



## FOREWORD

Made in Midland is an exciting project for FORM, being both the culmination of a year long project to assist the development of seven fine wood designers, and the beginning of FORM's work to develop and engage the creative industries with what will become an exciting, dynamic and creative precinct emerging at the Midland Railway Workshops Village.

FORM is delighted to be able to exhibit a range of contemporary furniture items that represent a new direction for these makers. Assisted by FORM's Designing Futures program, these men undertook a program of product design and business development, creating new works with consideration for contemporary lifestyles and markets.

Situated in the Pattern Shop at the Midland Railway Workshops Village, the fine wood cluster is the first group FORM has worked with at the Midland site. We are looking forward to engaging with practitioners from the craft and design sector as our work with the Midland Redevelopment Authority to develop a creative precinct begins to gain momentum. The initial focus will be on gathering support for the expansion of the fine wood studio and development of an access glass facility at the site. A project such as this offers an enormous opportunity for the creative industries to illustrate the contribution they can make to contemporary urban settings and to the development of attractive and dynamic living environments.

FORM would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the seven fine wood practitioners represented in this show and we look forward to working with the sector to develop an exciting and engaging working environment for the creative community.

Lynda Dorrington  
Executive Director  
FORM Contemporary Craft and Design



## MADE IN MIDLAND

Marina Lommerse, Rebecca Eggleston and Kris Brankovic

'Made in Midland' weaves together three important stories: the achievements of seven fine wood designers branching out into new and innovative areas of their practices; the support structure provided to them by FORM, which encourages the synthesis of refined craft skills, new manufacturing technologies and a fresh approach to design; and the unique historical and urban context of the Midland Workshop Village, where the group is based. The 'Made In Midland' exhibition presents the intersection of these three stories, celebrating the furniture and lighting products created by the participating designers, while beginning to build the Midland Workshop Village's reputation as a premier site for creative endeavour.

'Made in Midland' began with seven fine wood designers demonstrating a determination to make a living from their passion for working with timber and represents the designers' courageous venture into new areas of design for production. Malcolm Harris, Tim Whiteman, Scott Maloney, Philip Fry, Stuart Williams, Peter Vitalich and Tim Leaversuch embraced the professional development offered by FORM through its Designing Futures project in order to enhance the viability of their practices. To assist the designers to develop furniture and objects in small run production for a competitive market place, FORM worked with them through a series of workshops that sought to enhance the individuals' methods for designing with production efficiency and contemporary lifestyles in mind.

Guiding this process of development was facilitator, Marina Lommerse, who, along with FORM staff and renowned Australian designer, Jon Goulder, provided mentoring to the participants throughout the design process, opening up new perspectives and access to a broad expertise.





Initial stages of the project focused on concept exploration and market research around the use of objects, furniture and integral architectural elements in contemporary interiors. The individuals explored their ideas through modelling and prototyping, backed up by research into new materials, componentry and manufacturing possibilities. The critical factor, however, was working within a supportive group environment that offered critiquing, valuable feedback and knowledge exchange.

The works presented in this exhibition, and the Designing Futures program itself, have emerged in the wake of an interesting period in the history of Western Australia's timber industry. The cessation of logging of old-growth forests in 2001, and the timber industry crisis that ensued, resulted in state support for the development of alternate

pathways for timber workers and affected communities. Fine wood designers, craftspeople and manufacturers have had to adapt their traditional modes of practice and seek out more effective ways of maintaining their creative businesses. '15 years ago, things sold because of the material—the timber. This is no longer true—design is very important as we are competing against well designed and well made furniture. To compete, we need to have unique designs and be smart in how we produce them', says Malcolm Harris. Survival in the industry requires a bridge between the good grounding in technical skills that formal training provides, and running a successful business, which takes determination, savvy and tenacity. Designing Futures was developed to assist with this period of transition in the industry by supporting fine wood craftspeople to establish sustainable creative businesses.

The designers participating in 'Made in Midland' were particularly well placed for a program that was group (or 'cluster') based, given their co-location in a shared studio environment, commitment to their profession and openness to collaboration. The cluster's principal practitioner, Malcolm Harris, leased the Pattern Shop at the Midland Workshops Village in 2003 for his fine wood business, and then opened up the space to other, emerging designers. Malcolm welcomes the chance to work with others and feels that, 'by working with emerging woodworkers, I am able to provide a space where they can lay down foundations and get exposure to running a business in this sector.' One of these emerging makers, Tim Whiteman, says, 'This co-operative workshop has been the backbone for me being able to forge a career in fine wood. It is an important stepping stone, without which we would not be able to survive. With both the capital outlay for equipment and the various people in the workshop, we have been able to pool resources as well as essential skills and knowledge.'

Malcolm's extensive construction experience has been a crucial attribute—he is our mentor. Without these starting points we would be statistics.' As a collective, this group possesses an impressive range of skills in the craft of making, each contributing their own strengths to the mix.

The beautiful heritage setting of the Pattern Shop, with its dramatic physical and ethereal qualities, provides significant inspiration for those who use the space. The men speak of the unique character of the workshop and their love of its industrial architecture. From 1904 to 1994, timber patterns for forging all the rail equipment were made, catalogued and stored in the workshop. Timber craftsmen were apprenticed and many spent their working lives there. Although closed in 1994, many of the original patterns and equipment remain in the building. These patterns, created with such precision and durability, are testament to the skill and craftsmanship of the previous inhabitants. The continuum of skilled craftspeople and designers once again occupying this space is not lost on the Pattern Shop's current inhabitants. As Philip Fry says, 'there is 100 years of history of guys like us plying their trade right where we are'. The designers feel at home in their environment with affable ghosts of workers past, the library of patterns, and fine machinery. 'Every morning I walk into the workshop and smile'. (Tim Whiteman)



The business of sustainable object or furniture design is difficult and designer-makers in Western Australia have struggled throughout the years. Perhaps this is because small, creative furniture makers always seem to be riding the edge, unable to enjoy the security of a robust market and industry. The men in this cluster have tended to run their enterprises in varying ways, particularly with a focus on commissioned, one-off furniture and installations, and small batch production for wood galleries.

The Designing Futures program presented an opportunity for the designers to diversify their income streams. The program provided guidance and a number of the designers decided to pursue production lines for retail or manufacturing, in order to secure an additional and steady income suitable for more sustainable living. The results of their dedication, collaboration and sense of adventure can be seen in the 'Made in Midland' exhibition. Tim Whiteman says 'I've

made a goal to make a living out of my new career in timber, and with the developments over the last year, I now believe I can do it'. This bodes well for the co-operative, and for others following them. 'I feel this new body of work is securing our future.'

The Designing Futures program provides an important support structure for emerging designers, emphasising a consideration of the context and environment in which they work. The Western Australian design sector and market are underdeveloped but growing quickly, and new opportunities are constantly being presented to local practitioners. The Midland Railway Workshops are one such opportunity, having all the ingredients required to become Western Australia's premier site for creative industries. Over the coming years, this vision will be realised, and through the bold new approaches to contemporary design that makers like Malcolm, Tim, Scott, Philip, Stuart, Peter and Tim are establishing, the future looks bright for Western Australia's creative sector.



## FUTURE HISTORY

Narelle Yabuka

There is a strange, but pleasantly engaging feeling to be had when the city in which you have spent your life reveals a side to rival those you already know. My mental calculations about the 'feel' of Perth had always seemed to add up to adjectives such as 'modest' or 'restrained' - the culminating impression of factors such as flat geography, dry soil, and a relatively small population, combined with a 'make-do' settlers' history, largely unelaborate architecture and infrastructure, and a culture traditionally based to some degree on importation. There can be beauty in restraint, of course. But so too is there awe in grandiosity - particularly when it is of the unexpected variety.

Though today's Perth residents are perhaps mentally accustomed to the colossal scale of distant mining operations, let alone the size of their state, it could be fairly suggested that architectural spaces of sheer magnitude (sports stadiums aside) are rarely experienced.

To discover, therefore, the imposing red brick bulk and faded industrial might of the Midland Railway Workshops was for me a memorable event.

Venturing for the first time to the southern side of Midland's rail line in search of an exhibition space called the 'Power House' revealed smooth new roads skirting seemingly endless, astonishing steel-framed brick structures that appeared to simply shrug at their bulldozed and low-rise surroundings, and settle back into their enduring other-worldly skins. A gatekeeper pointed the way into their curious compound, across a rippled expanse of aged bitumen inscribed by the tracery of rail tracks. Weathered signage delivered a message of dis-use. The 'Power House', located opposite the third of the mega structures, proved itself to be precisely that - a structure from which power (originally in the form of steam and air) was supplied to the workshops. Within, there was an enjoyable incongruence between an immaculate exhibition of contemporary jewellery and the gritty industrial composure of antiquated compressors and air pumps, coloured by the scent of coal, oil, dust and old timber.



The Heritage Council of WA has recognised that the Midland Railway Workshops complex contains the most important group of early twentieth century industrial buildings in the State, and the most intact Australian example of a railway workshop from that era. Three monumental workshop blocks, each standing over three storeys high, were completed in 1904 (and extended in 1912 to double their size), along with the on site Power House, Pattern Shop, Foundry, Chief Mechanical Engineer's office, and various store buildings. The Railway Institute and Technical School was built in 1912-14, completing the construction of the main brick buildings. All remain today, along with an array of tools, equipment, furniture, fittings, documents, and a wide range of machinery, much of which remains operable.

C.Y. O'Connor, the State's Engineer in Chief (and the force behind the construction of Fremantle Harbour and the

Kalgoorlie pipeline) had proposed the shifting of the workshops from their cramped Fremantle accommodation to Midland in the late 1800s, and the effect of their subsequent new capacity on the State's industrial, economic and social development was exceptional for 90 years.

*In its heyday the workshops employed more than 3200 people, including almost 600 apprentices... This community, this 'army of men' ... streamed across the railway line each morning and into the workshops. Their job was to keep the State moving - building and maintaining locomotives, carriages and other rolling stock, making the materials and fittings needed out on the lines, and making specialised fabrications for mining and shipping.*

*The workshops could make anything in metal, from solid cast propellers standing more than 5m to the minutest watch parts. If the workshops didn't have something, the workers made it on site.'*








For decades, achievement, pride, and the development of social networks enhanced the lives of Western Australians in the extensive workshops 'family'. But trade skills and the might of a large workforce were no match for rapid changes in technology and techniques, shifts in Government policy, or economic rationalisation. With its scale of operations having been wound down for some years, the gates of the workshops were finally closed in March 1994. In the City of Swan's eyes, the associated loss of jobs was the final stroke of Midland's decline after the prior closure of an abattoir and a major clothing manufacturer in the town. Subsequent rallying for governmental assistance precipitated the establishment of the Midland Redevelopment Authority (MRA) in 2000. Its CEO, Kieran Kinsella, has since led the planning and land development agency's massive undertaking of the redevelopment of 256 hectares of land in Midland - including the workshops site.

The MRA's aim is to revitalise Midland into a vibrant, sustainable and diverse regional centre with a sense of local identity that is able to stand confidently beside the more prominent identities of centres such as Fremantle or Subiaco. The fostering of opportunities in commerce, education and the arts are seen as means of ensuring the prolonged achievement of these qualities, and, not surprisingly, the unique and commanding workshops buildings and spaces are central to the development of a refreshed sense of place for Midland. The workshops site is to be developed into a village of four core components: a creative industries precinct (including studio, exhibition and performance spaces), a rail heritage centre (to celebrate the past activities of the site), an education precinct (envisaged to specialise in the arts and design), and varied residential accommodation. It is hoped that these components will foster new tourism links with the Swan Valley.

Many of the existing built forms will be restored and reused, and bolstered by a substantial number of new structures. Already built on the surrounding land are police communications and forensic centres and large format retail spaces. The first residential subdivision is under construction. Also on the planners' drawing boards for the site and its surrounds are apartment blocks, a 'lifestyle village' for over-50s, a hospital, a hotel, further police accommodation, as well as the redevelopment of the town's train station and shopping centre, and of the workshops' main open space to reinforce its current (rare) function a public piazza. The MRA expects hundreds of millions of dollars of additional investment to be made, and thousands of jobs to be injected back into Midland. "There are a lot of small businesses in Midland," said Kinsella, "and people with a lot of entrepreneurial get-up-and-go, but who really need the support that this kind of project can give the town."

Describing the conception of the workshops village, Kinsella explained, "We looked at the sorts of things that would be possible with the existing buildings - the Foundry, the old Pattern Shop, and so on. We decided it would be wonderful to bring them back to life in a creative capacity," he said. "A lot of the people who worked on this site were craftspeople in their own right, so we're very happy to keep the traditions of the artisan alive through this new operation... We also see a creative industries precinct as an opportunity for new employment opportunities. Midland has a tradition of trade and a whole range of activities that supported the rail of Western Australia, so it is historically seen as an innovator and a driving force in industry in the State. We thought, let's take the creative component of those trades, and, by bringing together this precinct, create a point of difference for Midland."



The Midland timber cluster's occupation of the Pattern Shop has already illustrated the potential of the site to support creative activity, even in its non-refurbished state. "In the main, the buildings are over a hundred years old. We're trying to give those buildings new life - another hundred years of life - so there's something more for them to create," said Kinsella. He hopes the village will eventually be abuzz from morning until night every day. "People haven't traditionally been allowed onto the site, because of the activities that happened there," he continued. "So it'll be a real change when people who've lived in the town for a long time will be able to walk this space and drive through." Undoubtedly, activities such as those of the timber cluster are generating some excitement around what the buildings could be, and how the rich, rare and memorable resource of the Midland Railway Workshops might be used in a different manner. Certainly, perceptions of time and space will remain a distinct thread of the experience of the site.

*A carriage would come in and you would take it to pieces. We used to have to scrape the varnish off and sand the pieces down - get them all smooth. Then we would number all the parts and send them down to the paint shop. Then we would go down there with our tools and everything and put it all back together again.*

*Varnished and repaired, they were like a new coach. Going out, they were beautiful. They lasted for years.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Ellis, N. & Smyth, C. 2004, Midland Railway Workshops, St George Books, Perth, pp.10, 14

<sup>2</sup> Lal Mosey, car and wagon builder 1928-64, *ibid.*, p.42

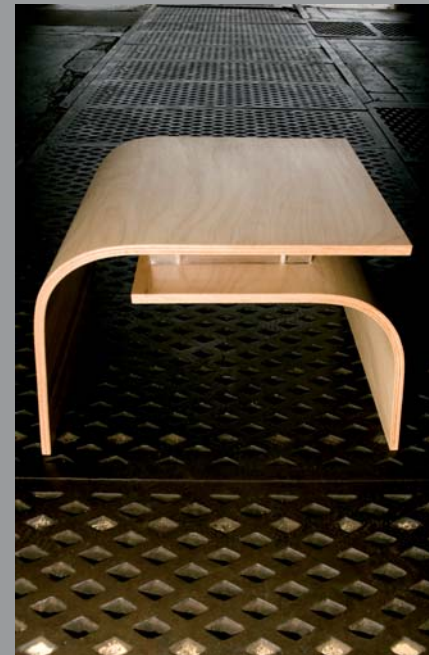




*Lightening Holes*, Scott Maloney, acrylic,  
200 cm H x 350 cm W x 40 cm D, red

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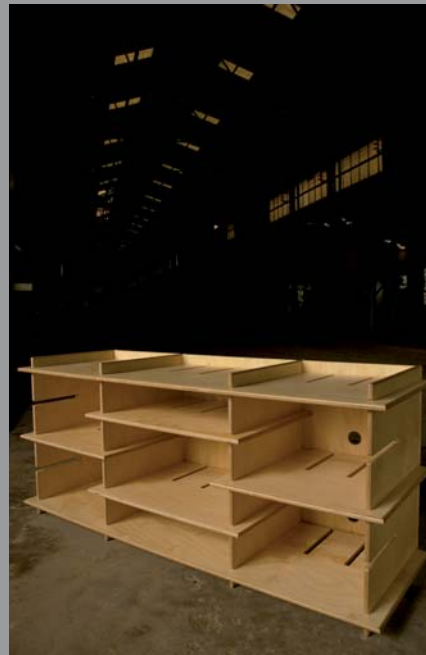
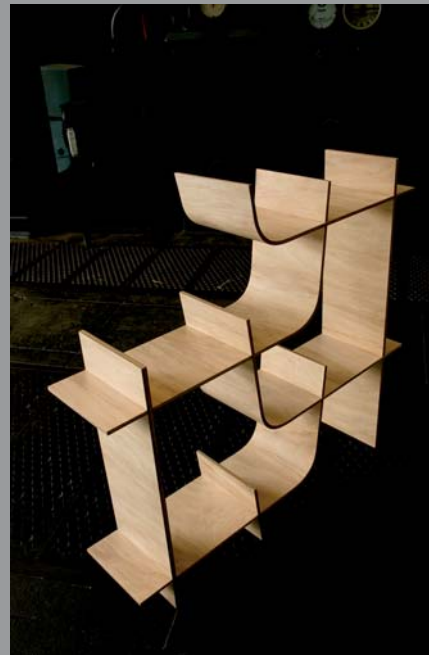


*Pod 1*, Stuart Williams, moulded acrylic and timber,  
400 mm x 400 mm x 500 mm

*Dune Pendant Lights*, Malcolm Harris, large round: shown in  
Rock Maple, 1000 mm H x 150 mm diameter, small round:  
shown in Tasmanian Blackwood, 700 mm H x 130 mm  
diameter. Fins available in round or square timber or acrylic.

*Helix*, Stuart Williams, moulded UV resistant opal acrylic,  
aluminium, LED lights, 1400 mm W, 200 mm D, 2400 mm H

*r2* occasional table, Peter Vitalich, laminated marine ply with  
timber veneer finish and acrylic, 340 mm x 500 mm x  
400 mm



*The Truss Collection*, Lignin, sheoak and stainless steel,  
1050 mm diameter, 7720 mm H

*r2 shelving*, Peter Vitalich, laminated marine ply with timber  
veneer finish and acrylic, 1505 mm x 1200 mm x 300 mm

*Morfbbox* entertainment unit, Philip Fry, waxed 19mm hoop  
pine ply, 1700 mm L x 750 mm H x 590 mm D.

*Table Lights*, Malcolm Harris, Tasmanian Blackwood, acrylic,  
florescent tube, 210 mm H x 180 mm W x 96mm D



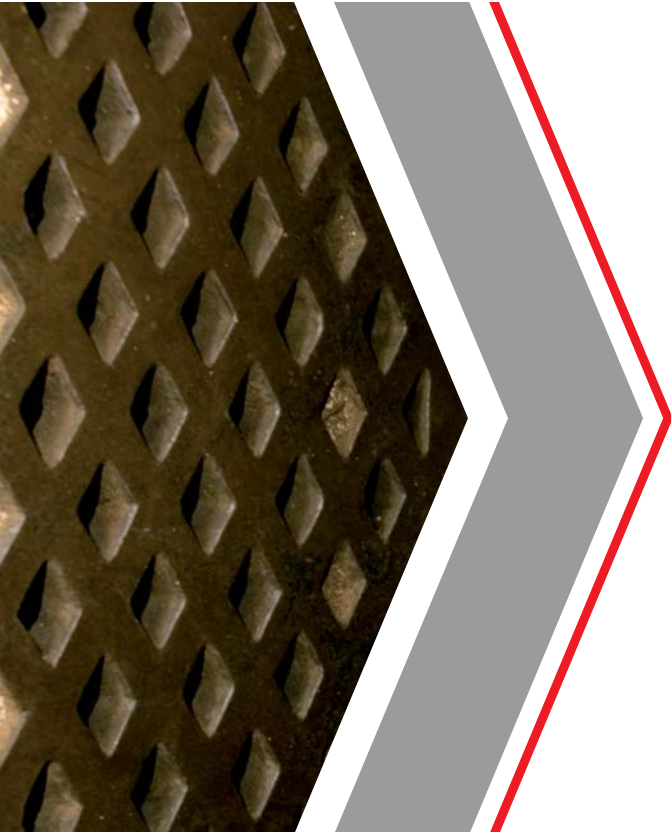
*Unite*, Tim Whiteman, paulownia and plastic laminate,  
packaged set of four: 480 mm W, 480 mm D, 380 mm H,  
various colours available.

*Standard Light*, Malcolm Harris, American Rock Maple,  
acrylic, florescent tube, 1900 mm H x 180 mm W  
x 96 mm D

*Stick Stool*, Tim Leaversuch, jarrah, 400 mm diameter x  
460 mm H

*Pod 2*, Stuart Williams, blown glass and she-oak timber,  
100 mm x 100 mm x 150 mm





FORM would like to thank facilitator and curator, Marina Lommerse, for her valued work on this project. We are also grateful to Jon Goulder for his work in mentoring the group together with Marina Lommerse.

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