

Design Tasmania Wood Collection

The First 10 Years





“The Tasmanian Wood Design Collection acts as an exemplar to sustain the wood design industry in Tasmania, to inspire Tasmania and the world with an understanding of the potency of design, and to create an identity for Tasmania as a place of excellence in the world”

Gary Cleveland AM, Founder Design Tasmania.

Design Tasmania Wood Collection: The First 10 Years presents works acquired in the early years of what is now an extensive collection of over 80 pieces, the largest public collection of contemporary wood design in Australia.

Design Tasmania was founded in 1976 by Gary Ogle Cleveland AM and Pat Cleveland, envisaged by Gary as the heart-centre of design for Tasmania.

In 1991 Gary established the Design Tasmania Wood Collection, acquiring the first 6 works from a Grand Exhibition held at Hobart’s City Hall. Every two years the Grand Exhibition offered Tasmanian designers and makers the opportunity to be selected for inclusion.

Exhibitions of works in this collection have toured from Launceston and Hobart to Hawaii, Beijing to New York, Parliament House to Germany, Sweden, Finland and Japan.

Today Design Tasmania welcomes more than 100,000 visitors a year in person and hosts globally accessible presentations online, continuing to fulfil Gary’s mission to have Tasmanian design recognised worldwide.

Design Tasmania celebrates our 45th Anniversary in 2021 through a programme of events, exhibitions and activities, that look back in order to look forward. We draw inspiration from our founding mission to inspire the community to embrace design, through programming that encourages diversity and inclusivity as well as championing design professionalism.

In 2021, we’re telling stories that reflect the changing paradigms of design now and into the future.



“Small series production can be the way to go for designers,” he says. “A designer can do an edition of say, 40 chairs, which makes the furniture much more affordable”

Gary Cleveland AM, as quoted by Sue Douglas in The Mercury, March 2000

This exhibition showcases some of the most significant items from the first 10 years of the collection. Each item has been selected to show a progression of techniques, use of various timbers and the development of designer’s styles, as well as our growing focus on sustainability in design and craft practice. Tasmanian designers are resourceful, excelling at overcoming distance and cultivating connections near and far.

The first six items in the collection include two lidded containers by Ian Hewitt, two timber boxes by Peter Gorring and a turned carved sign by Able Signs.

The Tasmanian Forestry Commission was an early supporter of the Wood Collection, donating Writing Desk by Ross Straker which had been purchased from the first Grand Exhibition. In 1985 Straker founded the Designer Makers Cooperative in Hobart and worked at the Centre for Furniture Design. In 2005 Straker was one of fourteen Tasmanian furniture designer/makers that were invited to interpret selected pieces from the Allport Collection held at the State Library of Tasmania.

Writing Desk showcases Straker’s skill as a master craftsman and his meticulous attention to detail. This piece was used as Gary Cleveland’s personal writing desk for a time and still holds strong association with the Design Centre’s founder.

By the early 2000s Tasmanian design had become increasingly more sophisticated. There was a broader spectrum of materials being used that reflected the needs and interests of a contemporary market. Promotional materials and editorial copy supporting an exhibition at Parliament House Canberra reflected this shift in focus and confidence: “Run your fingers over the silky smooth grain of some of the rarest and finest timbers of the world . . . a unique exhibition from Tasmania . . . showcasing the internationally recognised skills of Tasmanian designers...” - Sue Douglas, The Mercury, March 2000

For young Tasmanian designers the local market may have seemed small but there was a demand for high-end design. The focus was on the niche market, not mass market.

By 2001 the idea for a contemporary building to house the collection in Launceston was well underway. Now almost 20 years later, we’re building on this iconic site and expanding further into the digital realms, showcasing the Wood Collection and championing Tasmanian designers and makers to an increasingly global audience.

- Claire Beale & Michelle Blake,
Co-curators DTWC: The First 10 Years



“Horizontal timber is exceptionally tough and thin strips will support remarkably heavy loads before breaking. Despite its strength the wood is easily worked and can be cut very cleanly leaving a hard smooth finish ”

David Ralph, designer maker

Marty Wolfhagen 1959 - 2017

Casuarina Chair

David Ralph

Bush Chair

Casuarina Chairs were acquired from the 1995 Hobart Grand Exhibition. Made from trees grown on Wolfhagen's property, casuarina has a life span similar to that of humans, taking about 30 years to grow to maturity and reaching full growth after 60 years. The timber is hard, and difficult to handle with a rope-like texture.

Wolfhagen used boatbuilding techniques to achieve the curves, demonstrating highly sophisticated technical skill and aesthetic sensibility. He strived for simplicity in design, but noted it required a lot of difficulty to make something that looks so simple, working with ideas that had a good structural or engineering component.

The Bush Chair was donated to the Wood Collection in 1995 as a gift of Professor Geoff Parr. Made from a timber colloquially called 'horizontal scrub' the trees are known to grow to about 20 metres in height. With a narrow trunk and horizontal branches, when in full foliage the tree may eventually collapse under its own weight.

Ralph preferred to retain the natural state of the wood and kept most of the bark and lichen intact, using only horizontal branches in his furniture making. Inspiration was drawn from historic furniture making techniques, especially the 'stick chairs' made by Tasmanian bushman, Jimmy Possum, which features four legs passing through a slab seat to form arm rests. However, Ralph's chairs differ as he uses the traditional peg-and-post construction, in which the ends of the legs and arms are whittled down into a peg and slotted into the seat, back and each other, with a slatted seat with stretchers.

David Ralph retired from woodwork around 2002. Other examples of his chairs are held in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria and the Powerhouse Museum.



Snap Chair was acquired in 1993 from the second biennial Grand Exhibition. Designer Peter Costello worked almost exclusively with plywood – very high quality marine ply, adding speciality veneers to the form.

The Snap Chair generated interest when it was on shown at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) in New York in May 1995 with other Tasmanian furniture designs. The Tasmanian stand received continuous praise in New York for the quality of its presentation, the designs and promotional pamphlet. The success of the New York presentation created links with a wider design community and the promotion of Tasmania design through publications such as Craft Arts International, Vogue Living Australia, and 50 Chairs: Innovations in Design and Materials by Mel Byars.

Witt Design works with a number of Tasmanian furniture designers, in particular Dr Peter Costello. Allan and Peter worked closely together for many years, sharing a keen interest in timber due to its natural beauty, warmth and strength, and a focus on ensuring it is managed sustainably in Tasmania.

Peter Costello

Snap Chair

Allan Witt *1953 - 2021*

Jackie Witt

Stave Stool

The Stave Stool was acquired in 2001 from the Grand Exhibition of that year. Designed with the Wood Collection in mind (as there was not a stool represented at the time). It also had to fit the design brief to be able to globally distribute a high-quality item, in flat-pack form, to be shipped efficiently and assembled with reliable satisfaction by customers.

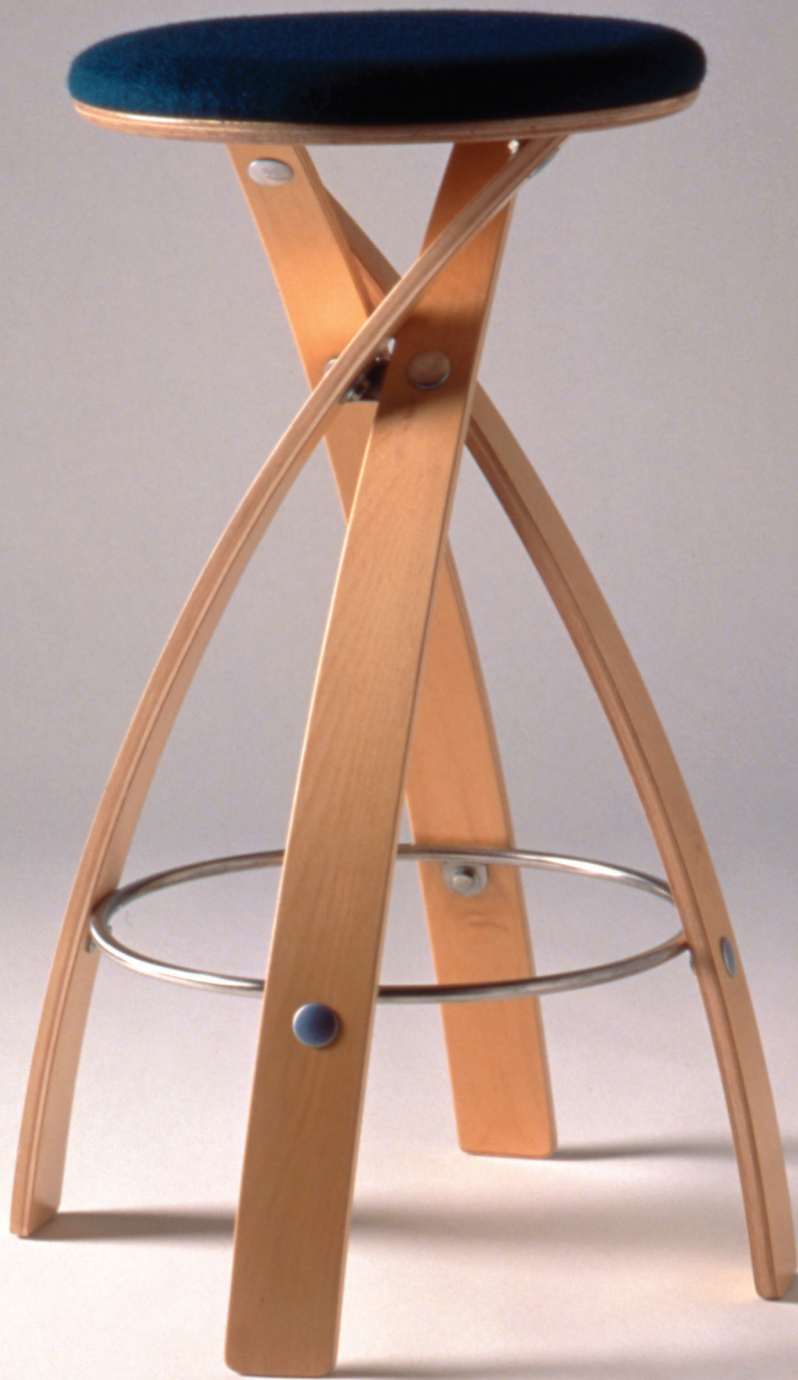
The idea for Stave came from the desire to use a laminating jig more productively. After preparing sample legs and playing around with the components, Allan's wife Jackie suggested twisting the legs through the centre. After several iterations, engineering and problem solving, the work resulted in Stave, and a highly successful design partnership.

In 2007, Allan created the Derwent Skiff, winning an international award at the Australian Wooden Boat Festival. This then led to the development of Witt Design Row and Sail, adapting the principles and expertise gained from extensive experience in furniture design, creating a range of wooden boats in kit form that allows clients to build them at home.

“Increasingly, designers must make a significant and positive impact on our throw-away society. Ideally, each of us will have fewer material things – but each more beautiful, more enduring, more functional and more valued.”

Allan Witt, designer





“If you’re not curious you can’t be a designer; if you don’t take risks, you won’t be successful and the third thing, is the most least understood, is a focused imagination”

Gary Cleveland AM

John Smith 1948 - 2015

Rip Tide Chair & Chest, Ripple Bowl

In 1992 John Smith undertook an Australia Council residency in Barcelona, the experience of which had a lasting impact on the techniques and materials he used in his practice.

During a later residency in Los Angeles in 2000, he sat on Malibu beach watching the crashing waves and considered that these were very likely generated from the shore of Marrawah, in Northern Tasmania.

This experience provided the inspiration that informed his future works which concentrated on ocean waves and the movement of bodies of water. He attempted to capture the ideas of turbulence, being uplifted by waves and overwhelmed by them through his works.

John Smith immigrated to Australia in the 1970s and began lecturing at the Tasmanian School of Art, which later became part of the University of Tasmania. In 1981 he was appointed Head of the Wood/Furniture Design program and taught in the department until his retirement in 2007.

He was instrumental in establishing the Centre for Furniture Design at the School in 1991 and, under his direction, focussed on design research for industry with post-graduate students. In the 1980s he was commissioned to design and make a desk and furniture for the Leader of the Opposition’s room at Parliament House.

The Rip Tide Chair and Rip Tide Chest of Drawers were both acquired in 1997. The Ripple Bowl was chosen from the Grand Exhibition in 1999.

This series demonstrates the technical possibilities of moulding wood veneers into three-dimensional forms. His use of laminated ply-wood with Huon Pine veneer on the surface shows his experimental process with using a specific material and various techniques.

The Rip Tide series charts the development of a designer’s inspiration and technique, and exemplifies his career achievements not only in Tasmania, but also on a global stage.



“The idea developed by Gary Cleveland in 1991 as a means of promoting the appropriate use of Tasmanian timbers and an understanding of the importance of design, and to “create an identity for Tasmania” overseas”

*Rory Spencer, Architecture AU
January 2003*

Ian Hewitt

Lidded Containers

Peter Gorring

Two Boxes

Ian Hewitt and his wife Julia owned and operated Axis Design from 1988. Axis Design manufactured 10 timber product lines, including the lidded container.

In 2012 Ian bought Axiom Lighting from Jane Hutchinson and Dan Whiting and expanded his practice. Under the Axiom brand, Hewitt designs and makes wall lights, table lamps and floor lamps finished with custom veneers.

His workshop is situated in a bush setting overlooking the Tamar River Estuary in Northern Tasmania, which is the source of much inspiration.

The Lidded Containers in tiger grain myrtle exemplify Hewitt’s focus on maximising the appreciation and sustainability of Tasmania’s rare timbers. This connection between skilled craftsmanship and sustainable timber practice is a key theme within the Design Tasmania Wood Collection.

Peter Gorring has been called “The Prince of Tasmanian Timbers” for his skill in being guided by the complexities and characteristics of the timber he works with.

Gorring developed his design philosophy from spending vast amounts of time in the bush; “To me it is beautiful, growing, so I try and keep it alive in its simple and individual way.”

Two Boxes showcases Gorring’s mastery of materials, creating beautiful yet functional pieces intended to protect treasured personal possessions.

The inclusion of Two Boxes and Lidded Containers in the inaugural Wood Collection acquisition indicates the awareness of the importance of a range of scale across the collection, and the importance of creating a robust touring package. These works showcase mastery of technique in an intimate, and highly portable format.





Kevin Perkins is a renowned Australian designer with works included in the Prime Minister's suite at Parliament House, and featured in St Patrick's Cathedral in Parramatta.

Perkins campaigned for a Tasmanian Forest Agreement which showed strong support across the specialty timber sector to progress a resolution to the conflict over forests in Tasmania. For him the greatest success will be when Tasmania's forest resources are permanently accorded their real value. He is a strong advocate and supporter of new, young, designers coming through Tasmania. On Australia Day in 2019 Kevin was awarded an Order of Australia honour for significant service to the visual arts as a timber craftsman, designer and sculptor.

His love for birds is evident throughout his work, particularly in the Cape Barren Goose Cabinet acquired in 1994. Not only the most iconic item in the Design Tasmania Wood Collection, the work is also listed as one of 100 items in Shaping Tasmania, an online exhibition of Tasmania's most significant items.

Inspiration for the Cabinet came in 2003 when an article about Flinders Island was published in The Sydney Morning Herald. A picture of a Cape Barren Goose with its wingspan was featured and Perkin's idea took flight.

“There are almost 100 species of timber of trees in Tasmanian forests, yet we only use a handful of species. My work highlights these rarer grains of wood, the timbers that have a high character such as the forking of trees, or the roots of wood, or unusual growth patterns.”

Kevin Perkins AO, designer maker

Gary Cleveland was very pleased with acquiring the Cabinet, referring to it as “The piece de resistance” in an interview with The Sydney Morning Herald. He went on to say that “The Tasmanian Museum wanted the cabinet; they were furious that we got it.” (SMH, 18 Oct 1994, p.37)

The Side Tables were acquired in 1991. Designed as an architectural statement, to be displayed with the smaller ends meeting, ideally to be showcased in a foyer. How apt that these now fit neatly into the main gallery niches at Design Tasmania's Gary Cleveland Galleries.

Both pieces by Perkins hold great artistic and aesthetic significance for the way they are designed, crafted and made. Their association with a world recognised Tasmanian designer only increases their value to our local and national cultural community, continuing to inspire emerging and established creatives.

Kevin Perkins AO

Side Tables (Set of 2)

Cape Barren Goose Cabinet



List of Works

Ross Straker, *Writing Desk*, 1991, Myrtle, Leather, Felt, Ebony, Brass, Ebonised Poplar Veneer

Kevin Perkins, *Cape Barren Goose Cabinet*, 1996, Huon Pine, Silky Oak, Ebony, Fine Silver and Brass

David Ralph, *Bush Chair*, c. 1970, Horizontal Scrub (Casuarina)

Peter Costello, *Snap Chair*, 1993, White Sassafras Veneer over Hoop Pine Plywood, Stainless Steel, Steel and Die Cast Aluminium Hingers, Stainless Steel Rigging Wire

Witt Design, Alan Witt & Jackie Witt, *Stave Stool*, 2001, Laminated Eucalypt, MDF, Stainless Steel, Fabric

Marty Wolfhagen, *Casuarina Chairs*, 1995, Laminated Casuarina, Stainless Steel

John Smith, *Riptide Chair*, 1997, Huon Pine Veneer, Plywood, Leather

Ian Hewitt, *Lidded Containers*, 1991, Tiger Grain Myrtle

Peter Goring, *Two Boxes*, 1991, Huon Pine, Celery Top Pine, Blackheart Sassafras, Felt, Brass

Kevin Perkins, *Cape Barren Goose Cabinet*, 1996, Huon Pine, Silky Oak, Ebony, Fine Silver and Brass

Side Tables, 1991, Huon Pine (Bookmatched), Eucalypt, Brass

All images c. Peter Whyte Photography

Thankyou

Design Tasmania acknowledges our supporters.

We are assisted through Arts Tasmania by the Minister for the Arts, and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

Design Tasmania is supported by The Ian Potter Foundation, one of Australia's major philanthropic foundations.

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