

After a prolonged judging session, Charles Wilson won this year's Bombay Sapphire Design Discovery Award with his *Spool* stool, 2006. In the words of one judge, he is a designer whose time has come.

While no-one can predict the altitude or end-point of Charles Wilson's trajectory, even a casual observer can see this designer is on track to achieve great things. Last year he was short-listed for the Bombay Sapphire Design Discovery Award for his *Silver Candelabra*, 2005. He didn't win, but has since partnered with a Danish manufacturer, and the piece is due in Australian stores before Christmas. This year, as the winner of the prestigious prize, the sky is surely Wilson's limit.

According to judge Heidi Dokulil, his *Spool* stool (pictured) is 'a great idea and really well resolved'. 'Charles really is ready to win this award,' Dokulil adds. 'Bombay Sapphire is the sort of award where it is important that the winner is at a point in his or her career to capitalise on it.' Wilson plans to use the \$20,000 prize money to progress the manufacture and distribution of the winning stool, as well as other recent designs.



Charles Wilson, *Spool* stool, 3D rendering, 2006



Charles Wilson



Charles Wilson, *CP1* sofa, 2001, cold-moulded foam over plywood, stainless-steel wire, upholstery. Photo: Marcus Fillinger



He already has an extensive range of furniture in production locally with Woodmark, and is collaborating with Denmark's Menu (which picked up the *Silver Candelabra*) on several projects, as well as Germany's WMF (which plans to manufacture Wilson's cutlery range).

One of the key factors in Wilson's favour this year, Dokulil says, was his status as a mature designer with considerable talent across the whole design spectrum, but she concedes that still didn't make the selection process easy.

'It was hard to decide, because there were a lot of designs, which is very exciting, and quite a lot of them were newcomers, which was great as well,' she says. 'Charles' *Spool* stool stood out because it's a lovely thing – a beautiful form, and a really good idea – and something I haven't seen before. In addition, Charles has a really strong body of work, and a strong philosophy that carries through all of his work.'

Wilson's inspiration for his winning piece came from fitballs™, which have moved out of the gym and into the office, as alternatives to upright chairs. He didn't have one himself, but many of his friends have used them. Wilson remembers his first reaction upon seeing one in use: 'It was just too big ... there are other issues that are impracticable as well,' he adds. 'For instance, it's useful to have a height-adjustable mechanism for different tasks, different desk tops and different people.' In April this year, the designer started experimenting with his concept in drawings and renderings, before sourcing a gas-lift mechanism – a challenge in itself to find one without a swivel – and building his first prototype.

'The seat is a turned piece of plywood, as is the bottom, and the concave section in the middle is created in the pattern-making of the cloth,' he explains. 'That's what stretches to give it the form. Of course, in its current form it is very different to how it would be in production. It would be constructed with injection mouldings or die-castings for efficient assembly, and the method of applying the upholstery would change.'

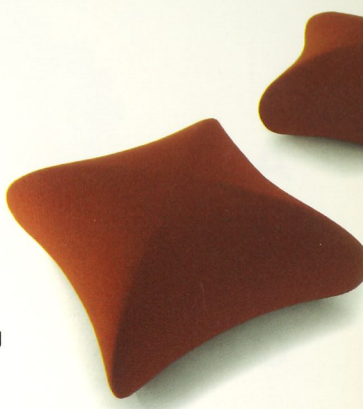
One of the attributes that will remain is the *Spool*'s 'cat resistance'. 'A friend of mine brought an exercise ball home one night and the next morning it was just a bladder on the floor,' Wilson laughs. 'Apparently that's not uncommon.'

He has already begun discussions with a Belgian manufacturer regarding the *Spool*, offering the potential to expand his list of overseas partners even further. While he admits to a shortage of opportunities in Australia for some types of manufacturing, Wilson has no plans to move offshore. 'I'd like to continue working in Australia,' he says. 'I've done very well with Woodmark, and we are looking at opportunities to manufacture and distribute that furniture overseas at the moment.'

Inspired by the praise of his latest accolade, Wilson seems fully poised to launch his career into the stratosphere. ■■■■

www.bombaysapphire.com/designdiscoveryaward

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Charles Wilson, *Boulder Ottoman*, 2004, cold-moulded foam over plywood, upholstery. Photo: Anson Smart



Charles Wilson, *Spool* stool, 3D rendering, 2006

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THE BOMBAY SAPPHIRE DESIGN DISCOVERY AWARD EXHIBITION WAS SHOWN IN SYDNEY AT OBJECT GALLERY (2 SEPTEMBER – 5 NOVEMBER 2006) AND WILL TOUR TO FORM GALLERY, PERTH (23 MARCH – 26 MAY 2007) AND MELBOURNE MUSEUM (JULY – NOVEMBER 2007).