

VOCAL

AUSTRALIA

LIVING

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inspiration!

'SPLASH'
WALLPAPER
DESIGNED BY
FLORENCE
BROADHURST
CIRCA 1967

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LEFT: Oliver Smith's 'Arc Cheese Knife' and 'Dorsal Serving Blade' for Workshopped. BELOW LEFT: Charles Wilson's 'Candelabra' for Menu.

LEFT: Korban/Flaubert's 'Mighty' chair in light blue. BELOW: Designers Stefanie Flaubert and Janos Korban.



local heroes

Brian Parkes of Sydney's Object Gallery reflects on Australian design

THE AUSTRALIAN DESIGN scene has come a long way since *Vogue Living* first went on sale 40 years ago. While confidence and optimism are at their greatest levels, the streets are not quite paved with gold for Australian designers, as the furniture and object design fields do not yet enjoy the high profiles fashion and architecture do.

On the bright side, this kind of challenge encourages Australian designers to become innovative and entrepreneurial, and good old-fashioned resourcefulness is one reason designers are being taken under the wings of influential overseas manufacturers such as Alessi, Cappellini, Edra, Kundalini and Moooi. Proven international success boosts interest from the local market, and there are currently more venues in existence than ever before to view and buy Australian design.

The continuing generosity of masters such as Marc Newson, Susan Cohn, Robert Foster (of Fink and Co) and Kjell Grant in nurturing emerging Australian designers is an indicator of the support that is out there, as the celebrated figures become mentors to a new generation. The influence of Newson's stellar career cannot be underestimated. He is a worthy ambassador for Australia and many younger designers follow his example by moving overseas to pursue opportunities. Expatriates Steven Blaess in Dubai, Ben McCarthy in Hong Kong and Brodie Neill in London are charming the design world with dynamic ideas.

Increasingly, too, outstanding designers are opting to establish reputations on home ground; marking their territory by forging relationships with leading Australian manufacturers. Helen Kontouris has her furniture produced locally thanks to a collaboration with Schiavello, as does Charles Wilson with Woodmark and Alexander Lotersztain with Planex.

In recent years, design-related competitions, events and exhibitions have evolved, along with a little profile-raising help courtesy of government initiatives such as the State of Design festival, featuring the Premier's Design Awards, in Victoria and Design Island in Tasmania. Queensland is also buzzing with industry attention. The state government has announced a \$1 million pledge to test the feasibility of an international sustainable design centre while also launching Design Five, promoting five designers from the sunshine state (including Lotersztain, Brian Steendyk and Marc Harrison, who are among the best in the country).



ABOVE: Helen Kontouris. ABOVE RIGHT: Kontouris's 'La La' stool for Schiavello. BELOW: 'Squash' storage vessels by Robert Foster for Fink and Co.



ABOVE RIGHT: design team Michael Alvisse (left) and Marc Schamburg. RIGHT: Schamburg + Alvisse's 'Smooth Tub' chair.



FAR LEFT: Rina Bernabei (left) and Kelly Freeman. **LEFT:** Bernabeifreeman's 'Criscross' light for Living Edge. **RIGHT:** Brodie Neill and, **BELOW RIGHT,** the London-based designer's 'E-Turn' sculptural benches for Kundalini.



LEFT: Caroline Casey and, **FAR LEFT,** her 'Woven Wall' storage unit for Anibou.



ABOVE: Brian Steendyk and, **LEFT,** his 'Cero' chair in red for Steendyk. **BELOW:** Designer Steven Blaess's stainless steel 'Keyring' for Alessi. Details, last pages.



and the emergence of home-grown talent in the 21st century.

Sydney Design is one of the most established in a rapidly growing number of design festivals around the world. It joins the annual Saturday in Design event run by Indesign Group, which saw nearly 7000 registered participants riding in free buses between the 91 participating showrooms around Sydney this year.

Awards are a growing trend of recognition, with a particular emphasis on furniture and objects – many looking to emerging talent. New Design is Object Gallery's annual exhibition and awards ceremony for the top graduates from Australian universities, while Launch Pad and Workshopped are both competitions for designers with a little more experience. Major shows such as Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living, developed by Object Gallery and the Melbourne Museum, or Smart works: Design and the Handmade, developed by the Powerhouse Museum, have proved popular with audiences.

The prestige pick of the industry awards is the Bombay Sapphire Design Discovery Award, where the winner secures \$30,000 and an Italian sojourn to show at Milan Design Week.

Magazines, websites and free public talks on design continue to gain momentum, such as the D-Factory series at the Powerhouse Museum and the Pecha Kucha evenings travelling the country – fun events at which designers present and speak about their work, with a quick limit of 20 images shown for 20 seconds each.

In the retail realm, most showrooms now carry work by local designers alongside high-quality international brands. Anibou shows Caroline Casey beside Alvar Aalto, while Living Edge presents work by Bernabeifreeman and Charles Wilson next to the classics of Charles and Ray Eames – matching them on both quality and inventiveness.

Perhaps the greatest indication of the strength of Australian design is the rise of independent companies. Entrepreneurs with can-do attitudes are tackling the design, production, sales and marketing of their own lines. Dinosaur Designs, Cloth, ISM Objects, Schamburg + Alvisse and Korban/Flaubert do this particularly well. High-profile commercial interiors are now as likely to have furniture by Schamburg + Alvisse as they are to have pieces by European masters Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Arne Jacobsen. This new breed of designers is meeting the challenges of our geography head-on and paving their own path to the future. Most importantly, an enthusiastic local market is waving them through. **BRIAN PARKES**

DESIGNERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

- | Simon Ancher
- | Jonathan Baskett
- | Anthony Dann
- | Penny Forlano
- | Adam Goodrum
- | Trent Jansen
- | Simone LeAmon
- | Stefan Lie
- | Marc Pascal
- | Elliot Rich
- | Oliver Smith
- | Frag Woodall



BELOW LEFT: Alexander Lotersztain and, **BELOW,** his 'Freefold' room divider for Planex.

