

# HOUSES

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The mind of Brian Steendyk works at scales that range from the urban (a city bypass) to the hand-held (a coat hanger), always with equal doses of logic and emotive consideration. *Houses* chatted to this well-travelled Brisbane designer to uncover the rational thoughts behind some very sculptural objects.

**At what point in your architectural career did you embark on product design, and why?**

I was invited to take part in an exhibition called *Chair for the Twenty-first Century*. I had tinkered with design (outside of the architecture discipline) for years, but this was my first foray into chair design. From it, the Cero chair was produced. The enthusiasm associated with this piece (which is now part of the Powerhouse Museum's permanent collection) propelled me to explore this avenue further. Now we have pieces produced by Italian company Serralunga in Europe and Schiavello in Australia, and our own range is ever expanding.

**Do your ideas for products grow out of particular needs within your architectural work, or independently?**

Our product ranges develop from a passion for design. We are constantly seeing ways to improve the environment around us, and we express this through the creation of objects. Playing with forms that have a sculptural quality exerts an influence upon our architectural work so, in a way, they are inextricably tied together through experimental explorations.

**You work across vastly different scales. What are the similarities and differences in your approach to, say, urban design and product design?**

Design is a wonderful word and, for us, it describes a way of seeing – regardless of scale. We look at opportunities and find pertinent solutions to solve many and varied problems. Scale is just one element of this.

**Architecture and interiors are often designed for specific clients with specific tastes, but products are destined for a multitude of users. How does your design approach vary in this regard?**

When we design architecture or interiors, we design with sustainability as a paramount concern. In a way, this means designing for many, as our designs are adaptable to different users and needs. The design process encompasses a wide range of considerations. There are a lot of parallels with product design, but with the latter, we do feel the burden of producing a design that is more “universal” in function and appeal. And of course, architecture and interiors are site specific.

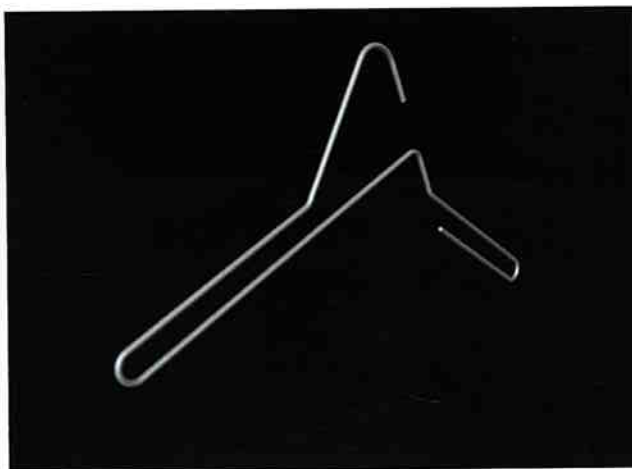
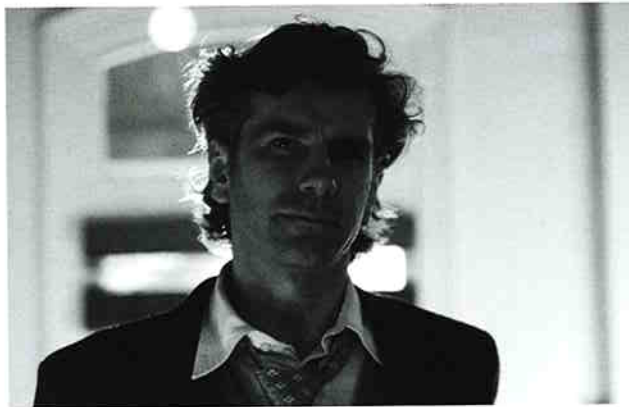
**What makes a product sustainable?**

Sustainability starts from designing through the dual considerations of functional and aesthetic life spans. As an example of this, the Cero chair is visually timeless which prolongs consumer desirability, while, in functional terms, there are no legs to be broken or snapped off. So the form is sustainable in its very essence. Also, we use recyclable material.

**Style can be a fickle entity. What gives a product aesthetic longevity?**

I think that to prolong aesthetic appeal it is important to imbue a sense of sculptural form into a piece. Great pieces such as the Butterfly chair or the Panton chair have a simplicity and sculptural element that has given them a timelessness. This is a crucial element in our work.





PREVIOUS PAGE, TOP: Cero chair. BOTTOM: Scoop glassware collection. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Versace Sunray sun lounge; portrait of Brian Steendyk; Wave hanger; Spoon children's furniture; Dove stool.

**How do you think Australia's manufacturing industry compares with those overseas?**

Developing ideas in Australia is great, however the manufacturing industry – apart from companies such as Schiavello – does not have the entrepreneurial spirit that pervades in Europe with companies such as Serralunga. As such, we as designers become the entrepreneurs, developing, funding and selling pieces ourselves to make the process sustainable in our relatively small marketplace. If Australians purchased more homegrown products then I think local manufacturers would start to take notice of our considerable homegrown talent.

**How do you collaborate with the manufacturers who turn your designs into physical objects?**

Our collaborations are very important for us. Every member of the manufacturer's team has vital input into seeing a piece realized – in bringing it from concept to market – so we endeavour to consider and learn from all team members. However, we are the guardians of the initial design idea so, while we aim to meet every manufacturing requirement, we also need to protect the design integrity of the piece.

**How has your overseas experience influenced your approach to design?**

I think it gives me a more rounded and international perspective. The formula of designing and prototyping in Australia and taking frequent trips abroad is working well. It affords me the best of both worlds, and allows me to escape the European winters. It also frees my

mind to stroll down the larrikin Australian path unencumbered by staunch European tradition.

**Have any specific designers been inspirational to you and your work.**

With such a wealth of talent in the world we are constantly dumbfounded and immensely inspired by other designers' work. There are those who deserve studying, such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto, Arne Jacobson, Le Corbusier and Harry Seidler. There are those who are breaking new ground, such as Ross Lovegrove and Herzog and de Meuron. And there are those who create inspirational spaces such as Zaha Hadid, Peter Zumthor and Rick Joy. But, for us, design has no formal boundaries, so our inspiration is eclectic.

**How do you see your work changing in the future?**

We are interested in the development and appropriate use of existing and new materials. The articulation of materials or tectonics in construction and product design is also an interest. We enjoy grafting materials to suit appropriate applications, and exploiting inherent qualities or characteristics. We are exploring, developing and employing this in our work. Environmental issues are always in mind. Our future work will continue to pursue the idea of creating and developing sculpturally beautiful, functional forms – both products and architecture. H



Photography by Russell Shakespeare (Cero) and Paul Barbera (portrait of Brian). 3D rendering by Richard Whimpany (Scoop and Spoon) and Shaun Crossman (Versace Sunray and Wave).