

jon goulder

WORDS BY ELISHA BUTTLER

Two small things about Jon Goulder: He refuses to make objects simply to make objects. He left the comfort and prestige of the Sydney design scene to relocate to the cultural wilds of Western Australia.

This page: Jon Goulder and Malcolm Harris, *Wesfarmers Reception Commission* (detail), 2008, hand-carved Australian oak. Photo: Adrian Lambert

Opposite: Jon Goulder and Malcolm Harris, *Wesfarmers Reception Commission*, 2008, hand-carved Australian oak. Photo: Adrian Lambert



Those are two small reasons why Jon Goulder is not your ordinary Australian furniture designer. This graduate of the Canberra School of Art via a trades apprenticeship in upholstery and furniture-making takes a more altruistic perspective on making and the realm of high-end craft and design. He may have achieved a major national and international profile due to his renowned, original pieces finding homes in prestigious showrooms throughout Europe and the United States. He may have work acquired by the likes of Sydney's Powerhouse Museum and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and have a houseful of awards, including winner of the inaugural Bombay Sapphire Design Discovery Award. Yet Jon Goulder remains devoted to the process and craft of making unique, innovative and beautiful furniture.

'I am not bound by the constraints of industrial process,' Goulder says. While his distinctly recognisable works such as the *Leda Seat*, 2003, *Stak Stools*, 2000, and *Calypso Lounge*, 2008 are (re)produced and distributed through Living Edge, they retain an uncompromising quality and the finely-tuned, refined hand of this astute maker is always evident. 'I'm proud of my making ability; when making, I always aim for something which inspires love of ownership.

'For me, it is not about making something new so much as personal growth of my craft. My work demonstrates the sum of my knowledge in design and making over the years, as well as in a particular point in time.'

It is this balance of zeitgeist-territory design aesthetics and a genuine commitment to the handmade that sets Goulder apart in the Australian marketplace, and it is a balance that has been pivotal in shaping his international pedigree. Goulder is skilled in the traditional sense of the word – and it is skill and knowledge honed through a varied and unpretentious history

combining fine art, design and time-honoured trades.

Goulder credits the late George Ingham, his teacher and mentor while studying at the Canberra School of Art, as leaving him with this legacy of exploratory fastidiousness. And while relishing the international acclaim afforded through his current 'icon' pieces, Goulder predicts his future lies in commissions, which allow him to create dynamic, one-off pieces and to work directly with the commissioner and other practitioners.

Goulder describes the recent Wesfarmers commission as his most exciting project to date. In 2008 Wesfarmers and architectural consultants Woods Bagot engaged cultural organisation FORM to select the designers who would create two furniture pieces for Wesfarmers' refurbished reception in Perth's CBD. Goulder was selected to work with fellow maker Malcolm Harris in what became a watershed project. The Australian-oak reception furniture, a free-form carve of extraordinary scale, became the first work created specifically for the prominent Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art.



Above: Inside Jon Goulder's Perth workshop at Midland Atelier.

Above right: Jon Goulder, *Calypso Lounge*, 2008, fibre glass, wool felt and stainless steel. Photo: Bill Shaylor

Right: Jon Goulder, *Leda Seat*, 2003, CNC cut birch plantation plywood, aluminium frame. Photo: Justin Malowski



Both Goulder and Harris initially questioned the feasibility of their design concepts, but were lured by the chance to do something not done before. 'It was a huge challenge,' Goulder admits.

For Goulder, the professional development and opportunities garnered through his ongoing association with FORM have both enabled his creative freedom and opened doors.

'Having worked with FORM for over four years, I am very proud to be part of it,' he says. 'Everyone in the team is accomplished in their own right. The (Executive) Director Lynda Dorrington has amazing vision and inspires us all to go beyond what we originally thought possible. I look at what is going on across FORM's program areas and am continually blown away. If you work there you need to have a great deal of passion.'

But these are the people Lynda attracts – together we accomplish some amazing projects across the Canning Stock Route, regional Western Australia and the city.'

Goulder is in the process of achieving another vision: he is currently developing a solo exhibition of new work, to be shown alongside select existing favourites. Goulder says this exhibition, developed, curated and funded by FORM, is 'a very rare opportunity. To create ten brand new pieces of furniture in one hit and be supported through the process is incredible.'

With a launch at Perth's FORM Gallery at the beginning of 2010, the exhibition intends to tour to New York City, with interest also piqued from commercial spaces in Europe and Sydney.

The exhibition, like the Wesfarmers commission, is being created at Midland Atelier, where Goulder is a permanent artist in residence. Fully operational by 2010, the Atelier is Western Australia's first creative industries centre. Located on the eastern outskirts of Perth, it is the brainchild of FORM, which has partnered with the Midland Redevelopment Authority to develop, program and

manage the precinct. The Atelier will house design studios for multimedia, glass, wood and furniture, jewellery, and large-scale metal and architectural/public work, and incorporate a rigorous program aimed at high-end professional development, learning, collaboration and cultural exchange.

In Goulder's words, Midland Atelier will 'become one of Australia's beacons of creative endeavour ... already it is attracting some of the best creatives from around the world. I feel that together we can build an energy that is both creative and industrious, and in time the Atelier will help to contribute to the growth of national and international art, craft and design.'

The phrase 'great expectations' comes to mind, but one suspects Goulder and the troupe are more than capable. ○

Elisha Buttler is a writer, curator and cultural strategist.

DESIGN NOW! 2009

These 18 university graduates from across the country are a striking indication of the inventiveness and imagination of Australian design at this moment in time.

These are the faces and the works of finalists in *Design Now! 2009*, Object's highly-anticipated annual national graduate exhibition.

This year the six *Design Now! 2009* categories cover design for studio production, the home, the built environment, industry, the body and communication.

With innovative designs from animation and fashion to jewellery and furniture, the exhibition, which runs from 18 April to 21 June, showcases the best and freshest.

Object Magazine's Managing Editor, Joan-Maree Hargreaves, questions Australia's design future in this very special edition of *Emerging*.

Design for Studio Production

Hannah Wight
University of South Australia, Adelaide



What has inspired your design?

The inspiration for my work was strongly connected to my research into the incessant need for technical perfection within traditional embroidery and my own need to rebel against what is expected. The images that I have stitched are fragments of pictures of myself and portray a feeling of being trapped behind or within something, relating to my sense of containment within the conventions of a traditional embroidery practice and the necessity of perfection. Each design has a facade of perfection with a reverse side showing a chaotic mess of elongated and wasteful thread tails, depicting both a conformity with and an escape from the predetermined shapes of tradition.

Amanda McKenzie
Monash University, Melbourne



Why did you choose to study in your field?

Glass is a very unique medium – it is fragile and delicate yet can obtain volume and depth. It has a vulnerability about its nature. The beauty of its characteristics allows me to sculpt it in all forms, shapes and sizes, capturing hallowed objects as solid.

What has inspired your design?

Traditional baroque still-life oil paintings (especially the work of Caravaggio) and the different interpretations of its symbology. Symbology and meaning in the still life has changed over the centuries, and have been phased out in contemporary art. In my work, I am focusing on introducing a new model of the still life in a modern and relevant style that can be interpreted in a society of materialistic values.