



## DESIGNING WAYS

From everyday objects to top-end collector pieces, Australians are approaching design with a fresh eye that is producing unique and quirky pieces. Meet five designers who displayed their wares and attracted attention at the aptly named Matilda exhibition at the recent London Design Festival's showcase of Australian works.

WRITER  
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### KATE STOKES

*her name in lights*

Kate Stokes' curvaceous pendant light had barely been created and it was winning acclaim. The beauty of her Victorian Ash timber and spun aluminum Coco Pendant was enthused about by international design blogs and local and international design magazines, including *Vogue Living* and *Monocle*.

The pendant was named *Home Beautiful* Product of the Year in the lighting category.

It was a case of first time lucky for the 29-year-Melbourne designer.

"You never know what's going to happen when you go out there," says Stokes, "but I've found the Australian design industry to be encouraging and supportive."

Stokes' creation was one of the most popular designs at the London Design Festival's Matilda exhibition. It was also exhibited at Melbourne's 2010 Fringe Furniture Festival, where it picked up awards including best lighting design, best market-ready design and best design for commercial application.

Inspired by a Japanese spinning top, the handmade light is now stocked by retailers, and commands \$1,500. More than 300 lights have sold since their release a year ago.

Stokes handcrafts each light, producing about 20 each month.



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Manufacturing her creations can eat into her design time. Consequently, she is hoping that, within five years, she can grow the collection and license the products to larger international companies.

For now, production is about to ramp up via Matilda's founder Jenni Carbins, who will make the pendants in the UK to sell across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Stokes opened her design studio, Coco Flip, in Melbourne's Collingwood a year ago, with the help of an Australia Council for the Arts ArtStart grant, which provided designers with \$10,000 to put towards setting up a practice. She also received the Australia Council's New Work Grant, to fund new designs.

A recent six-week internship in New York at design studio Rich Brilliant Willing gave Stokes a shot of confidence.

"The more I expose myself to people like that who are doing fabulous things, the more I realise that the design community internationally isn't as big and as scary as it may seem," says Stokes. "It's really important to travel and see what's happening in other parts of the world."

Stokes already has her eyes wide open to the rest of the world. At 17, she moved to Italy to work as a nanny. She was meant to be away for a year, but shifted to Ireland instead and travelled extensively throughout Europe.

On her return to Australia, Stokes enrolled in an architecture degree, but

after a year relocated to Canada. Back home again in Perth, she switched to industrial design and found her groove.

"I was originally drawn to architecture because I have a real love of art and the creative path is something I wanted to pursue," she says. "I really loved physics and mathematics in school and wanted to find a way to combine the rational side of the brain with the creative. One thing led to another and that's the path I have followed."

Stokes has released her second product, Mr Cooper, a copper pendant light that was inspired by the old tin can telephones she used to play with as a kid.

"It's quite a masculine light, the lines are quite hard and I envisioned it would be in a gentlemanly bar with whiskey and cigars," she says.

Although she finds a lot of freedom in lighting design, there are plenty of forms Stokes would still like to explore. Her philosophy is based on the Swedish word 'lagom', which roughly translates as 'not too much, and not too little'.

"A few people have referred to me as a lighting designer and I don't think of myself as only lighting," says Stokes. "I'm looking into designing an Ottoman range, I'd like to work with rug manufacturers and bring in the graphic design element and move onto lounges, coffee tables and other designs."

Before she knows it, Stokes will have a full house. ➤

01 The Coco Pendant.

02 Kate Stokes.

03 Mr Cooper, a copper pendant light.



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## FUKUTOSHI UENO

*playing dress-ups with Akira Isogawa*

When Fukutoshi Ueno arrived in Brisbane from Japan in 1993, his aim was to study English. He had dreams but they didn't include creating unconventional wooden furniture that would win a place among the National Gallery of Australia's permanent collection.

Once his English lessons were out of the way, Ueno followed his passion for creating beautiful things and studied interior design at the Queensland College of Art and the Queensland University of Technology.

Ueno's breakthrough moment as one of Australia's top designers came through a collaboration with another Australian of Japanese background – acclaimed fashion designer Akira Isogawa. Together they produced the Dress-Code Collection, which features Ueno's wooden furniture, Code, clad in Isogawa's kimono-inspired designs.

Ueno's Code can be used as a stool, table or shelf. The collection debuted in Tokyo in 2008 and has since been exhibited in Australia and the UK.

Developed with grant funding from Arts Queensland, the premier collection was released as a limited edition of 50, retailing for \$4,600 apiece. The range has been extended to non-limited pieces, an acrylic version and a flat-pack model.

Upon meeting 10 years ago, Ueno and Isogawa were able to bond over their common cultural background as Japanese artists based in Australia.

"Akira is passionate about virtually everything and is constantly looking for

- 04 The Dress-Code Collection.
- 05 Fukutoshi Ueno.

new challenges, as am I," says Ueno.

"He is one of the most stimulating creative people I have ever worked with."

The duo wanted to explore collections that reflected "not only our individual artistic practices but also our shared traditional culture in modern ways", says Ueno, whose own work combines many dualities including the old Japan of his origins and the vibrancy of Australia.

"I try to create organic forms derived from nature with a contemporary feel, embedded in a sense of timelessness," Ueno says. "Many of these qualities are bound up in my native culture. Coming from a Japanese background, I feel myself moving between the austere beauty of ancient Japanese tradition for example, the ceremonies associated with Shinto and Buddhist temples as well as the dazzling sight and sounds of the contemporary world for example, the Shibuya district of Tokyo."

Code was inspired by the symbols given to the mistresses of the 11th century Japanese nobleman Hikaru Genji.



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A career highlight came for Ueno when the National Gallery of Australia added Dress-Code to its permanent collection, something he considers a great honour. "Sometimes I have to pinch myself to ask if it is all real," he says.

The 2011 London Design Festival's Matilda exhibition was Ueno's third London show; for the past two years he has presented his art at the contemporary design show, 100% Design London.

Ueno's final show of 2011 will be at home in Queensland. After that, he'll retreat to his studio, planning new creations and designing for private clients.

He will also journey back to the seaside town of his birth – Fukuoka – where he will seek out local craftspeople whose skills he wants to promote internationally as a way to help preserve their fine quality handicrafts.

Ueno's next collaboration will be with Brisbane fashion label Easton Pearson. He remains tight-lipped on the details, but it will be available in early 2012 and he promises it will be fun.



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## HENRY WILSON

*a master recycler*

It was a case of fourth time lucky for Sydney designer Henry Wilson, who won the coveted 2011 Bombay Sapphire Design Discovery Award after four years of being in the final four.

The 28-year-old received Australia's richest design award for the 'A-Joint', a multi-use joinery system that can morph from a table to a bench, market stall or shop fit-out.

"It is comforting to think I won with a piece I am truly proud of," says Wilson.

The design was used as bench seats in the pop-up café at the 2011 London Design Festival's Matilda exhibition. The beauty of the creation is that it's easy to assemble from pre-cut timber and is recyclable.

"It's my comment on the value of democratic design, in that it's opening up design to being a platform or a system that we can all use," says Wilson.

"It's fairly cheap to buy. It's made in Australia, at this stage, and has a really diverse use ... It's very easy to build, it doesn't use any nails so you can take the wood out and reuse it in some other way, and you can make several sets of legs and put different ones in."

Wilson recently returned to Australia following two years of study at the prestigious Design Academy Eindhoven in the Netherlands. He went to the design school after winning a Huygens Scholarship from the Dutch government.

At first, he had wanted to create "fancy furniture" but came away believing designers can play an important role in society via sustainable design.

"The idea is that by applying new thought, time and material to an object firmly perceived to be a classic, we are forced to consider it in a new way," says Wilson. "Maybe we don't need to make more and more things for the design world, but we can rethink some of the things that already exist."

Wilson's postgraduate project, Things Revisited, gave six design classics a twist. An enamel coffee pot was adapted to make an electric kettle, a Kikkoman soy sauce lid was tailored to other products, and a stand was added to the classic Le Creuset pot so it could be served directly on the table.

His signature piece was his LED Anglepoise lamp. He remade the lamp by hand, outsourcing the shade and then fitting it with a low-energy LED bulb to replace the original incandescent bulb.

In a similar vein was Wilson's Tolix chair cover, which he fitted over an 'A' chair originally made for factories in France at the turn of the last century. Wilson's vegetable-tan leather covers wear in over time and he is in discussions to have them stocked in a major UK and US store. They are already on sale at the pop-up gallery and workshop Trent & Henry, which Wilson opened in Sydney's The Rocks with fellow Australian designer Trent Jansen.

It's opportunities like this that drew Wilson back to Australia, along with the realisation that there's more chance of making an impact on the design world from Australia.

"There are not that many people in Australia doing what I do," he says. "That gives you a great chance to leap to the international scale because you've kind of got the voice of a country behind you." ➤



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- 06 Portrait of Henry Wilson. Photo credit: Sam McAdam/NEWSLIFEMEDIA.
- 07 The A-Joint.

**DANIEL EMMA***from little things big things grow*

Even in everyday objects, there can be beauty. And uncovering it is winning young husband-and-wife team Daniel To and Emma Aiston plenty of attention.

The young couple's label Daniel Emma is best known for taking ordinary desktop objects, such as stationery containers and paperweights, and reinventing them into hip geometric forms.

The duo have emerged as two of Australia's most awarded young designers, with exhibitions in London, Milan, Tokyo, Melbourne and Sydney. Their handmade designs, which are made in Australia, sell for between \$A65 and \$A240.

Daniel Emma's 'Basics Collection', which includes a paperweight, pendant light, paperclip holder and mirror, won Australia's richest design award – the 2010 Bombay Sapphire Design Discovery Award. The prize included \$A30,000 in cash and a trip to Italy to attend the Milan Furniture Fair.

Guest judge Neale Whitaker, editor-in-chief of design and fashionable living magazine *belle*, describes Daniel Emma as "the complete package".

"They display a proactive independence of spirit, brand awareness, great interaction with their end-user and a reliance on local production," Whitaker says. "One of the judges commented on the simple 'heart and emotion' of Daniel Emma's well-edited range, which is both international and uniquely Australian in its appeal."

The young couple – To is 27 and Aiston is 26 – met at the University of South Australia. He had dreams of becoming an artist and she was heading towards architecture, but they both ended up studying industrial design.

The pair moved to London in 2007 after Aiston won a SOYA Qantas Spirit of Youth Award. Part of her prize was an internship with Marc Newson, Australia's most renowned industrial designer, who now works in the British capital.

Aiston went on to work for another high-profile design studio, Thorsten van Elten, while To headed to studio Committee. Their UK experience gave the Adelaide couple the confidence to start their own studio. It also helped clarify their direction – they realised they



- 08 Daniel To and Emma Aiston. Photo credit: Sharyn Cairns/NEWSLIFEMEDIA.
- 09 Brass paperweights.
- 10 Stationery containers.
- 11 Pen holder.

**"IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT AS AUSTRALIAN DESIGNERS WE ALL WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS CREATING INTEREST IN AUSTRALIAN DESIGN INTERNATIONALLY."**

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wanted to design products in Australia, particularly in South Australia, making things in small batches using local manufacturers.

To and Aiston caught the attention of *Wallpaper\** magazine and their first exhibition at 100% Design London earned them a spot in the magazine's 2009 Graduate Directory.

"That was a nice little encouragement," says Aiston. "We felt confident ... that people liked our aesthetic and liked what we were doing."

Returning to Adelaide for their wedding in 2009, they decided to stay. After two years away, they missed their families. Another drawback was the mortgage on their house on the outskirts of the city; it was cheaper than renting

a London bedsit and the home was big enough to create a studio.

"We realised that if we could set up shop anywhere in the world, it would be lovely if it was Adelaide," says To. "We travel twice a year to various exhibitions and shows overseas, we are definitely connected to the rest of the design world, but we like to come home and relax."

In 2010, Aiston and To won the 100% Design London's Blueprint Most Promising Talent award for their 'Basics' collection. This year the duo also exhibited at the London Design Festival's Matilda exhibition.

"It's really important that as Australian designers we all work together towards creating interest in Australian design internationally," says To.

While they both love stationery, there were also practical reasons to specialise in its design. "Because we were travelling and showing the products overseas we couldn't design big bulky furniture pieces," says To.

Daniel Emma are set to have a busy year in 2012. They will exhibit at the Direktorenhaus (the Director's House), the central venue for Berlin's design and art scene. They also have a show at Sydney's Object Gallery, which was part of their prize for winning the 2011 Annual Manual: A Guide to Australian Design Now competition.

One thing's for sure – any new small design creations by Daniel To and Emma Aiston are sure to garner a big response. ◀