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IN FOCUS

THIS ISSUE

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BENEATH THESE BIG IDEAS, THERE ARE THE SMALL DETAILS, THE CLEVER THINKING, THE NUANCED GESTURES THAT RESOLVE THE CREATIVE CONCEPT.

Cover House: Richard Cole Architecture / Photography: Brett Boardman

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FROM THE EDITOR

Amid all these sweeping vistas and monumental structures, it's easy to get caught up in the grand statement, the big architectural idea that drives the project. But beneath these emphatic manoeuvres there are the small details, the clever thinking, the nuanced gestures that resolve the creative concept. There's delight to be had in the small moments that the clever architect uses to make a house practical, livable and beautiful. Matt Elkan (page 102) provides a fine example – a triptych of hinged timber screens that enclose the guest bedroom when required or swing open to reveal glimpses of Pittwater beyond. Elsewhere, Sam Crawford Architects (page 44) uses an angular window of translucent polycarbonate to echo the geometry of the project's arcing roof – at night it glows, recasting the addition as a UFO hangar. Middap Ditchfield (page 36) employs a striking wall of concrete that slides through the house. The wall itself is impressively robust – but its detailing is sublime, varying from rough-hewn to smooth as it progresses from room to room. Perhaps the true value of designing the details is most clearly articulated by this issue's three alteration and addition projects (page 22). Here, FMD Architects, Form Architecture Furniture and Christopher Polly reveal a love of the little things – the intriguing angles of a modulated white wall, careful material selections that sympathize with the existing dwelling, or an artfully assembled array of windows that energize a garden pavilion.

Peter Davies



PETER McLISKY

Stylized bunnies, running men and cartoonishly gothic cityscapes populate the oeuvre of sculptor and furniture designer Peter McLisky. Inspired by travelling exhibitions that visited Auckland during his youth, Peter studied graphic design before moving from flat page to three-dimensional object. Bold colours, intriguing scales and a pop-art sensibility infuse his sculptures and furniture.

What elements or themes characterize your creations?

Most of my work is derived from botanical or animalia themes. This comes from an interest in gardening and natural forms. A lot of the new pieces draw on my previous occupation as a graphic designer. I tend to simplify shapes and to abstract them. Inherent within a graphic designer's training is the – sometimes annoying – habit of balancing the form, and it has become second nature to me. I was taught to look at every piece in a negative as well as positive manner – that is, to consider that the material removed is as important as the material left behind.

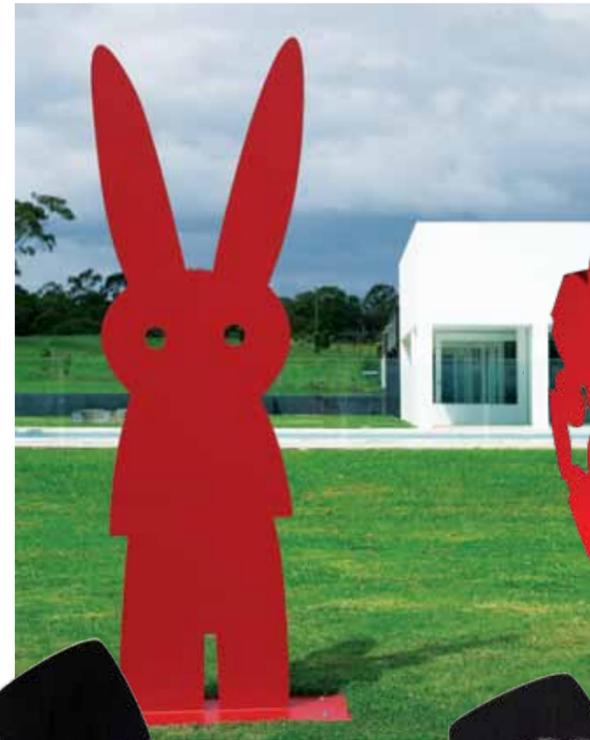
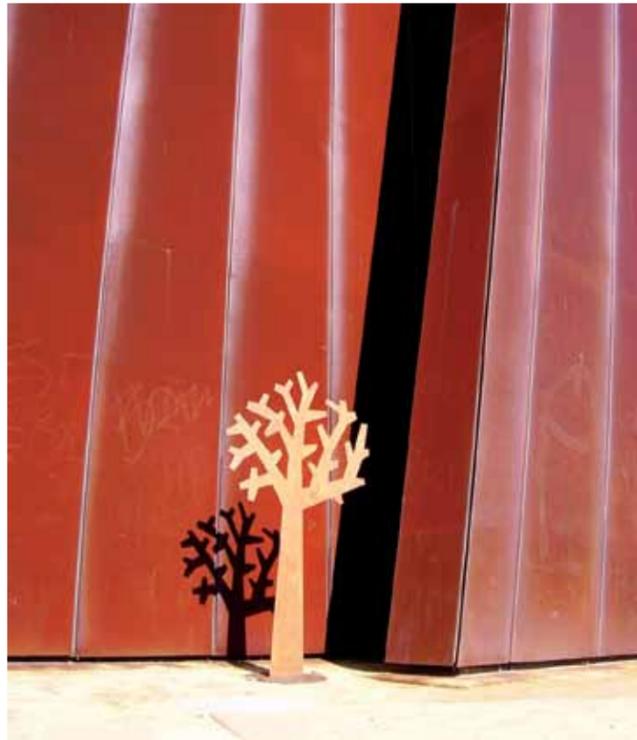
Describe your creative process.

It's easy to overwork a drawing, and most of my better pieces were conceived in a small, concentrated fit of work. I'll sketch on paper first and then redraw on a computer. It seems impossible for me to scan a drawing and then retrace on my Mac without it tightening up, so I always redraw on

the computer using the original as a reference only. I draw to scale whenever I can, but will often make small plastic models at about 1/8 size so that I can see from all angles. After that I will make a steel model at 1/4 size using 1/4 thickness material.

How did you come to work in sculpture and furniture design?

Trained initially as a graphic designer in the sixties, I worked within the period when our tools of trade were scalpels and wax, rulers and squares, paint and glue – all very tactile and three-dimensional. Although I love working with computers, I did miss the tactile nature of the process as technology progressed, so it was an easy step sideways, about ten years ago, to start working with a sculptural material – aerated concrete. Three-dimensional design was always a part of my working practice, as I had worked on set design for television and had been making furniture and design pieces (lighting, clocks) since high school.



PREVIOUS PAGE: A silhouetted rabbit sculpture at Sharon Fraser's Amileka – see the full story on page 78. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Trees. MIDDLE: Cityscape. BOTTOM: Portrait of Peter McLisky. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Rabbit; Dotti coffee table; a series of Running Men.



From aerated concrete you've moved onto steel. How does material choice inform the creation and production of the finished piece?
Steel has the strength and weight that I like. I also like the way steel ages and changes if left unchecked. The range of modern finishes available gives great flexibility. Unless powdercoated (as in my furniture), my work usually has added patinas, and I like that steel can take so many hand-finishes. Of course steel has limitations of its own, so I offer many pieces in other materials including wood and resins.

How do you balance artistic demands with functional needs and commercial requirements? Does this balance shift between furniture and sculpture?
Some pieces I would not recommend for clients. Usually that might concern children – steel is not the most child-friendly material, as it is heavy and sharp and can, of course, rust. Also

certain finishes are more suitable for commercial rather than residential applications. That can be the amount of use and also the cost. I like my work to fulfil both aesthetic and functional needs, so I would like to think that the furniture in particular has a sculptural backbone. One example of this is the Dotti coffee table, which is designed to be used as a functional item over the summer months and then stored on its side during the winter to add a sculptural element to the less colourful garden surrounds.

There's a sense of fun and a graphic quality to the simple, silhouetted shapes of some of your pieces. Are urban landscapes where they typically end up? What inspires these designs?
Going through design school in the sixties, my heroes were the great American sixties artists: Warhol, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg et al. Much of their art was drawn from graphic design and it was an easy journey back the other way. During those days, there were large touring exhibitions that visited Auckland, and it was my first exposure

to large-scale painting, kinetic art and sculpture. Although not my favourite, Oldenburg specifically played with scale which I apply with the large rabbits and running men. Also within that period was the emergence of large-print fabric design, notably Marimekko and Panton. We had them in our house in Auckland and these are the most obvious links to the Dotti range and probably the tree series.

Some of your other pieces seem more specifically urban in nature. Are urban landscapes where they typically end up? What inspires these designs?
I live in the Melbourne city, Docklands to be exact. Having been within the building zone here for five years, we have seen the skyline change almost daily – one building built in front of another. It really does remind of the flats used in theatre which slide out in front of each other to suggest depth and scale. The Cityscapes and Skylines pieces are a direct interpretation of this.

Photography of rabbit sculptures by Richard Powers.

Does sustainable practice influence your work?
I did feel guilty when I was starting to hear how concrete is a most disturbing material environmentally. It would have been my favourite choice for my house of the future but I will have to reconsider that now. I don't use concrete any more and do steer away from materials that are not environmentally sound. I'm glad to say that steel is a readily recycled material. Most of my steel is recycled, from China – apparently it could be old battleships which makes me feel better still.

Your furniture is used in both commercial and residential settings. How do these contexts affect the creative process?
Most pieces are flexible for use; often the choice between residential and commercial use comes down to finishes. Some hand-finished work is better for residential use, while powdercoatings are more suited to commercial settings. Some pieces

are not intended to be used alone – for example, the Dotti Slide table. It's designed so that, when not in use, multiple pieces can be arranged to form a low wall with a repeating pattern. Since it works best in multiples, I consider it more a commercial piece. I also produce a small flat-pack table and stool range designed specifically for use in cafes or event situations where storage can be a concern.

What are the key considerations in creating residential furniture?
I always seem to work within my own requirements – most of the pieces I've designed have come about as solutions for my own needs. I live within a contemporary apartment situation, fairly blocky and minimalist with a low-key colour palette. The Dotti range attempts to break up those lines with pattern and colour. Steel is a fairly hard, unforgiving material to use within a residential situation, and I have tried to soften its overall appearance with shape and pattern finish.

What inspires or influences your work?
Usually the last thing I have made – it's impossible not to think of alternatives during the making. Working in steel is not so immediate as graphic design on a computer; the process is much slower and you do distill everything over that time. Limitations of budget and time also change design choices. Mostly I enjoy that; I like to simplify the process.

Are there any designers whose work you particularly admire?
Many artists and architects but, more specifically, some projects or designs: American desert architecture (the Dean Martin kind) of the sixties and seventies; Dorothy Napangardi, Minnie Pwerle and Mitjili Napurrula paintings; Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut, my favourite building; Bridget Riley's paintings; Brian Eno's music; Cocteau's drawings. They all seem very spare but all utterly finished. **H**

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