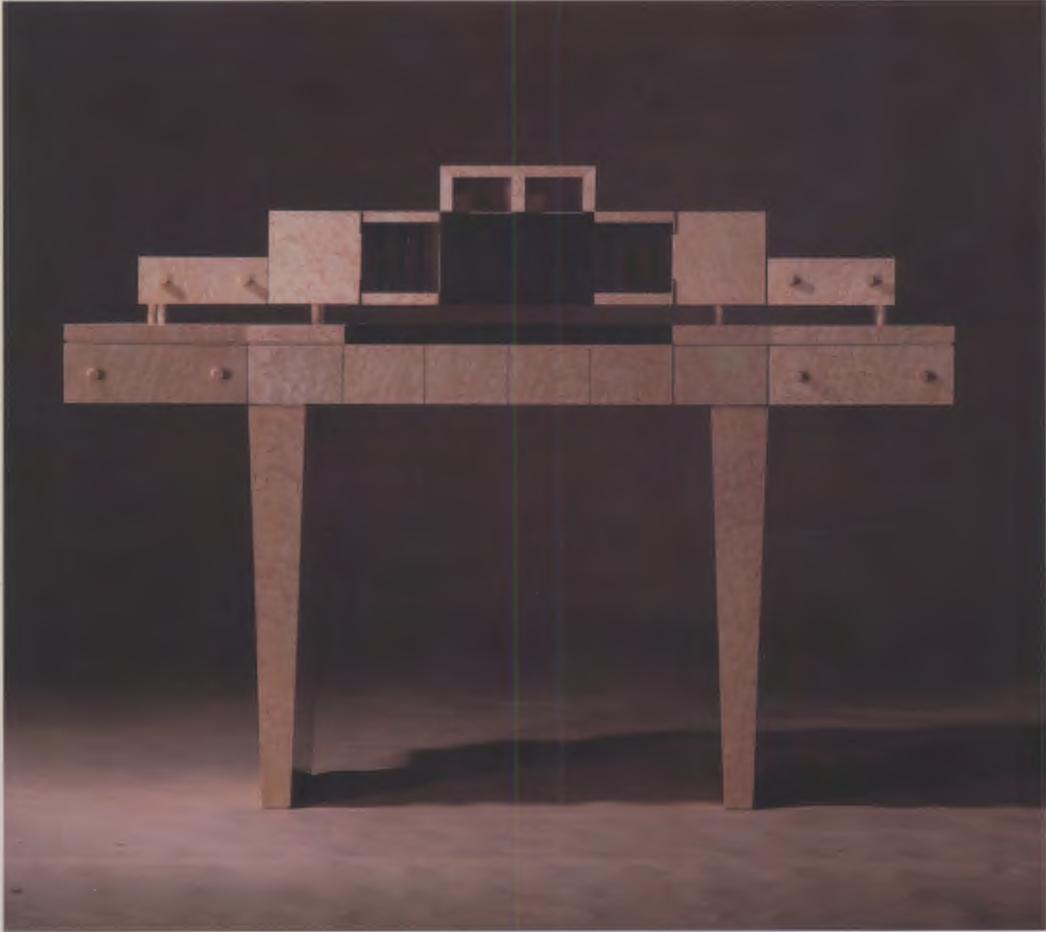
Bill MacMahon (born 1959) has a background in architecture and interior design and has worked with various firms since 1980 including: the Power House Museum, Design Department, Marsh Freedman Associates and Robyn Wade Design Associates (England).

Stephen Roberts (born 1960), an interior designer, has worked in interior and furniture design, exhibition and museum design, graphic art and production, and retail promotional design. He has worked with companies including Neil Burley Design, the Myer Emporium and Chatswood Chase.

Michael Scott-Mitchell (born 1960), a set designer and art director with a Diploma of Dramatic Art in Design, has worked in the areas of film and television as a designer and art director.

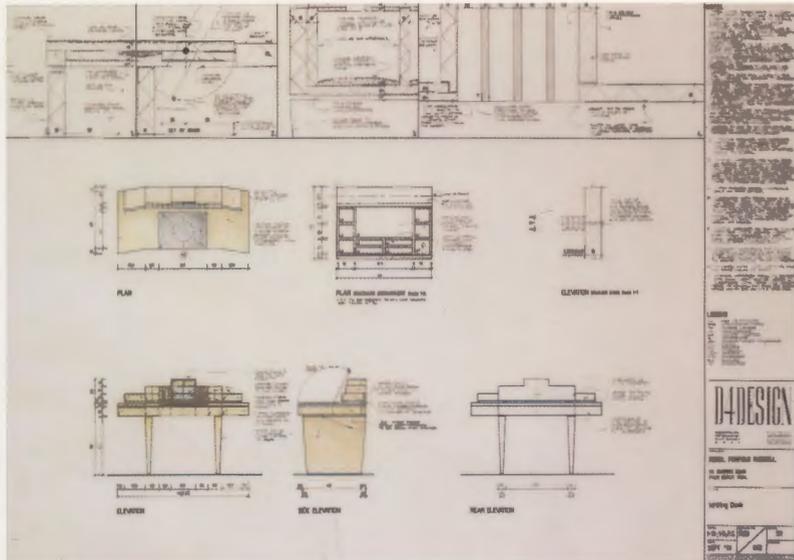
Writing Desk

The *Writing Desk* is a one-off commission and is the result of a collaboration between the designers, D4 and the cabinetmakers, Constantia Designer Craftsmen. Constantia, who specialise in traditional methods of construction, design and detailing, worked to D4's design drawings with some details being left to their discretion. This piece is unique for D4 Design, in that it is the only example of their work to be carried out using 'traditional' methods.



Writing Desk
 (Courtesy of Rebel Penfold Russell)
 Birds-eye Maple (Veneercraft) detailing dark green leather.
 1350mm (L) x 650mm (W) x 1000mm (H)
 Cabinetmakers - Constantia Designer Craftsman

Photography:
 Constantia (piece)
 Uffe and Glennis Schulze (drawings)



DIANA FIRTH

Diana Firth was an original member of the furniture Group *Artiture*, formed in New Zealand in 1986. Besides exhibiting with *Artiture* annually, she has shown work in various exhibitions including *The Mind's Eye*, A.S.A. Gallery; *Garden Art* at the Pumphouse and *N.Z. Contemporary Furniture* at the Museum (Auckland).

Firth attended Elam School of Fine Arts and Wellington Poly Tech School of Design. Prior to her involvement in furniture design she was a fashion designer. Together with the making of one-off pieces of mixed media, she has, in recent years, designed and built her own house and furniture in Westmere, New Zealand.

He Whare Taonga and Aluminium Drug Cabinet

Both pieces by Diana Firth are corner wall units which are mounted directly to the wall excluding the use of pedestals. The drug cabinet, constructed by Mickey Allen, of aluminium and demolition Kauri is derivative of the He Whare Taonga (Ancestral Treasure House). Diana Firth's designs incorporate many references to Maori culture.



He Whare Taonga (Ancestral Treasure House)

Demolition Kauri, copper, pau, gold leaf.

Figurine "KAHURERE" - demolition kauri, gold leaf.

1190mm (H) x 600mm (W) x 500mm (D)

Design, carving and finishing: Diana Firth

Construction: Bryan Heighon, Mickey Allen

Aluminium Drug Cabinet (under construction)

Construction: Mickey Allen

Photography: Peter Molloy



ROBERT FOSTER

Robert Foster was born in Kyneton in 1962. In 1980 he gained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in gold and silversmithing at the Canberra School of Art where he has since undertaken post-graduate studies and worked as a technician in the glass and gold and silver workshops. Foster has also undertaken contract work for the Australian National Mint.

Recent exhibitions include *Vessels*, Remo, Sydney; *Tallent Borse Handwerk*, Munich, Germany and *Collection of Contemporary Australian Craft/Design*, David Jones, Sydney (1990).

Foster established his own studio in 1986 and his work to date includes the design and production of chairs, lamps, tables, stools, and vessels.

Reclining Chair and Bar Stool

Robert Foster rarely does drawings prior to making. He works out as much detail as possible in his head before taking up his tools. For him 'designing through making' is an essential part of his creativity. Foster's work reflects a love of precision and clarity of form and line.

**Reclining Chair**

Aluminium rods, powder coated aluminium,
(formed) stainless steel, aluminium tube.
2000 (D) x 500 (W) x 1000mm (H)

Bar Stool

Rolled aluminium (3mm sheet),
chromed steel, Delrin, rubber.
400mm (D) x 400mm (W) x 900mm (H)

Photography and styling:

John de la Roche and Marie Fitzgibbon (pieces)

Uffe and Glennis Schulze (drawings)

PATRICK HALL

Patrick Hall was born in Germany in 1962 and emigrated to Australia in 1970. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Design) at the Centre for the Arts, University of Tasmania in 1986.

Hall has exhibited widely since 1983, with Group Exhibitions including: *Australian Furniture Expo*, Darling Harbour Sydney in 1988; *Topping Tables* W.A. Crafts Council 1989; *Double Vision*, Despard Street Gallery, Hobart in 1989. Hall's most recent exhibition (solo) was *Lonely Fish, Sad Parrots and Other Stories*, Entrepot, Centre for the Arts in 1990.

Commissions include: A Reception Desk for the Tasmanian Development Authority (1988) and a Sculptural Mural for the Zeehan Public Library (1990).

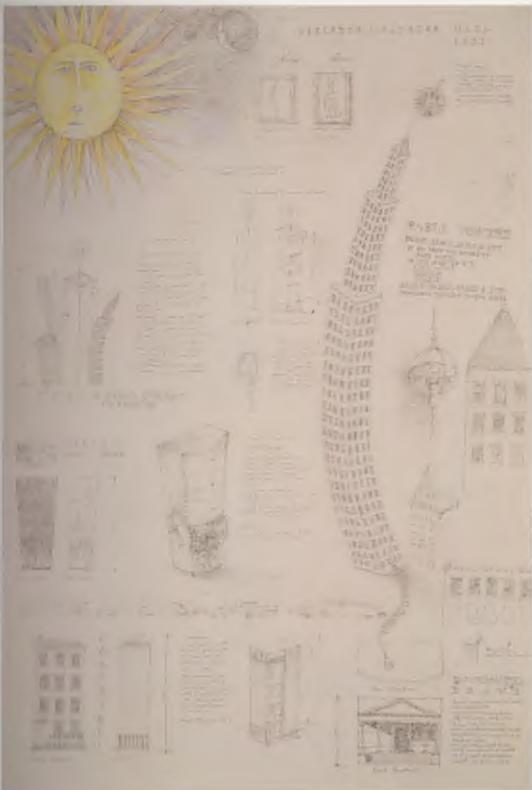
Patrick Hall, a founding member of Designer Makers Co-operative Society Tasmania in 1985, works as a designer-maker with a range extending from illustrated gift cards to furniture.

Power Lamps

"Commercial manufacturing should examine the potential of applied decoration in production furniture. Decoration can make flat surfaces vibrant, can lighten volumes, can change mood and character, can imbue with personality and humour, and above all can provide a variation amongst a range of pieces without the need to change the form. For 'industry' this provides versatility and an opportunity to appeal to a broad spectrum of tastes, style and markets. For the Designer/Artist it means new ideas can be explored without compromise.

The lamps in this exhibition are an attempt to create a relatively simple form but to enrich it through the use of applied decoration. The graphic elements have been printed onto both metal and glass surfaces by screen printing."

Pat Hall



Power Lamps 1 and 2

Custom wood, aluminium, plated steel fittings,
slumped glass, silk screen.

Lamp 1 - 150mm (D) x 150mm (W) x 2000mm (H)

Photography and styling:

John de la Roche and Marie Fitzgibbon (pieces)

Uffe and Glennis Schulze (Drawings)

MACGREGOR KNOX

MacGregor Knox, born in 1957, has a background in film production design and art direction. Recent projects include art direction for the music videos "Is anybody in there", Hunters & Collectors, "Devil you know", Kylie Minogue, "Boom Boom", Crash Land.

In 1987 MacGregor Knox carried out the set design and construction for the film "Ghosts of the Civil Dead".

Other design projects include the design and production of 35 and 16mm portable globe animating stands and the design and production of the LOLLA, a convertible lounge, which was exhibited at *Designer's Saturday* - New York Design Centre, and the Milan Furniture Fair in 1988 and is currently being marketed through Idiom Corporation. MacGregor Knox also directed and produced a 3 minute animated video for the point of sale for the LOLLA Lounge.

SOFIA Convertible Lounge

"SOFIA was designed with a few main criteria in mind.

1. *To provide a variety of seating positions that range from a conventional 550 mm seat depth to an 850 mm circular area, with the back rotating 90 degrees around this seat to allow an easy change of orientation ie. direction of conversation - direction of T.V. viewing.*

2. *Space Awareness: To provide the opportunity of a large seat at certain times or reduce to a minimum overall size to suit a smaller environment.*

3. *Simplicity of Construction: Two quite different pieces of furniture provided the yardstick of simplicity I wish to achieve. These are the LeCorbusier chaise-lounge and the Asian market basket type chair. Both of these chairs employ two main components that nest in a variety of positions without the complications of mechanical engineering."*

MacGregor Knox



Convertible Lounge

Steel framed, cold foam, leather upholstery.

850mm (D) x 1000mm (W) x 800mm (H)

Photography: Ross Bird

HELMUT LUEKENHAUSEN

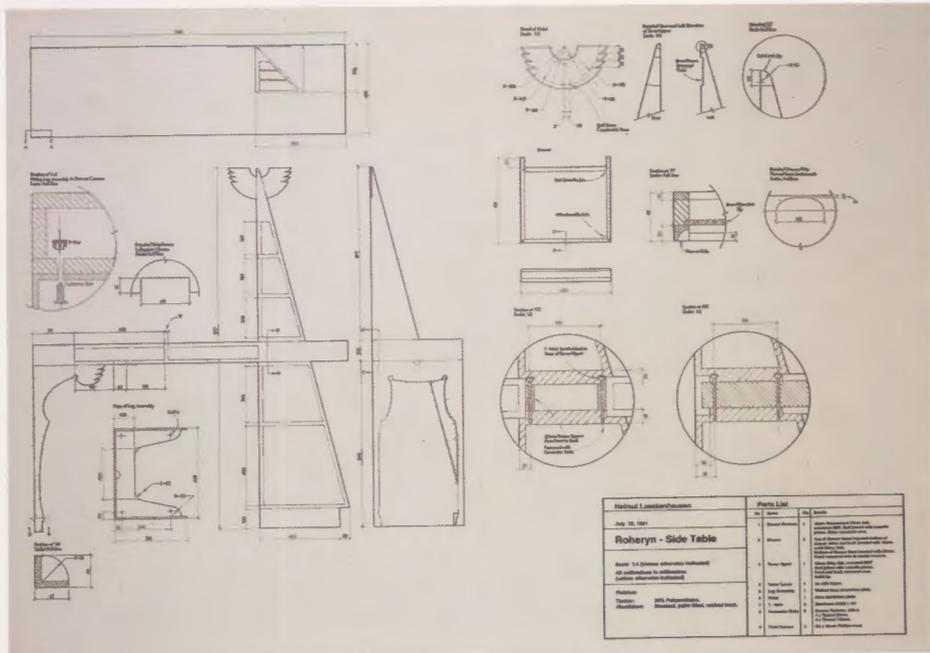
Helmut Lueckenhausen, born in Cologne, Germany in 1950, has a background in industrial design and education. In 1974 he founded and taught the Three Dimensional Design and Sculpture courses at Box Hill College of Technical Education. He has since lectured extensively, both nationally and internationally.

Helmut Lueckenhausen began freelance practice in paper engineering/construction in 1974, working in areas of exhibition design, display and advertising. In 1979 he established a furniture design and manufacturing practice.

His work has been exhibited widely and is held in collections including: The Australian National Gallery, Canberra; The National Gallery of Victoria; The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

'Roheryn' Sidetable

The 'Roheryn' sidetable reflects a considered view to future production with features such as the cast aluminium and veneers replacing carved wooden legs and solid timber. An emphasis on componentry allows for compact packaging for transport.



'Rotheryn' Sidetable
 Aluminium, veneered particleboard,
 Silver Ash and Silky Oak veneer.
 1817mm (H) x 1580mm (L) x 450mm (D)

Photography and styling:
 John de la Roche and Marie Fitzgibbon (piece)
 Uffe and Glennis Schulze (drawings)

TONY MASTERS

Tony Masters was born in 1947. In the early seventies he worked with architect Gae Aulenti in Milan on large scale interior design projects for Fiat, Olivetti, Artemide and Knoll. He stayed on in Milan to work as a freelance designer and consultant on a variety of projects and products, which included the design of the *Playtime Restaurant* and extensive research into ergonomics and office related equipment.

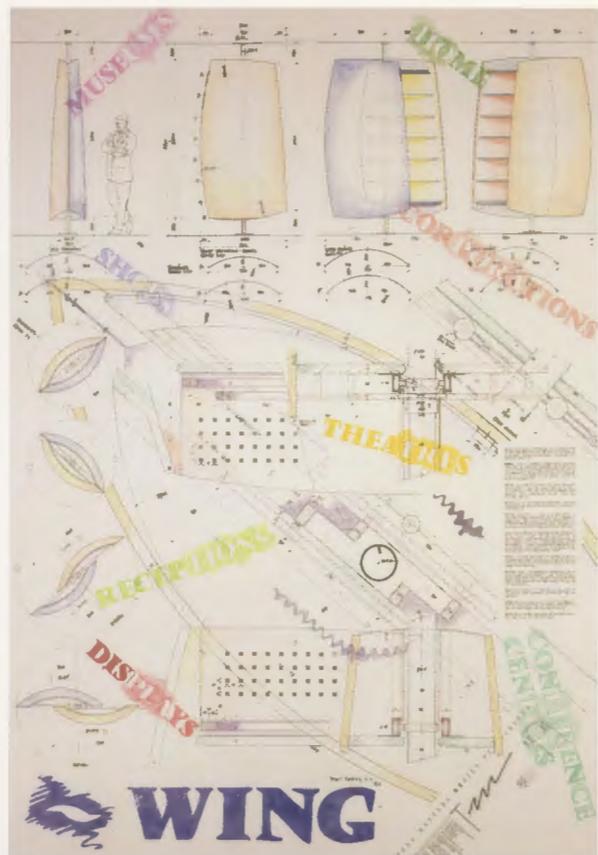
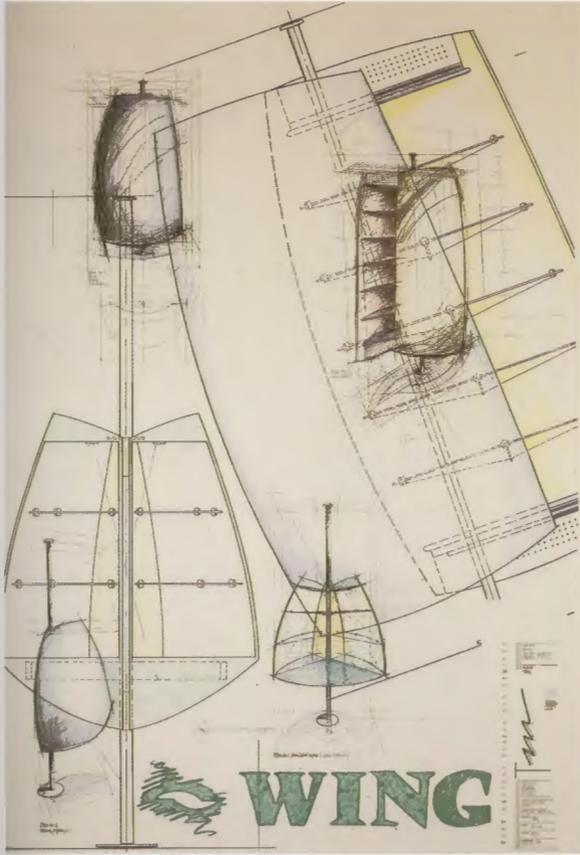
Tony Masters was brought to Australia to design an office reticulation system for Concrete Constructions.

The recipient of the Australian Design Award in 1986, 1987 and 1988 for the Lecon XL System, Dexion Plan D System and a kitchen system (Sydney Kitchen Centre), Masters has lectured at the Sydney College of Arts in Furniture and Interior Design and is Director of Tony Masters Design, Sydney.

Wing II

Wing II, a space divider was designed alongside of Wing I, a pivoting/folding display unit. Wing II has a double-sided facility for display and can be mounted in any spatial situation, requiring only a pre-determined ceiling to floor height to which the central pole can be manufactured.

Wing II is designed to adapt to a variety of situations with a flexibility in finish and application.



Wing 2

Materials:

- Central fin: Aluminium extrusion with ABS end caps
- Base and top plates: stainless steel
- Ball racers: steel with nylon wheels
- Tracks and guides: aluminium extrusions
- Casings: moulded plywood
- Shelves: lacquered craftwood and glass
- Covers: perforated metal

Dimensions:

- Total height: 2900mm
- Casings: 2300mm
- Width: 1200mm
- Extended width: 1700mm
- Depth: 500mm

MICHAEL TRUDGEON

Michael Trudgeon gained a Bachelor of Architecture at RMIT in 1979. In 1986 Trudgeon (*Crowd Productions*) was commissioned to develop a major exhibition about design for Free Entertainment in Public Places. The resulting exhibition *Living Design*, was attempt to explain how professional designers actually work, step by step.

In 1989 Trudgeon co-curated and exhibited in *Deus Ex Machina*, an exhibition which presented new work, thematically linked around the presence of the machine in our society.

A recent commission was the design of three ranges of dyecast corporate furniture for Cast Design Products. Trudgeon has worked as a freelance art director and graphic designer since 1984, with clients ranging from fashion designers and nightclubs to 'townships'.

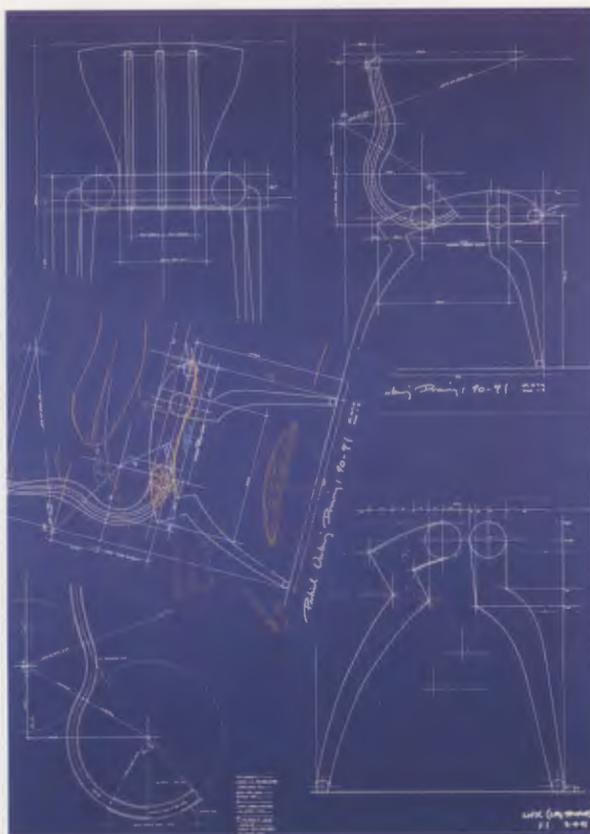
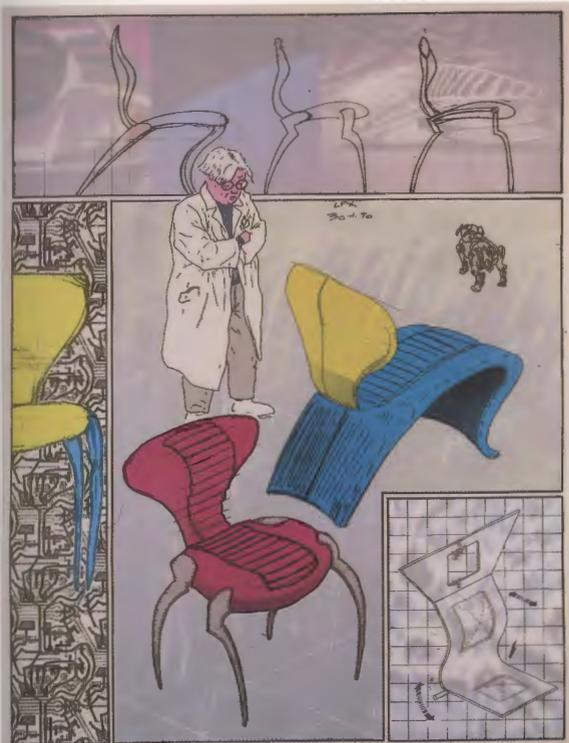
LFX

"Machines that modify, extend or enhance the operational performance of human beings can be thought of as supplementary limbs or prostheses. Similarly, clothing can be seen as supplementary to and a prosthetic extension of human skin.

Viewed in this way, the chair is an out-growth of the spine extending the coccyx, creating supplementary legs or a tail to sit on, as with the Kangaroo.

The principle element of the LFX system is an adjustable tubesteel spine which is strung and gaslift supported. This reactive element is designed to work comfortably as an organic extension of the sitter's spine responding to pressure and changes in posture. The spine is attached to a core chassis which contains the complete mechanism. Legs of any style or material can be attached to four anchor points on the chassis and are removable for transportation. While the back support profile is created by the internal mechanism and is ergonomically determined, the overall shape of the back is not."

Michael Trudgeon



LFX

Nonfunctioning Full Scale Maquette

Materials: custom wood, foam, polyurethane

Design: Michael Trudgeon

Collaborator: David Poulton

Technical Support:

Cash Engineering Research, A.M.S. Polycraft

Dimensions: 550 mm (D) x 540 mm (W) x 850 mm (H)

Photography:

Elle (piece)

Uffe and Glennis Schulze (drawings)

LESLIE JOHN WRIGHT

Leslie John Wright was born in Western Australia in 1951. He gained a Bachelor of Arts in Design at the Curtin University of Technology in 1984. His travel experience is wide and includes attendance at the Milan Fairs in 1985, '87, '88 and again in '91 when he acted as Design Coordinator for an exhibition by West Australian furniture manufacturers. Wright believes the experience abroad enables a clearer perspective of those characteristic Australian values he draws on for his work.

Wright's work has been shown in such invitational exhibitions such as *The House of Fiction 1988* (Sydney, Milan, New York, Tokyo), *The International Crafts Triennial 1989* (Art Gallery of Western Australia) and at the *Milan International Furniture Fair, 1991*. Collections in which his work is represented include the Museums of Applied Arts and Sciences of Sydney, and the Northern Territory, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

Professional practice for Wright encompasses the design and production of furniture and decorative arts to commission and exhibition; consulting in furniture and product design; and as Visiting Lecturer in design at Curtin University.

Currently he is focussing on refining several past and new designs for production. These will constitute the basis of a collection to be marketed by his own company.

Gymnos Dining Table

"The form and structure for the table are drawn from the lithe movements of the gymnast. Materials used correlate with the implication of tension...Gymnos was especially commissioned to requirements...which broke away from the formality of symmetry... An interpretation of the form designed for production, is a symmetrical shape which employs similar materials and structure. The principal variation besides the shape is the securing of the cast alloy leg connector to the underside together with the use of CAD CAM to cut the table-top and framework; pressure casting for the leg connectors and copy shaping for the legs...A design for related chairs is following."

Leslie John Wright



Gymnos Dining Table

Sycamore veneer over medium density fibreboard; Sycamore edge rails and legs, cast aluminium alloy with stainless steel, marine ply frame, leather.

2800mm (L) x 1110mm (W) x 720mm (H)

Photography: Robert Garvey



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



 **herman miller**



The *Splitting Heads* Exhibition was curated by the 1991 *Hobart Design Triennial* Committee, who would like to thank the participating artists for their commitment to the Triennial through the many changes that have occurred over the past eighteen months.

Special thanks to:

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Linda Forster

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D'Art Room Design and Illustration

Catalogue Essay:

Michael Bogle

Triennial Printing:

Focal Printing

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SPLITTING HEADS







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DIANA FIRTH

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