


List of contacts.

**Grey Bloomfield**  
**Kennedy Brown**  
**Candywhistle**  
**Phil Cuttance**  
**Jenny Emery**  
**Lindsay Marks**  
**Bamie McLellan**  
**Tim Larkin**  
**Robert Rose**  
**Subart**


# ShowRoom.

It was a long and busy 2007 for the designers featured in this year's ShowRoom. From the beginning of the year, the designers were busy with their clients, and many of them were also busy with their own businesses. The designers in this year's ShowRoom are: Grey Bloomfield, Kennedy Brown, Candywhistle, Phil Cuttance, Jenny Emery, Lindsay Marks, Bamie McLellan, Tim Larkin, Robert Rose, and Subart. Each designer has a unique style and a diverse range of work. The designers in this year's ShowRoom are: Grey Bloomfield, Kennedy Brown, Candywhistle, Phil Cuttance, Jenny Emery, Lindsay Marks, Bamie McLellan, Tim Larkin, Robert Rose, and Subart. Each designer has a unique style and a diverse range of work. The designers in this year's ShowRoom are: Grey Bloomfield, Kennedy Brown, Candywhistle, Phil Cuttance, Jenny Emery, Lindsay Marks, Bamie McLellan, Tim Larkin, Robert Rose, and Subart. Each designer has a unique style and a diverse range of work.

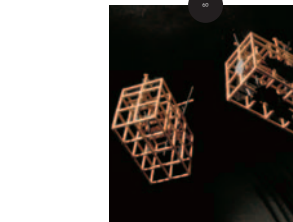
**Emma Fisher-Balshaw Kate Emery**  
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 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
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**Holding up the Bar, 2007**  
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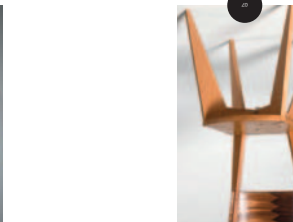
**Tim Larkin**  
**Folk Furniture Cabinet, 2007**  
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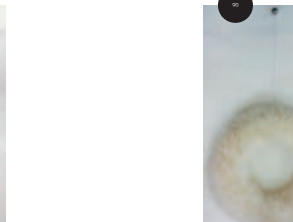
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**Lindsay Marks**  
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**Jenny Emery**  
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## Introduction.

**Philip Clarke, Director**

ShowRoom puts the spotlight on the lesser-known side of contemporary New Zealand furniture practices and the work of customers Regi Scorzano and Katy Wallace reveals an active and diverse range of designers and makers intent on producing original and innovative work while strengthening themselves as a small and often conservative local market.

It often feels like the opportunities are endless. It's a reality of contemporary New Zealand furniture design. But as a specific contributor to the success of the industry, it's important to have a voice. This is the role of ShowRoom. It's a platform for designers and makers to showcase their work and to connect with a wider audience. It's a chance to be seen and to be heard. It's a chance to be part of something bigger.

**Grey Bloomfield**  
**Panther, 2007**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

**Pumice 2, 2007**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
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There are many great designers in New Zealand. But it's not always easy to find them. That's why ShowRoom exists. It's a platform for designers and makers to showcase their work and to connect with a wider audience. It's a chance to be seen and to be heard. It's a chance to be part of something bigger.

**Kennedy Brown**  
**Celebrant's Chair, 2006**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

**Book Table, 2006**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

William Brennan and Kate Emery have a unique style and a diverse range of work. They are two of the most talented designers in New Zealand. Their work is a blend of traditional and contemporary design. They are always pushing the boundaries of what is possible in furniture design. Their work is a testament to the power of creativity and innovation.

**Craig Bond**  
**Shopping Trolley with Yogurt Tray, 2006**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

**Jake the Peg, 2006**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

Each designer has a unique style and a diverse range of work. They are always pushing the boundaries of what is possible in furniture design. Their work is a testament to the power of creativity and innovation. They are always looking for new ways to create and to connect with their audience. They are always striving for excellence in their work.

**Phil Cuttance**  
**Fantasy Fantasy Chair, 2007**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

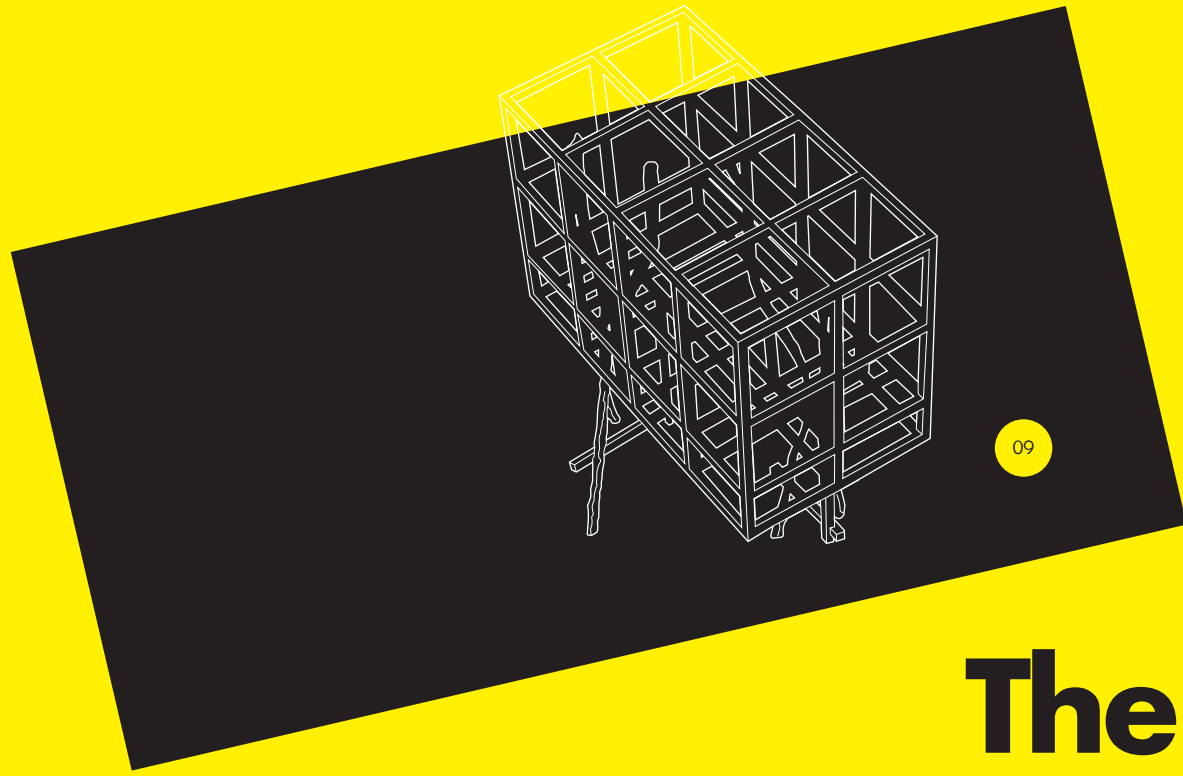
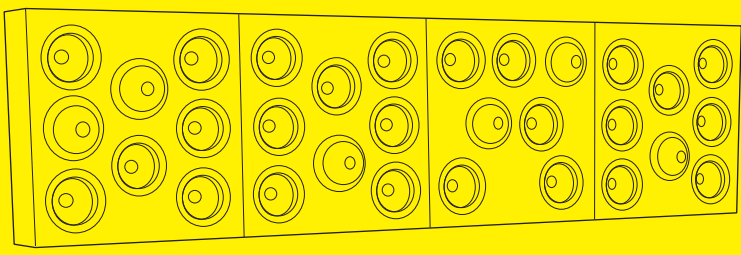
**Canvas, 2007**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

Phil Cuttance's work is a blend of traditional and contemporary design. He is always pushing the boundaries of what is possible in furniture design. His work is a testament to the power of creativity and innovation. He is always looking for new ways to create and to connect with his audience. He is always striving for excellence in his work.

**Jenny Emery**  
**12 Second Chair Disassembly, 2006-2007**  
 1000 W. 10th St., Vancouver, BC  
 604.681.1111  
 www.wallpresser.com

Jenny Emery's work is a blend of traditional and contemporary design. She is always pushing the boundaries of what is possible in furniture design. Her work is a testament to the power of creativity and innovation. She is always looking for new ways to create and to connect with her audience. She is always striving for excellence in her work.



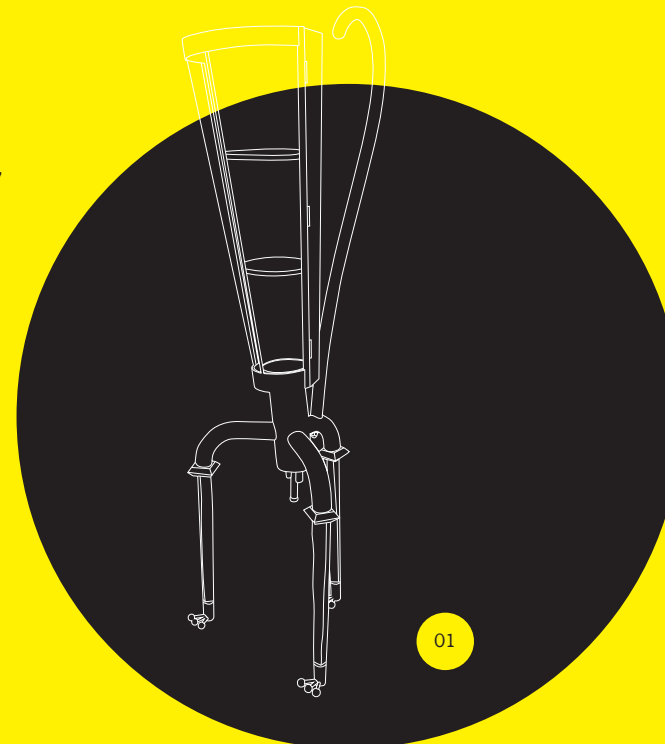
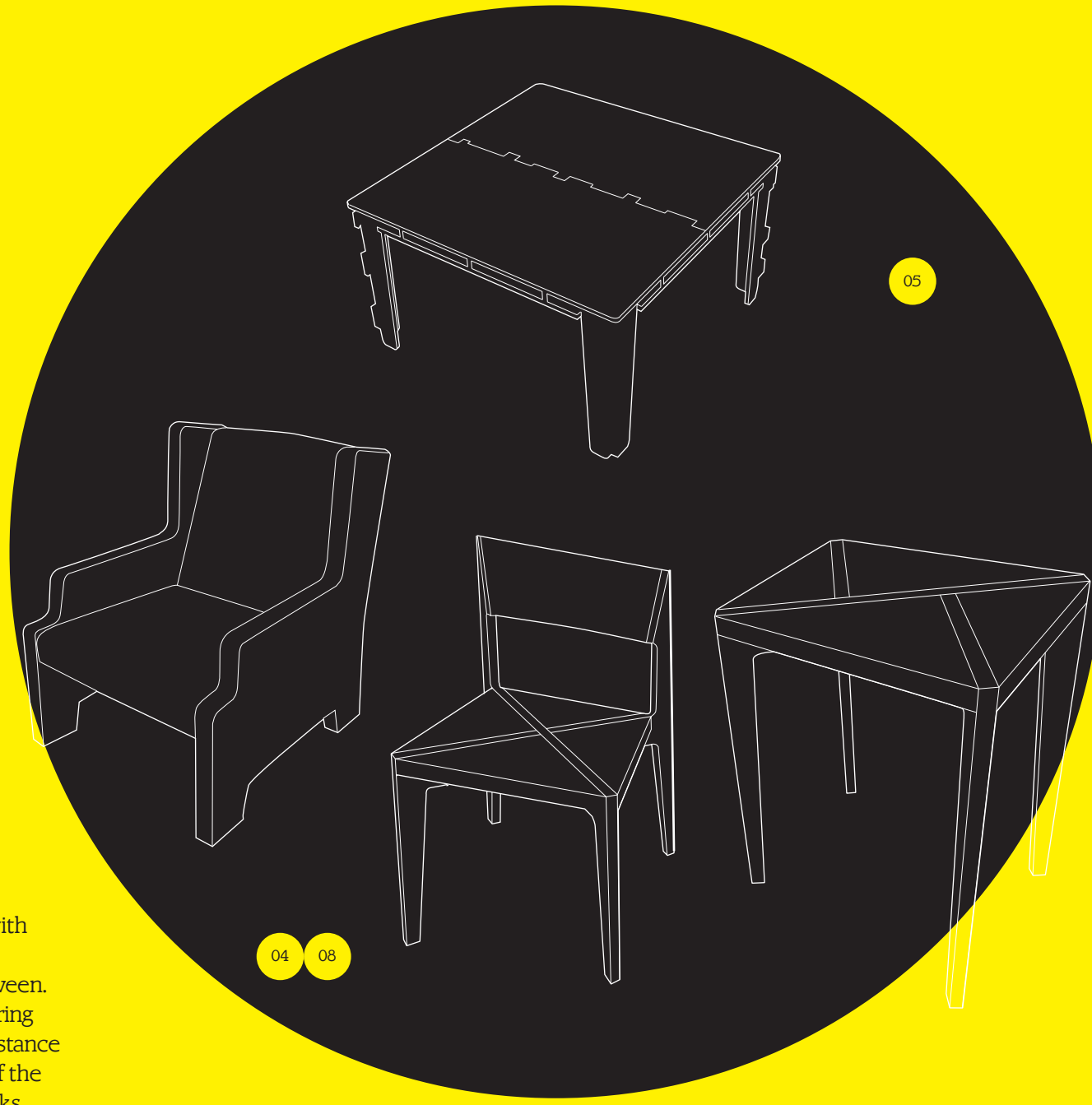
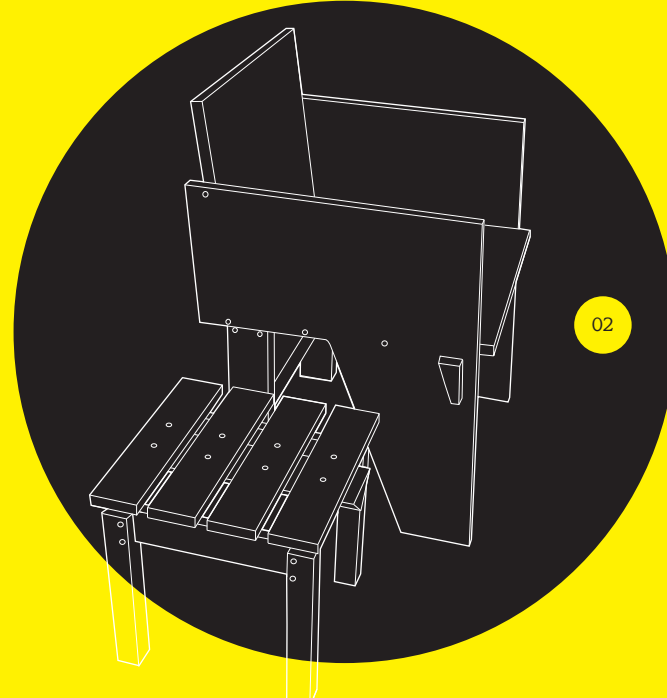
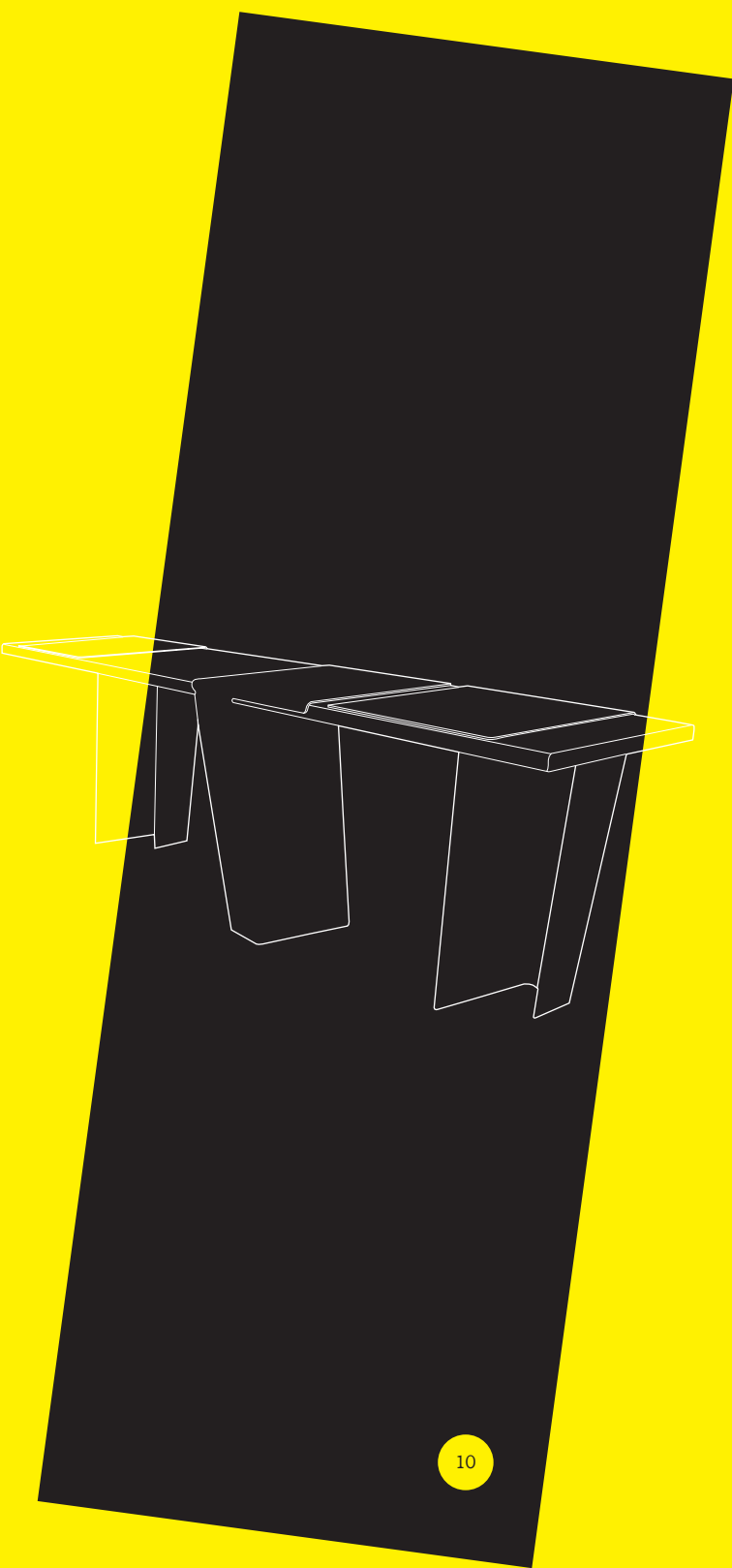


Katy Wallace is a three dimensional designer, working primarily in furniture. She also teaches within the Spatial Design Degree at AUT University. [katy@katywallace.co.nz](mailto:katy@katywallace.co.nz)

## The Multi-taskers.

Katy Wallace

ShowRoom - a version of the retail furniture showroom - is in some ways the missing link between the retail space and gallery floor. It spotlights a range of furniture practice too rich for the mainstream furniture showroom whilst being too designed for the art gallery.



## The Furniture Problem.

Rigel Sorzano

Furniture, as with all object-making, has its origins in craft, but long ago shed any inhibitions about multiples or mass-production.<sup>1</sup> It delights in diversity of material, which puts it in a different sphere to materials-based disciplines such as ceramics or glass, or even woodwork. And it may be decorative, but it is always functional.

Rigel Sorzano is an Auckland based object maker and writer. Since graduating from Unitec with a Bachelor of Design (3D) in 2002, she has written about objects and design for a number of publications and exhibitions in New Zealand and Australia. [rigel@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rigel@xtra.co.nz)

As Donald Judd put it, "If a chair...is not functional, if it appears to be only art, it is ridiculous. The art of a chair is not its resemblance to art, but is partly its reasonableness, usefulness and scale as a chair."<sup>2</sup>

The history of contemporary furniture in New Zealand has been something of a fitful one. The innovative work of Garth Chester in the 1940s, was followed in the 1950s and 1960s by designers such as John Crichton, Bob Roukema of Jon Jansen, and the Winters of Danske Mobler. This period saw a shift in public taste to a modern, often Scandinavian-accented style, but also the introduction of import controls: while some original work was produced, much of it was highly derivative, if not literally copied. The 1970s offered little evident advance-

ment in local design, with reproduction furniture gaining in popularity. However the work of Humphrey Ikin, and of craft revivalists such as Colin Slade and Carin Wilson, ushered in a resurgence of design and craft energy in the 1980s, with the removal of import restrictions and the introduction of Craft Design polytechnic courses from 1986.

The Craft Design courses were an alternative to made-based training. With their emphasis on cross-disciplinary practice, they encouraged experimentation and conceptual process, which echoed a general trend in design. Issues of place and identity began to be worked through and traditional materials and forms challenged in an increasingly energetic furniture sector, which included the Auckland-based Artium group, who began exhibiting locally in 1987.

In 1988, the Auckland Museum undertook the first national exhibition of contemporary furniture.<sup>3</sup> This was a significant event, representing "the best of what was happening from around New Zealand", with the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council paying for the transport of furniture to Auckland for selection by George Ingham.<sup>4</sup> Pieces which were not selected were then shown at a 'Salon de Refusés' at the Gow Langsford gallery, creating an extended discussion about the nature and quality of contemporary furniture in New Zealand.

Artium shows continued until 1992, when the final exhibition toured Japan. Activity then seemed to die down, but this proved deceptive. The Framed<sup>5</sup> survey exhibition at the Dowse Art Museum in 1997, followed by exhibitions such as Facing North<sup>6</sup> and Furniture in Context,<sup>7</sup> revealed an "extraordinary depth and diversity of activity among furniture designers in New Zealand"<sup>8</sup> and a range of work of high quality and conceptual vigour. What was missing, however, was the transmission of this energy into the retail environment and consumer market.

As Paul Greenhigh points out, "to survive, it is necessary either to make a lot of affordable things or a very few prestigious things... Each individual craftsman has to position himself appropriately within this economic reality, or risk a life of anonymous financial hardship."<sup>9</sup> As this implies, design and art are often seen as occupy-

ing opposite ends of a spectrum, with craft, something which is neither, slithering about somewhere in between. This assumes that both extremes bring an equivalent financial return, the distance apart being to do with the nature of the output - prestigious one-off artworks versus mass-produced design objects.

The predominant model of creative practice in New Zealand was, and remains, one of studio practice. Even today contemporary furniture is a discipline where the term "designer-maker" is frequently heard, and where those designers who have their work made by others commonly bear responsibility for initiating, supervising and co-ordinating the processes involved, regardless of their aptitude or appetite for entrepreneurship. In short, it's a model of practice best suited to one-offs or short production runs, leaning more towards the art end of the spectrum.

But although its promiscuous appropriation of materials and processes might seem to align contemporary furniture practice with contemporary art practice, furniture is generally regarded as design, not art. Its functionality, ubiquity in daily life, and propensity for mass-manufacture, gives it the default identity of a commodity or product, and the current tendency for "contemporary" to be read as "urban", underlines this further.

This isn't rocket science: when a design discipline which operates like a craft practice, creates for mass-production market objects which are often not mass-produced, but one-offs or short-run production items, there's going to be a gap between output and return. In order to survive, contemporary furniture began looking for some way of bridging that gap.

A solution wasn't likely to come from industry, whose reluctance to engage with design was acknowledged in the Design Taskforce Report of 2003.<sup>10</sup> Attempting to address this has required the ongoing efforts of government agencies such as New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and Better By Design, who have achieved limited success so far as contemporary furniture is concerned.<sup>11</sup>

Institutional support was also lacking, for the Crafts Council had closed in about 1991, and while furniture designers could join the Designers Institute of New Zealand, their mode of practice did

This middle ground is not clearly demarcated by a specific venue type often leaving the work suspended between institutions. The exhibition holds the concentrated end of furniture design where the object comes into play as commentator or explorer, testing ideas and theories in a more direct way than the commercial realm allows.

Gathered on the strength of the work as much as the diversity of the practice ShowRoom gives us a rare opportunity to examine some current themes in contemporary furniture - and perhaps more importantly for the sector - some of the strategies that enable and underpin these designers' approaches. A reality of the prevalent studio model of practice in New Zealand is that the designer must be maker, promoter, distributor, and business manager. A practice of this nature requires a long term commitment to become sustainable, while at the same time remaining vulnerable to quick changes in fashion, philosophy or technology which may leave the inexperienced designer wondering where to go next.

All of the participants in ShowRoom have had multiple work streams or are holding down 'day jobs' to sustain their conceptual practice. For some this is a means to an end, but for others this is not necessarily a negative state of affairs. For ShowRoom exhibitors these other income streams generally have some relationship to the design field, offering other layers of networks, experiences and perspectives that may not occur in a more singularly focused practice.

The question can be asked: is this multi-tasking approach a problem or is this actually a preferred mode of operation for many of these designers?

The combination of educator and practitioner is a frequent occurrence. This relationship seems symbiotic as theories, philosophies and new technologies can flow freely between the teaching environment and personal practice. Tim Larkin, SubART and Lindsay Marks have all established this balance. As Marks plainly states 'as a design educator, exclusive financial support by my furniture design practice is neither a necessity nor a reality.'

Moving between materials, scales, technologies and a variety of disciplines is a strategy that allows designers to pursue opportunities outside of the furniture sphere. The ability to undertake a variety of commission, contract, or project work gives an individual the means to layer their practice while remaining engaged in a direct or related furniture sphere. The ability to undertake a variety of commission, contract, or project work gives an individual the means to layer their practice while remaining engaged in a direct or related furniture sphere. The ability to undertake a variety of commission, contract, or project work gives an individual the means to layer their practice while remaining engaged in a direct or related furniture sphere.

In Candy Whistle's case their practice spans interior, exhibition, event, and object. The furniture object is pivotal to their projects and the creation of a strong dynamic between furnishing and space is a Candy Whistle signature. Jamie McLellan's international career, primarily as an industrial designer, has included in-house, freelance, and contract positions, as well as private commissions and personal projects. Changing frameworks as McLellan does gives new perspectives with each brief, creating a freshness of approach that is much harder to maintain if you are repeating the same processes over and over.

These designers are multi-tasking at a productive level, balancing clients, design briefs and disciplines to create a sustainable and flexible practice for themselves. Again this is a relationship where multiplicity can enervate a practice but it can also have the effect of slowing down substantial progress in any one stream, in this case the singular pursuit of self-directed furniture projects. For those designers whose practice exists solely outside the hours of full time employment, time balancing is an issue that will inevitably need addressing if they are to respond to increasing levels of interest their work may generate. They will not only require more time for their practice but more time to action enquiries and the resulting increase in administration. The financial dimension of this shift in focus can be a difficult one to manage.

Establishing some sort of economic platform is an essential element for a contemporary furniture practice, but once the practitioner puts works into play it is equally important that a clear vision is established for the work itself. It is interesting to see how the local climate can shape the way designers create their work and strategise towards finding a market. The designers and the work in ShowRoom demonstrate that there are some broad categories that are emerging as areas of focus or strategy - global targeting, technological advancements and somewhat in contrast, the crafted tradition.

not readily mesh with the overall concerns of that organisation.

From a retail perspective, public awareness of design and design objects grew throughout the 1990s, and changes in architecture and lifestyle threw greater focus on contemporary furniture. This provided more opportunity, but equally meant that local furniture was competing not only against cheap Asian imports but expensive European ones. Retailers of imported furniture could sometimes be persuaded to carry specific local items, but what ultimately made a difference was the growth of a number of retail-oriented enterprises devoted to New Zealand design.

Particularly significant among these was Eon, a gallery, retail space and café opened by designer Angela Roper in 1999. Other businesses - Uno Design, for example - promoted contemporary New Zealand work, but Eon, focussing entirely on New Zealand design, provided a hitherto missing interface.

Designers unused to supplying a retail market received encouragement and advice from someone who understood the way they worked: moving from the gallery through the shop to the café, the consumer had a sense of taking part in something immediate, discovering along the way that New Zealand contemporary furniture was not only lively and interesting, but included such practical and accessible items as beds, couches and tables.

Other businesses launched around this time included Simon James Design and

Purple South. In 2004 they joined David Tubridge, who had been exhibiting at Milan's Salone Satellite since 2001, in the first group showing of New Zealand contemporary furniture in Milan.

Since then, New Zealand design has acquired a strong mainstream presence, and the furniture fairs of Milan and New York have grown accustomed to displays of New Zealand furniture. Stores specialising in New Zealand design and contemporary furniture have proliferated. Eon has grown into a more commercial New Zealand design showroom and interior design business, with much of the furniture it sells designed or commissioned in-house. Essence, another New Zealand design retailer, "is responsible for the global marketing, distribution and sales"<sup>12</sup> of the designers it represents. MOA, based in Paris, "[collaborates] with designers, entrepreneurs and artists to put together a selection of New Zealand design world-class products and visual arts for presentation in respected European design galleries, restaurants and shops".<sup>13</sup>

So is that it? Well, no. To misquote Humphrey Ikin,<sup>14</sup> "the furniture problem" is still very much alive. Although there's much more of it than there used to be, contemporary furniture in the retail environment and media often seems static, promoting a relatively limited number of designers and makers, and celebrating forms and ideas which have been repeated for so long they've become lifeless.

One reason may be that manufacturers,

International markets hold a bigger pool of buyers for niche design and it can be a daunting prospect, shipping yourself, your work, and gauging the market from our remote country, but it is evident the global reach of our designers is becoming stronger and more confident. Greg Bloomfield and Phil Cuttance have targeted their audiences and by-passed the local market to exhibit their work on an international stage. Jenny Keate's first design, the Lily lamp has gone from studio prototype to international mass production and distribution. And it is standard practice for designers to have a web site as an internationally accessible flag.

Technology offers designers many new opportunities in terms of creation, materials, manufacturing and communication. Design can be sold through virtual stores and delivered straight from machine to customer. Mass-production technologies can incorporate a personalised or customised differentiation with each unit, offering a level of customer personalisation within production that has usually only been able to exist in the high end one-off market. This type of technology has been uplifted by both Phil Cuttance and Dan Emery. Cuttance has used a large scale fabric ink jet printer that allows for the custom production of printed fabric on a chair by chair basis. Emery has used a similar principle using laser cutting, but goes a step further and hands over the authorship of decoration to the customer.

Craft-oriented practice has been over shadowed for some time by the growth of the design sector. Industry and market have been intoxicated by the seductive nature and accessibility of the production piece, but with the current

scrutiny around the issues of value, sustainability and purpose in relation to the manufactured object, craft practice stands in a strong position to regain attention and value. Kennedy Brown, Tim Larkin, Lindsay Marks and Greg Bloomfield's work operates within this territory although their work is more different than it is similar. For their work to sustain itself it needs to position itself beyond the production design piece and draw attention to the qualities inherent in the crafted object.

The definition of a sustainable practice is extending, depending on the parameters and expectations placed upon it. Whether an individual's output consists of one piece or twenty pieces per year, it is the continuation of practice which deems it to be sustainable. It is largely a combination of tenacity, pragmatism and sheer determination that has enabled these designers to continue producing such remarkably individual work. Perhaps we need to acknowledge that, based in this country of short history and small head count, the furniture practitioner will, by necessity, always be a multi-tasker.

It is encouraging to witness through the designers presented that the various methods of sustaining such practice are generally integrated within the work of design. In many cases this multi-tasking is extending the scope of local contemporary furniture.

ShowRoom provides us with visible evidence of committed activity within the sector. It is an opportunity to draw together diversity and provide a platform for focused conversation and planning - a temporary link between the poles of retail and gallery.

1. Theoretically, the best of what was happening from around New Zealand, with the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council paying for the transport of furniture to Auckland for selection by George Ingham.<sup>4</sup> Pieces which were not selected were then shown at a 'Salon de Refusés' at the Gow Langsford gallery, creating an extended discussion about the nature and quality of contemporary furniture in New Zealand.

2. Donald Judd, 'On Furniture', in *Design Taskforce Report of 2003*, p. 18. September 2003, Wellington. [www.designtaskforce.govt.nz](http://www.designtaskforce.govt.nz)

3. *Furniture in Context*, curated by David Tubridge, Auckland, 1988. [www.aucklandmuseum.co.nz](http://www.aucklandmuseum.co.nz)

4. *Framed*, survey exhibition at the Dowse Art Museum, 1997. [www.dowse.co.nz](http://www.dowse.co.nz)

5. *Facing North*, survey exhibition at the Dowse Art Museum, 1997. [www.dowse.co.nz](http://www.dowse.co.nz)

6. *Furniture in Context*, curated by David Tubridge, Auckland, 1988. [www.aucklandmuseum.co.nz](http://www.aucklandmuseum.co.nz)

7. *Framed*, survey exhibition at the Dowse Art Museum, 1997. [www.dowse.co.nz](http://www.dowse.co.nz)

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9. *Framed*, survey exhibition at the Dowse Art Museum, 1997. [www.dowse.co.nz](http://www.dowse.co.nz)

10. *Design Taskforce Report of 2003*, Wellington, 2003. [www.designtaskforce.govt.nz](http://www.designtaskforce.govt.nz)

11. *Design Taskforce Report of 2003*, Wellington, 2003. [www.designtaskforce.govt.nz](http://www.designtaskforce.govt.nz)

12. *Design Taskforce Report of 2003*, Wellington, 2003. [www.designtaskforce.govt.nz](http://www.designtaskforce.govt.nz)

13. *Design Taskforce Report of 2003*, Wellington, 2003. [www.designtaskforce.govt.nz](http://www.designtaskforce.govt.nz)

14. *Design Taskforce Report of 2003*, Wellington, 2003. [www.designtaskforce.govt.nz](http://www.designtaskforce.govt.nz)