CHAPTER 3

History of Studio Furniture in New Zealand, 1979 to 2008

In their inspection of the exhibits under this head, the Jury took into their consideration the following points – viz., general workmanship; design; illustration of the ornamental woods of the Colony; and decoration where resorted to. Speaking of the furniture exhibits generally, the Jury feel themselves justified in expressing praise of the taste, variety, and workmanship displayed. The numerous ornamental woods with which New Zealand abounds, afford great scope for the exercise of the higher efforts in cabinet-work, and for the display of decorative art in furniture (Cottrell 479).

Almost a century and a half ago, the Jurors of furniture for the International Exhibition, Dunedin, 1865 expressed their optimism for the future of the industry in this country. Aesthetically, the Jury commended design, execution and incorporation of local materials; statistically, for a population of approximately 185,000 Europeans, there were more than 200 furniture-making enterprises (Cottrell 263) in the new colony at the time. A few firms in Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin employed factory methods, but the majority of cabinetmakers worked alone or with minimal support. By 1885 furniture manufacture ranked 14th\(^1\) in revenue earnings for the entire manufacturing sector (Cottrell 264).

Thus, within several decades of becoming a British colony in 1840, a significant community of artisans was supplying domestic furnishings for the New Zealand population. Although Cottrell notes that wealthier settlers still preferred to obtain their chattels from Britain, “for those of the middle and lower classes the local product represented good value” (Cottrell 280). The 1865 Exhibition Jurors were favourably impressed with the furniture’s quality and form. While New Zealand did not lure the most skilled cabinetmakers from their European homes, some immigrants came with pre-existing skills in relevant trades such as carpentry, turning and upholstery; with examples in their midst of fine furniture brought from country-of-origin households, there were models that could be copied or emulated. Early makers also had access to British catalogues (Cottrell 369) that provided the latest styles and designs, and the opportunity to incorporate native woods permitted innovation in orthodox forms.

For some settlers, basic cabinetry was practiced of necessity, but the results “represented poverty and hardship, so when a family could afford something better, even if it was low-cost factory furniture, the original ‘home-made’ product would be cast aside in acknowledgement of their improved economic status” (Cottrell 373). Though factory-made, these purchases were nationally produced. Therefore a range of furniture products, from rudimentary to exhibition quality, attests to a respectable tradition of furniture-making that has existed in New Zealand almost since its inception as a colony.

William Cottrell has meticulously and exhaustively documented the parameters of this tradition from 1830 to 1900, and his scholarship has been recognised for its contribution to this country’s knowledge of itself.\(^2\) It is not the purpose of this thesis to provide an evolution of the furniture industry subsequent to 1900. Nor do I want to make a connection between the pioneering makers and the studio practitioners at the end of the twentieth century, even though Anton Seuffert, a renowned nineteenth

---

1. Cottrell’s figures for 1885, 1890 and 1895 come from the *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1897* (New Zealand Registrar 198). According to this volume, manufactories were reviewed by means of a census every five years. Cottrell arrives at the ranking “14th” from the listing of the value of manufactures from the most important industries. Meat preserving and freezing, followed by tanning, fellmongering and wool scouring were first and second. In 1885 the total revenue from all manufacturing was £6,781,379; furniture manufacturing was £162,375.

2. “Furniture speaks volumes about the whole colonial experience. A painting is a painting – in colonial New Zealand, they tended to be landscapes, portraits, pleasant things. But furniture tells you how poor somebody was or how wealthy, whether they wanted to make a work of art, whether they just needed a utilitarian thing to make life better for themselves. There’s a lot of history attached to these things and they are often discarded because people just don’t notice them” (Cottrell quoted in Howells 10). *Furniture of the New Zealand Colonial Era* won two awards: the 2007 Montana Book Award for Reference and Anthology, and the New Zealand Society of Authors E.H. McCormick Best First Book Award for Non-Fiction (Book Publishers).
century Auckland cabinetmaker (Figure 64) who fashioned astounding feats of marquetry (Peet 11), was undoubtedly the finest studio craftsman New Zealand has known. Rather, beginning with the now substantial evidence that furniture-making has been practiced in New Zealand for generations, this thesis posits that it is an entrenched part of the culture,\(^3\) regardless of whether the category is crude cottage craft, decorative art, or industry. Its venerable processes and all of its practitioners deserve as much recognition as other culturally revered practices such as rugby playing, yacht racing, and mountain climbing.

At the time of this writing there are five books\(^4\) dedicated to furniture made in this country. Northcote-Bade, Cottrell and Peet write about the colonial period; De Lautour offers a mixture of imported and local production; and Lloyd-Jenkins concerns himself with 20th century design. Although errors\(^5\) in De Lautour’s international contextualisation make her text unreliable for furniture students, she is to be commended for concluding her book with a selection of small New Zealand manufacturers and one-of-a-kind makers, from both North and South Islands, whose names would otherwise be lost. Lloyd-Jenkins includes significant designers from the 1950s and 60s but mentions only three names in the genre of New Zealand studio furniture: Humphrey Ikin, David Trubridge and Carin Wilson. It is the purpose of this thesis to redress the absence of scores of names of other makers who have contributed to the material culture of this country.

This chapter will briefly describe the precursors to contemporary studio craftsmanship in New Zealand, and document its advent in the late 1970s and burgeoning during the 1980s throughout the nation. A discourse on the definition of studio furniture will assist the reader in understanding its parameters, followed by an overview of the formation of guilds and dedicated publications. The influence of overseas visitors and local events will be recorded, and the extent of exhibitions in the 1980s and 90s will demonstrate the public attention studio furniture received during a period of about 15 years. Education in particular regions and nationally will bring the chapter into the present day. A conclusion will summarise the current state of studio furniture.

---

\(^3\) Prior to European contact, Māori did not use furniture: they sat on woven mats on the ground. Subsequently the furniture they adopted was the same as that available to colonists.


\(^5\) Examples: “Charles-Edouard Le Corbusier” instead of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, called Le Corbusier; and Eileen Gray was, indeed, an Irishwoman but spent most of her life in France (both De Lautour 67).
Modern craft practice harks back to the late nineteenth century Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain. Exponents such as John Ruskin and William Morris elevated the virtue of the hand-made and advocated the honesty of natural materials with minimal ornamentation. These principles travelled to New Zealand via the ‘South Kensington’ system of education where it was manifest in wood carving (Figure 65) undertaken by women from 1890 to 1910. Carving, an aesthetic pastime, was thought to be “the perfect artcraft/trade for women” (Calhoun 89) and was taught at schools of Art and Design throughout the country. Examples exist that demonstrate the collaboration of spouses: husband made the case goods and wife did the carving (Calhoun 88). However, these pieces were for personal domestic use. There is no evidence in New Zealand of husband/wife teams engaging in furniture-making for other than private home decoration.

The most recognised professional exponents of Arts and Crafts furniture in New Zealand were James Walter Chapman-Taylor (1878-1958), his son Rex and grandson Jack. James Chapman-Taylor, an architect, had met British Arts and Crafts practitioners, C.F.A. Voysey, M.H. Baillie Scott and Ernest Gimson (Siers Life 91), during trips to England; he designed and/or built 97 homes in this country. The interiors of these houses featured exposed rough-sawn structural and decorative timbers, and doors had adzed surfaces. James also designed and made free-standing furniture (Figure 66); built-in furniture was integral with the architecture (Cooling). Rex worked with his father for almost 20 years beginning in 1924, imbibing the Arts and Crafts aesthetic that would eventually be evident in his furniture. He built a workshop in Trentham, near Wellington, in 1940, where he made craftsman-style tables, chairs, chests of drawers, cabinets and fireplace surrounds that found their way into homes locally as well as in Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia and North America (Gillett 103). Jack became his father’s apprentice in 1946 and worked alongside his father; he still makes furniture even though he is in his eighties (Siers “Happy”).

6 In an earlier paper in the Bulletin of New Zealand Art History Calhoun elaborated on the gender bias and made the distinction between woodwork and woodcarving: “In the higher standards, manual and technical training, increasingly subsidised by the government, provided classes in woodwork for boys and, for girls, cooking, sewing and domestic economy. Instruction in woodwork would have been given by male instructors and would have begun the process by which boys were taught the skills and attitudes required to produce architects, engineers and related trade professionals and artisans. There were exceptions and it is clear that some girls and young women learnt woodwork at this time [1870-1900]. The desired union of art and industry must, however, have been thwarted if not stopped, by the preference of aesthetic and design training for girls and women and technical training for boys and men” (23).

7 Schools under the South Kensington system were established in Dunedin (1893-94), Christchurch (1896), Wellington (1888) (Calhoun 33); Wanganui (c. 1895) (Calhoun 102); and Auckland (1889) (Calhoun 41).
Neither Rex nor Jack Chapman-Taylor had visible connections with regional furniture makers allied with the contemporary craft movement, but that does not mean their work was unknown. Carin Wilson provided this recollection:

. . . a friend of mine who I was at school with showed me a piece of furniture. He lived in Wellington, or this family lived in Wellington, and there was a custom in the family whereby when each of the children reached a certain age, it may have been sixteen or eighteen or something, they were given a piece of furniture for their bedroom and the piece of furniture was always a piece manufactured by the Chapman Taylor workshops in the Hutt Valley. That, as far as I can recall, was the first piece of furniture that I saw which spoke to me in a way that said, this is something different and there is design and there’s workmanship and there’s thought that’s gone into this piece that steps far beyond what is normally invested in the production of a piece of furniture (Wilson 2009).8

Lloyd-Jenkins identifies Peter Smeele (Figure 67) as a contemporary of Rex Chapman-Taylor during the 1960s (At Home 200-203). Smeele, a furniture maker and craft entrepreneur, emigrated to New Zealand from Holland in 1952 and opened The Brown’s Mill Market in Auckland in 1968. The Mill was a craft cooperative whose participants included potters and weavers; Smeeele is mentioned in Peter Cape’s Please Touch (144), but his name does not appear contemporaneously amongst the Crafts Council of New Zealand artist files or in the Index of New Zealand Craftspeople, Designers and Manufacturers created by the Auckland Museum (Olsen “Index”). It should be noted that Lloyd-Jenkins (At Home and 40 Legends) also identifies furniture by John Allingham (architect), Garth Chester (designer), John Crichton (designer), Tibor Donner (architect), Michael Payne (architect) and Ernst Pischke (architect). These architects/designers contributed to the history of New Zealand manufactured furniture (Figure 68) but were not makers. Lloyd-Jenkins argues that the limited number of units of this furniture, produced in small factories, justifies calling it “an advanced form of individual craft practice” (At Home 238). However, craft,

---

8 Wilson was born in 1945 so he would have seen this furniture in the 1960s.
as defined in this thesis, is a holistic practice (page 3-4) whereby idea to execution and beyond is by the hand of one person; in these terms, ‘primitive’ reproduction methods, limited numbers of finished goods, or factory size does not constitute a craft practice.

**Definition of Studio Furniture in New Zealand**

Cooke, Ward and L’Ecuyer adopt the term ‘studio furniture’ to describe a North American movement in the period 1940 to 1990, rejecting the adjectives ‘art,’ ‘handcrafted’ and ‘modern/postmodern’ (13) because they have been used in previous stylistic periods. Studio furniture refers not only to where the work is made but the process by which the practice is acquired:

What distinguishes the furniture . . . is the background of the furniture makers; their interest in linking concept, materials, and technique; and the small shops in which they work. Studio furniture makers have not learned their skills through traditional apprenticeship systems but rather have mastered design and construction in college . . . . There are others who are self-taught. The latter, as well as many of the academically-trained, have developed their skills through reading, attending workshops or short-term courses, constant experimentation, and comparing notes with other furniture makers . . . . most studio furniture makers experience a longer, self-directed, and less constrained learning process (Cooke et al. 13).

Within this definition, studio furniture makers engage in an intellectual, exploratory process rather than a repetitive, task-oriented and mechanical one wedded to working drawings. Also significant is networking, through reading and meeting other makers, and the existence of printed and visual materials that facilitates exchange. Cooke, Ward and L’Ecuyer add that makers in this category have “a high degree of visual literacy” (13) drawing on resources from art and design history and popular media; their familiarity and experimentation with orthodox and new materials and processes provoke ever-evolving bodies of work. These makers are distinguished by commitment to long-term incultation and refinement of knowledge, attention to detail, and the desire to emphasise conceptual development ahead of function. “The term ‘studio furniture’ thus highlights the independent professionalism of these makers and their custom production, which is reflective of most aspects of today’s decentralised (yet networked) social and economic culture” (Cooke et al. 14).
A decentralised economic culture is evident in the marketing practices for studio furniture. The work is sold in galleries and at exhibitions. Pieces are usually commissioned unless the maker sells samples from an exhibition or showroom. Makers’ clients are therefore local, and practitioners need not aspire to national or international markets to be successful. Finally, The Maker’s Hand (Cooke et al. 15-16) tells us what studio furniture is not:

- separation of design from manufacture, as happens in the furniture industry
- volume Arts and Crafts furniture
- vernacular or folk furniture
- reproduction ‘antique’ furniture copying eighteenth and nineteenth century designs (Figure 69)
- amateur and hobby woodworking for private use

Does the American definition for studio furniture readily transpose to New Zealand? Notably, the expression ‘studio furniture’ is not universally recognised and used by practitioners or the general public. New Zealand curators have called it ‘contemporary furniture practice’ (Objectspace’s ShowRoom); ‘craft art’ and ‘one off’ furniture (Suter 2000 & 2002); or ‘alternative’ (Te Papa). The public understands ‘bespoke’ which comes from the verb bespeak meaning “engage beforehand” (“Bespoke”): a bespoke bootmaker makes footwear to the specifications of individual customers. Yet, with respect to furniture, the term bespoke is only partially apt, in that only some pieces are preceded by a commissioning customer.

Because ‘studio furniture’ is acceptable to most practitioners (e.g. Framed: a Studio Furniture Survey 1997 and the Weyerhaeuser Studio Furniture Awards, 2000 and 2002), I will proceed with that designation. What does the term entail nationally? By surveying about thirty practitioners I determined that the majority of the traits evident in the United States apply in New Zealand:

- small workshops/studios
- highly skilled makers
- one-of-a-kind production with infrequent repetition (except sets of chairs, paired cabinets)
- exploration of materials and fine cabinetmaking techniques
- zealous attention to detail
- consumption of woodworking books and magazines; workshop attendance; networking with other makers
- sales via galleries, exhibitions, and commissions
- local clientele
- alternative independent lifestyle
- career commitment

The significant discrepancy with American counterparts lies in the rarity of participation in tertiary studies. Of the 15 makers detailed in Figure 17 one third learned their skills via formal or informal apprenticeships; the rest are self-taught, inspired initially by a workshop or using workshops to enhance knowledge and technique. These workshop opportunities will be discussed in the next section. The result is that conceptual furniture—referred to by Cooke, Ward and L’Ecuyer as focusing on content rather...
than function—appears infrequently. Because conceptual design is honed in a setting that teaches and supports it, untrained attempts often look awkward and clichéd.

New Zealand studio furniture makers are certainly participants in, and knowledgeable of, art precedents and popular culture, yet it could not be said that, like in the United States, there is evidence of “a high degree of visual literacy.” Exposure to a range of art sources and materials, which is _de rigueur_ in art and design schools, has not occurred, so that incorporation of such references is not common with most New Zealand makers. Experimentation with new materials also happens in a North American educational context because of corporate marketing initiatives. Such experimentation is not unknown nationally: in 2003 _Metaform 03_ was a competition to demonstrate the versatility of Green Seal, a cellulose-impregnated pine product that behaves like a manufactured timber product (Sharma). However, purchase of quantities of new materials, purely for the purpose of conducting tests, is not financially viable for the solo practitioner.

As a consequence, makers are more likely to become expert in the characteristics of, and appropriate techniques for, a limited palette of materials, primarily wood species—both indigenous and imported—and orthodox metals; for the most part, New Zealand studio furniture makers produce simple, classic designs with consummate skill. The difference between functional and content-driven work can be seen by comparing a chair by David Haig (Figure 70) and a cabinet by Greg Bloomfield (Figure 71). Whereas Haig's rocker is functional and sculptural, Bloomfield's cabinet tells a story in addition to serving a purpose. Even the fact that the former is called Rocking-Chair and the latter Symphony is an indication the maker's intent. Haig has spent his furniture-making career in the Nelson region whereas Bloomfield, a New Zealander, trained in the United States and was exposed to makers imbued in furniture as narrative.

![Figure 70. David Haig. Sycamore Signature Rocking-Chair, 2006](image)

Haig's rocker design, modified for 30 years, is about form and faultless construction. The fact that the image shows the chair in profile demonstrates Haig's intention that its flowing lines and presence in space are emphasised.

![Figure 71. Greg Bloomfield. Symphony, 1998. Bird's eye maple](image)

Bloomfield's cabinet is inspired by music; the forms are reminiscent of instruments—harp, cello, kettle drums. The unorthodox shapes and their juxtaposition suggest movement: the cabinet is not only for housing music, it has the rhythm of music.

In summary, with the exception of education, Cooke, Ward and L'Ecuyer's definition of studio furniture applies in New Zealand. Thus New Zealand studio furniture is:

- one-of-a-kind or limited edition pieces in any media;
- designed and produced by a skilled designer/maker;

---

9 While I attended the Rhode Island School of Design, DuPont donated quantities of Corian and a pizza oven to the Furniture Department in order that students experiment with the bending properties of the heated material. DuPont not only had access to free research and development done by students, it hoped that students, while at school or later, would specify DuPont products.
who has acquired skills in various ways,
whose output demonstrates an individual approach to design, materials and techniques;
primarily, though not exclusively, functional;
sold through galleries and exhibitions, commissioned by patrons, or purchased from the maker.
The absence of tertiary training has not compromised the quality of the work. However, this absence is manifest in a lack of conceptual underpinning in the finished pieces and the use of orthodox materials.

**Studio Furniture Begins and Quickens**

As noted in the previous chapter, the advent of the World Crafts Council in New Zealand produced the first indication of the presence of furniture craftsmen: its June 1971 membership list identified one practitioner (page 39). My decision to seek evidence of studio furniture via the Crafts Council is because: 1) no national network of individual makers existed until 1986 (“Resource Centre” 38); 2) the New Zealand Furniture Manufacturers’ Federation, while it recognises that “solo crafts people producing one-off designs” (Palmer 32) are furniture manufacturers, does not embrace ‘soloists’; 3) the New Zealand Industrial Design Council (1967–1988) directed its energies to industry (Dept. of Statistics 1007). Were it not for the CCNZ, no record of the presence of solo practitioners at this time would exist.

Following the June 1971 entry there is sporadic reference to furniture and woodworking activities until the *Crafts Council News* of November 1980. In this issue comes the announcement of the existence of the Canterbury Guild of Woodworkers with Carin Wilson as founding President (page 50). Wilson described the organisation as “the first social co-operative of furniture makers who worked together to achieve better results in the practical aspects of their craft” (“Art and Industry” 14). Wilson began his woodworking career in the early 1970s by making furniture for his family (Figure 72) from found materials like kauri tubs and an old gate. For him, the experience was “always, always, always . . . enriching” (Wilson Personal 2009). From the beginning he exhibited in galleries, committing himself to producing work for a solo exhibition at the Building Centre in Christchurch as early as 1974; when that

Figure 72. Carin Wilson. *Control Centre*, early 1970s
Wilson describes this piece as one of his earliest, and the earliest he photographed. The cabinet would fall into the category of vernacular or folk furniture because of its basic form and unrefined aesthetic. However, it does not display crude technique—the dots on the bottom rail are either dowels or plugs covering screws.

---

10 In the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the WCC, 26 July 1970, a summary of a discussion concerning the appropriateness of furniture for a craft exhibition appeared. The consensus was that it must be handcrafted, “not produced in mass for commerciale [sic] sale” (“Minutes of the Annual”).
11 At the outset of this thesis it was called the Furniture Association of New Zealand Inc. As of 2011, the organisation has ceased to exist.
12 For instance, an item in the *CCNZ Newsletter* (December 1978) concerning a recent crafts exhibit: “This Exhibition of invited craftspeople has received enthusiastic public response. Although it was disappointing not to receive work from the invited woodworkers and Maori craftsmen, it was nonetheless an exhibition of wide range and high standard . . .” (“Crafts Exhibition”). Thus, invited woodworkers, but not necessarily furniture makers, did not participate.
sold in its entirety to a furniture retailer, he secured workshop space in the Artist's Quarter and continued to supply the furniture retailer with one-of-a-kind pieces. From 1975 to 1979, he shared a studio with another woodworker, James Pocock, producing furniture under the label Adzmarc, and mixing with craftspeople in a variety of media (Slade Personal 2008).

Christchurch had enough woodworkers in its environs in 1979 to begin the Guild with fourteen members. For instance, Colin Slade, who had completed a chairmaking apprenticeship in High Wycombe, England, emigrated to New Zealand in 1972 and found employment as a herd tester for the Auckland Livestock Improvement Association (Slade CV). On a tour of the South Island in 1976 he decided to join a craft cooperative in Christchurch (Blair 10) and resumed his chairmaking (Figure 73). Also in 1976, David Thurston, whose first major commission was cases13 for grandfather clocks (Crean), set up his own shop in Akaroa. David Putland and Iain Wilkinson were also in Christchurch. The Guild staged its initial formal exhibition at the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) Gallery in October 1980, enabling a membership of woodturners, furniture makers, carvers and a toymaker to display their work for two weeks; 70% was sold (“Guild”).

Thus, by 1980, the Guild was attracting members and exhibiting, and the CSA Gallery held annual exhibitions entitled Beyond Craft in which Carin Wilson showed his work. In Nelson, John Shaw (Figure 74), a self-taught woodworker making small looms and turnings (J. Shaw CV), held a modest exhibition at the Suter Gallery in Nelson. Born in England, Shaw spent his teens in Hamilton, and left New Zealand in July 1980 in search of furniture-making training. He enrolled at Rycotewood College in England and obtained qualifications in furniture craft and advanced furniture craft in 1982. He returned to New Zealand that year.

Crafts Council publications provided the only national networking opportunity at this time. In the April 1981 issue of Crafts Council News a brief article and photographs appeared inviting craftspeople to visit a self-sufficient agricultural community that was based on a “successful cottage industry making French-style country furniture” (“French”). Called Pays de Brouillard Bleu (country of the blue mist) by

---

13 In my 2009 interview, Thurston said these were kitset clocks that he assembled for an American distributor.
one of its founders, Victor de Villalier (the other founder was Neil Gandy, a New Zealander), the community was located in the Wairarapa. The article, more akin to a press release, stated that the pair had been making furniture for eight years. De Villalier and Gandy chose to ‘come out’ in a Crafts Council newsletter, thereby aligning themselves with the craft of furniture rather than manufacturing. The newsletter served as a marketing vehicle.

Carin Wilson’s education was in law, and organisation and methods studies. This background and a charismatic personality facilitated his presidency of the Canterbury Guild; shortly thereafter he replaced Vivienne Mountfort as the Southern Regional Representative on the Executive of the CCNZ. Wilson was the first furniture craftsman to sit on the Executive, and this was important for the national recognition of studio furniture. Firstly, a voice was raised to draw attention to furniture makers’ interests in an organisation that had been dominated by potters and weavers (“Taxation”). Wilson’s appointment to the Executive appeared in the same issue of Crafts Council News as the announcement of the Canterbury Guild. In the following issue, February 1981, came notice of a Nelson Crafts Convention taking place on 6 and 7 June (“Nelson”); woodworking was included and Wilson was a guest exhibitor and collaborating curator. This issue also contained a book review of Woodcarving for New Zealand by Austin Brasell and an item from the Hutt Valley Memorial Technical College stating that a course in furniture-making was available. Carin Wilson’s involvement was clearly valuable in drawing attention to such items and resources.

Secondly, when Wilson was elected President in August 1981, the CCNZ was anticipating its second national conference in January 1982 in Hamilton. Kevin Perkins (Figure 75), a noted Tasmanian furniture maker, was a guest at the Conference; while in New Zealand he gave a lecture in New Plymouth and a workshop at the Christchurch Polytechnic (“Kevin”). His trip was partially funded by the Queen Elizabeth II (QEII) Arts Council. Perkins’ impact during his attendance at the CCNZ Conference was described as the “determined and uncompromising attitude which he took to his life as a craftsman” (Wilson “Conference” 1). Wilson’s presence at the table facilitated the nomination of Kevin

---

14 De Villalier was born in the south of France and came to New Zealand with his parents in the 1930s. He purchased the land in the early 1970s and created a French village. De Villalier died in 1992 and the property fell into ruin until its purchase by a Wellington businessman as a retreat centre. A few pieces of furniture survive although many were looted (Ditchfield). Gandy went on to establish the Hand Carved Furniture Company Limited in Porirua near Wellington (Gandy).

15 The first CCNZ national convention in 1980 in Hastings made no mention of woodworking workshops or participants (“Report from Hastings” 2).

16 Peter Gibbs wrote in the June 1981 Crafts Council News that five guest exhibitors “. . . selected about half of the mountain of work submitted, then voluntarily worked for seven hours setting up the exhibition. The spirit of unity and closeness built up by the 5 during those hours spread through the following two days to the nearly one hundred craftspeople who participated in the activities of the weekend” (Gibbs “Nelson Crafts” 8).

Perkins as a potential presenter. Exposure to professional craftspeople was vital in this period if New Zealand makers were to aspire to that level.

Third, Wilson's personal agenda was education. This arose out of a particular event: 

. . . when I first started making I wanted to find some point of contact whereby I could accelerate my own skill development and I went to the Polytechnic in Christchurch and I said, “Do you have any courses in furniture making?” And, basically, the answer I got was, “no we don’t, but you could enrol here as an apprentice builder.” And I said, “well that won’t really work for me.” So I let that go but it remained in my mind that what’s absent from the curriculum in New Zealand is training for people who are interested in taking up what it was that gave me so much pleasure. So one of the first things that we began to address in the Crafts Council at a national level was the dearth of adequate craft education programmes (Wilson Personal 2009).

The theme of the 1982 Conference, Wilson’s first as President, was Craft Education. The outcome was a resolution that a five-year plan of action in education be conceived, including encouragement of future generations of craftspeople by means of tuition subsidies. A concurrent Special Meeting, convened to discuss a potential constitution, considered as one of its objectives: “[t]o encourage and assist the education of craftspeople, artists and designers and to encourage education in crafts, arts and design through all levels of the education system” (“Special”).

A President whose constituency prioritised education would be charged with the mission of realising that mandate. This, along with his personal experience, prompted Wilson to put a proposal to the QEII Arts Council to enable him to visit influential overseas art schools, talk to senior people, gather curriculum ideas, and look at and photograph studio facilities; he received a grant from the Arts Council to undertake that mission (Wilson Personal 2009). His report to the Minister of the Arts in 1984, and passed on to the Director-General of Education (to be discussed in Chapter 4), included all craft media, but Wilson’s passion for, and expertise in, woodworking meant that American and European facilities for furniture-making were closely looked at and emulated in recommendations.

Finally, Wilson visited James Krenov and Alan Peters on his overseas trip and paved the way for their visits to New Zealand in 1983 and 1984 respectively (page 55). James Krenov (Figure 76), a consummate American craftsman who learned his skills in Sweden, founded the cabinetmaking

---

Figure 76. James Krenov (1920-2009)
Krenov wrote four books: A Cabinetmaker's Notebook (1976), The Fine Art of Cabinetmaking (1977), The Impractical Cabinetmaker (1979) and Worker in Wood (1981), all published originally by Van Nostrand Reinhold. His death provoked many tributes including one in the New York Times entitled “James Krenov, Wood and Word Worker, is Dead at 88” (Hevesi) that acknowledged his making and writing.

Figure 77. Alan Peters (1933-2009)
programme at the College of the Redwoods in Fort Bragg, California in 1981 (College), which Wilson visited. Humphrey Ikin described the importance of Krenov’s writing in New Zealand:

When I was young I was very inspired by those James Krenov books. They can seem a bit quaint now, I found them on the shelf the other day when we were unpacking, but they were just so influential at the time. It was just someone speaking from the heart about that passion of living with their work and that’s what I related to, getting really close to your work whether you liked his finished objects or not . . . . He was so loose but he was also so refined . . . . So that timing was really important for me—no two ways about that, and that was a bit of a universal thing, wasn’t it, right round the western world there were people who were influenced by those [books] . . . but it wasn’t the way the work looked that influenced me so much as that beautiful connection of material with a way of life, and all those things that he expressed so well (Ikin Personal 2009).

As a result, when Krenov visited with the assistance of a Fulbright Scholarship (Bagnall), his workshops in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch were sold out (Ross “From”) and his lectures in Rotorua, Havelock North and Nelson were presented to standing-room-only audiences (page 55).

Six months later Alan Peters (Figure 77), sponsored by the British Council, was a guest speaker at the CCNZ Conference held at Lincoln College, Canterbury (“Conference ‘84” 8). A British designer/maker, Peters completed a seven-year apprenticeship with Edward Barnsley (1900-1987), another significant modern proponent of the English Arts and Crafts aesthetic in furniture. He then trained as a craft teacher and taught at secondary schools as well as the John Makepeace School for Craftsmen in Wood in Dorset (“Conference ‘84” 9). Peters’ contribution to New Zealand practitioners was encapsulated by Charles Blackburn, a workshop participant: “Nelson craftsmen, mostly the professional people, seemed delighted to hear from Alan Peters, that it is possible to combine a business approach and uncompromising craftsmanship” (“Alan Peters” 5, italics in original).

Whereas Blackburn commented on the practical benefits of Peters’ visit, both Krenov and Peters can be credited with raising the issue of design. Lack of design, a criticism levelled at New Zealand craft for many years (Chapter 2), was confirmed by Krenov (Arthur “James” 17) and Peters. While in Auckland, Peters was asked to judge the Fine Furniture Competition (1984) at Compendium Gallery in Devonport. As Pamela Elliott, Compendium’s Director, pointed out: “. . . the whole idea of woodwork being judged is a relatively new one for New Zealand, and the concerns of standards among practitioners was certain to raise some paranoias” (Elliott). It seems likely that Peters was forewarned. His “Introduction to the Competition” (reprinted in Touch Wood) used diplomatic language: “. . . the quality of the workmanship was so high throughout the pieces that I saw here [at Compendium] I had to move into an area that’s much more difficult to define, and that’s the area we call ‘beauty, design, aesthetics’” (Peters 23).

Noeline Brokenshire, editor of Touch Wood, reiterated his concerns about design:

I hope our New Zealand craftsmen will glean a good harvest from Alan Peters. I hope to see the presentation to our public of furniture of a quality and design that befits fine craftsmen. . . . We have a climate ready poised for an eager and aware public who want individualistic pieces and not the monotonous consumer goods, but their needs can only be met by sensitive skilled craftsmen of the ilk of Alan Peters (Brokenshire “Alan” 4).

Peters chose a bench by designer Michael Penck as the winner of Compendium’s $500 prize. Penck had done a two-year apprenticeship as a cabinetmaker in Germany and four years’ study at the Ulm School of Design. He came to New Zealand in 1976 to teach at the Wellington Polytechnic School of Design (Basant 26). The bench (Figure 78), made from a kauri railway sleeper that had been rescued
from a Titirangi beach,\(^{18}\) was selected for its simplicity. Peters stated that he recognised “a sensitivity for material, colour and texture, that excited me as a creative person. . . . I wasn’t terribly impressed at all by the fact that the piece of wood had come out of a swamp – that’s just a lovely bonus” (Peters 23-24).

Penck tried to convey his design knowledge to his colleagues in the Auckland Woodworkers Guild; his message, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s “less is more” (Penck), was not heard until he won the Compendium prize and his fellow competitors admitted they now understood what he was talking about. He attended the Australian Wood Conference in Adelaide in 1985 and returned with inspiration to advocate for national design-based craft education in New Zealand. Penck stated: “I believe New Zealand’s identity as a nation should be promoted through its vigorous crafts, but a greater design awareness is needed. There would be mutual benefit from having an Industrial Design Workshop, staffed by designers, next to an experimental workshop where craftspeople and artisans could work together—ultimately resulting in design-based craftwork using up to date technology and production methods” (Bassist 27). His suggestion was not taken up and he moved to Adelaide in 1986 where he has continued with his design practice and furniture-making.

Thus, by 1984, two renowned professional furniture makers representing two continents and avowing the tenets of studio furniture had influenced the New Zealand scene. James Dowle’s recollection holds true for many:

\(^{18}\) “I found this kauri sleeper, still doweled with metal rods to the rocks. It was the very last sleeper of that old railway line which used to transport kauri logs to the ships. . . . I drove back to get my Japanese saw, cut it off at the metal dowels (the contamination of the metal are these dark stains at either end). Then I had to drag/carry this sleeper all the way back to my Bedford van. So the next step was drying. It took three years under my house. Then this English cabinetmaker [Alan Peters] arrived in NZ and I ‘organised’ him in Auckland with a series lectures at the Auckland Uni. All the time he was in NZ there was this competition initiated by Compendium Gallery, he was the judge. . . . The timber was dry - I was able to do something with it. I still wanted to keep this character of a rail-track - defined but open. So I developed a series of T-shaped ‘bases’ - different sizes and thicknesses - until I was satisfied. There was a small group of people near the Auckland railway station with a foundry, which cast the bases. They were still ‘warm’ when I delivered my design to the gallery. . . . The aim was to show the beauty of the timber - the sleeper, sandblasted surfaces all round except for the polished and oiled top surface with weathered bronze bases” (Penck).
His [James Krenov’s] visit had a profound and lasting effect on many of us that were fortunate enough to attend - we all learned so much in a short time and I still enjoy using the matai plane that I made under his guidance. I also recall returning to my workshop after his visit to finish off a half-built sideboard. I was so ashamed of the great clunky dovetails that were reliant on epoxy glue to hold together and fill the gaps, but fortunately the customer still thought it was marvellous.

I must concede that I earned virtually nothing through this period and was very dependant on the income of my new wife. She even allowed me to attend the Alan Peters workshop in the first week of our honeymoon, here in Nelson with John [Shaw], David [Haig], Jimu [Grimmett] and others from all over the country. Alan Peters’ training under Edward Barnsley brought an entirely different perspective to Jim Krenov - still devoted to integrity in design and construction, but much more concerned about communication with the client and systems to run a good business. I needed this message (Dowle “Re: Furniture”).

The work of both makers represented a combination of excellent craftsmanship and design. The aesthetics of both were conservative: Krenov’s from the Scandinavian tradition, Peters’ from the Arts and Crafts (Figure 79 and 80). Both were teachers, who conveyed that any compromise of standards, in design, construction or materials, was anathema to the pursuit of a furniture career. Carin Wilson’s motive in bringing these men to New Zealand was “to grow the sense of community and designers” (Wilson Personal 2009); at the same time he put, in woodworkers’ midst, the models to which they should strive. James Krenov and Alan Peters epitomised and raised the bar for studio furniture in New Zealand.

Enthusiastic reception of Krenov and Peters prompted invitations to other visitors: Jon Brooks (United States) came in June 1984 and gave seminars in Christchurch, New Plymouth and Auckland (Arthur “Jon” 15); Art Carpenter (United States) visited Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, and Christchurch in March 1986 (“Profile: Art” 3); and Richard La Trobe-Bateman (United Kingdom) gave workshops in Auckland and Christchurch in December 1987 (“In Touch” (13) 28). Familiarity with these educators also encouraged New Zealanders to drop by their workshops in the United States and England. Jimu Grimmett, a former furniture maker in Nelson, recalled:

---

**Figure 79. James Krenov. Cabinet, 1979.** Andaman padouk

Donald Lloyd McKinley described Krenov: “Jim is primarily concerned with the way the work is being done - not the how of technique, but the why of attitude. The feelings, presence, and spirit of the maker are paramount” (124). This aligns with the passion that Humphrey Ikin recognised in Krenov’s work and words.

**Figure 80. Alan Peters. Table in Elm, 1985**

This piece was in a display at the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum in 1985-1986; it was published in *Touch Wood* although it is not stated whether someone saw the exhibition or the information came from the show’s catalogue written by Mary Greensted. The table held “personal satisfaction” for Peters since the top was made from one piece of timber (“Exhibitions” 1986 25).
I’d been travelling quite a few times to the States and hoped to meet Sam Maloof\(^\text{19}\) at one of these woodworkers’ seminars or an event. And I got talking to him and he said, “Ahh, from New Zealand. When you’re passing through Los Angeles, call in.” So I called in and ended up working for him. For six weeks. I left there and made my way to Japan . . . . And he wrote to me, saying come back if you’d like to. So I went back and spent three months with him that time. . . . I spent time with Art Carpenter in Bolinas, just outside San Francisco. Went and saw him and ended up staying there a week and helping. That’s what I did in those days. Just go to these people and say I’m free and I’ll work for nothing as long as you have some support (Grimmett).

Prior to the early 1980s New Zealand furniture makers read the literature by and about overseas experts. As the growth of community and a sustaining infrastructure increased, there was no reluctance about extending invitations to significant practitioners. Funding for transportation and fees was an issue, but with woodworking having a national profile and the Crafts Council (plus individuals) becoming adept at soliciting grants from the QEII Arts Council, New Zealand was no longer isolated from what was happening in the worldwide community or its experts. Exposure to the best international practice contributed to improving design and techniques in the national community; it also offered experience with process and materials which led to applicable outcomes for practitioners trying to earn a living from making. Carin Wilson was the catalyst for inaugurating these many links.

Collectivity and Voice

The establishment of the Canterbury Guild of Woodworkers spread nationally in the early 1980s (Figure 81). A Taranaki Guild formed in 1982 (“Liaison/Linkages”); one of its founding members, John Finn, was the second furniture maker to join the CCNZ Executive that same year (“Executive” 17). The Auckland Guild progressed from idea to reality when enthusiastic participants at Compendium’s first Fine Woodworking Exhibition in 1983 decided to make it real (kin “Auckland”). The Guild was incorporated on March 15, 1983 and held its first exhibition in the old Auckland Customhouse to coincide with James Krenov’s visit in July. Also in 1983 John Shaw instigated the Nelson Guild due to a desire for collegiality following his return from Rycotewood. Shaw placed an advertisement locally and attracted 30-40 makers with varying levels of interest and skill (J. Shaw Personal 2008). Wellington woodworkers (Figure 82) got together in 1984 (“In Touch” (3) 26); Marlborough and Northland in 1985 (“In Touch” (6) 25).

November 1983 saw the publication of a national magazine, *Touch Wood*, devoted to woodworking. Carin Wilson described its advent as “the beginning of an important new age in our [woodcraft’s] development” (Wilson “Message”). In the inaugural issue, the editor and publisher, Noeline Brokenshire, explained her initiative:

Over the last few years New Zealand has experienced a revolution in the handcrafts. Pottery, fibre art, weaving, glass work, jewellery, have shown a vast increase in interest and participation. The number of craftsmen has swelled and the quality of artistry is bringing world recognition. Wood craft, established longer than many of its fellow crafts, has been slow to slough off its traditional fetters but our numbers have risen and creative design has become more explorative, and quality of execution has acquired new, high standards. But – we have no national body, not much communication between one woodworker and another and no national means for transfer of ideas. In short, no printed magazine peculiar to this country.

\(^{19}\) Sam Maloof (1916-2009), identified by Cooke as one of the First Generation American studio furniture makers (Cooke 13), never came to New Zealand.
Figure 81. New Zealand Woodworking Guilds and Dates of Inauguration

Inauguration of regional woodworking guilds:
1979 Christchurch
1982 Taranaki (New Plymouth)
1983 Auckland
1984 Wellington
1985 Marlborough (Nelson)
1985 Northland (Whangarei)

Figure 82. Guild of Woodworkers Wellington Logo
The tree-trunk cross-section harkens back to my holistic diagram in Chapter 1. The Guild’s current website states that its membership includes turners, carvers and furniture makers; its national body is the National Association of Woodworkers with a strong turning contingent (Appendix 5). This accounts for the superimposed concentric circles which represent spinning timber on a lathe.
Touch Wood could become that medium for communication and, together with the rise of regional woodworking guilds, it may set a pattern for a new dialogue (Brokenshire “This first”).

Noeline was a recognised woodturner (Figure 83) and her husband, David, was a potter; they knew the craft community and were committed to it. Touch Wood was well written, competently edited, and intelligent; it carried a range of articles that were nationally focused including Guild news, maker profiles, exhibition reviews, technical know-how, design discussion, timber resources and advertising. Brokenshire solicited articles from subscribers as well as researching and writing many herself. Her editorials, with the general heading “Plane View,” consistently advocated for design, professionalism and a national organisation for woodworkers (Brokenshire March 1984, July 1985, July 1987, March 1988).

After fourteen issues, in March 1988, Brokenshire gave up ownership. Her last editorial hinted at the reasons:

I had hoped that New Zealand woodworkers would have seen Touch Wood as their magazine and would have contributed articles because they felt they needed to communicate their own expertise, that they would want to help their fellow worker and give freely of their knowledge – and there have been some who have done just that – and a great number of people who could have but didn’t! As I have become older I feel the pressure of requesting writings has become a little depressing and it is hard to maintain all the working on my own . . . (Brokenshire “Plane View: Changing” 2).

She may also have been disillusioned that her vision for a national umbrella association encompassing all the woodworking guilds, with Touch Wood as its mouthpiece, had not eventuated. She described her perception of woodworking at that time:

. . . there has been division within the guilds. Unlike the potters who formed a national body and whose very humble newsletter became an exceptionally fine magazine, the woodworkers have formed small specialised groups, the furniture maker/designers, the

Figure 83. Noeline Brokenshire; Touch Wood, Issue 11, March 1987
Brokenshire studied English and physical education at university; her work with wood began as carving followed by a few turning lessons from a neighbour. Brokenshire had “high expectations” (Brokenshire Personal) of woodworkers’ participation in Touch Wood but gradually realised they were practical men who were interested in making, not writing. She was on the verge of updating Touch Wood, like incorporating colour, when the opportunity to open a gallery in central Christchurch arose. She sold the magazine to concentrate on Cave Rock Gallery, first in Sumner and then in the city’s Arts Centre. The cover of issue 11 of Touch Wood shows Carin Wilson’s chair designed and made for the QEI Arts Council boardroom. Details of this commission appear in Chapter 4.

20 The Canterbury Society of Arts records a joint exhibition in 1980 of Brokenshire’s turning with weaving by Tony Garland (“Noeline Brokenshire”).
21 Brokenshire envisaged an association of guilds much like the embroiderers, spinners/weavers and potters had (page 47).
woodturners, both have formed professional type national bodies and the guilds have become rather nondescript with low working profiles (Brokenshire, “Plane View: Changing” 2-3).

In passing the baton to the new owner/editor, Malcolm Macpherson, Brokenshire concluded: “He is a great guy and you will get better value for your money; he has the youth and vitality to make the changes that are now necessary; he is a fine furniture maker in the true sense and will know more surely where a woodworkers’ magazine should go for the 1990’s” (Brokenshire “Plane View: Changing” 3). Brokenshire’s words imply that she and Touch Wood had been criticised for ageing but her dedication to craft betrayed no failing of energy. Noeline and her daughter, Ann, opened Cave Rock Gallery in 1987 where all craft media, including furniture, were displayed and sold (“New Ventures”).

Like Carin Wilson, Noeline Brokenshire made a significant contribution to New Zealand woodworking. In a letter to the editor of the first issue of The New Zealand Woodworker, Colin Slade paid tribute “to the courage, perspicacity, perseverance and generosity of Noeline Brokenshire in founding, and so firmly establishing, TOUCH WOOD as the journal and forum for New Zealand woodworkers” (Slade “Dear”). Slade acknowledged Brokenshire’s disappointment at the Guilds’ diversification but praised Touch Wood as the “meeting point” for the disparate parts. He reminded readers that “it is always the idea which is important and the person courageous enough to launch it who deserves the highest accolade, and never more so than in the case of TOUCH WOOD” (Slade “Dear”).

Macpherson’s The New Zealand Woodworker (Figure 84) had a different mandate than its predecessor. In small type on the first page of the first issue Macpherson disclosed his intent, which coincided with Brokenshire’s dénouement:

WHAT HAPPENED TO TOUCH WOOD?

This is it. New name, new style, new owners and a new editor, but still New Zealand’s national and only woodworking magazine. New Zealand craft woodworking, is rapidly changing, and the pace of change is increasing. Old ideas are disappearing, a new professionalism is sweeping through. Wood-worker organisations are at a crossroads. If the literature is to keep up, or even lead a bit, it needs to change as fast.

Timber tradesmen – Joiners, carpenters, cabinet makers, turners, are all woodworkers too, and this magazine will in future make an attempt to report on their activities and interests as well.

This is not a criticism of Touch Wood – it took a brave effort and a lot of hard work by Noeline Brokenshire and her helpers and supporters to get this magazine going, and to keep

---

Figure 84. The New Zealand Woodworker, Issue 15
The cover of issue 15 was captioned: “One of the famous two-metre portholes which lets in the light at the Wellington Aquatic Centre. Supported and encircled by laminated timber from prolog’s [sic] Waipa mill, the portholes took a great deal of time to get right - revolutionary design, stunning result” [1]. The accompanying article, akin to a press release, was reprinted from the Dominion Sunday Times. Macpherson’s insertion of himself in this first caption—“famous,” “revolutionary,” “stunning”—typifies the magazine. Whereas Brokenshire entitled her editorials “Plane View,” Macpherson’s were “My Word.” The front cover of Issue 1 was labelled 15 to follow in sequence with Touch Wood.

---

22 Macpherson received a PhD in geology from the University of Canterbury in 1978. His 2009 webpage states that he was a craft furniture maker in Wales, 1979-1986, and returned to the South Island in 1986 where he was a studio furniture maker and desktop publisher (Macpherson Resumé).
it going, and New Zealand woodworking would be considerably poorer today if she had not done so. But times change, and so must we (Macpherson “What”).

Macpherson’s tone implied a fast-paced, newly focused professional industry. His target was now timber tradesmen, joiners and carpenters and the magazine’s graphic style moved away from Brokenshire’s crafted writing, editing and composition. However, the Touch Wood readership did not abandon The New Zealand Woodworker. The Guilds continued to submit reports, and Colin Slade wrote a regular column called “Letter from Barrys Bay.” The New Zealand Woodworker changed its format from A4 to A3 with the Spring 1990 edition, citing substantial cuts in production costs for A3 (Macpherson “My word”); the subsequent issue (number 24) contained complaints from readers about the tabloid size. It was the last issue, in the summer of 1991,23 and nothing replaced it. The timber processing industry—forestry, construction, milling, and wood products—has dedicated journals as does furniture manufacturing but, in order to read any current news about studio furniture, New Zealanders must buy or subscribe to Fine Woodworking, Woodwork, or Woodcraft from the United States, the Australian Woodworker or British Woodworking. With the closure of The New Zealand Woodworker in 1991 and Craft New Zealand in 1993 the medium was faced with a loss of voice and forum, not to mention a publicity vacuum.

Leading makers could not have foreseen this eventuality but had already taken steps to try to establish and sustain an independent professional presence. In July 1986 more than 25 furniture makers gathered for two days in Wellington to address the “overwhelming need for a National Body” (“Resource Centre” 38). Classifying themselves as designer/makers, the group specified its objective as providing “a leading edge to continuing development of a high quality and innovative furniture identity” (“Resource Centre” 38). Instigated by Colin Slade, John Shaw and Humphrey Ikin, the Association of Designers & Furniture Makers New Zealand required submission of slides and a curriculum vitae for membership (“Association”). Its initial officers were Vic Matthews (Hamilton) as national coordinator and Noeline Brokenshire as secretary. Later known as The Furniture Group: Independent Designer/Furniture Makers of New Zealand Inc. (“Clubs” 4) (Figure 85), it set out its aims in New Zealand Crafts, Winter 1989:

1. To promote a public awareness of the presence of professional Furniture Designer/Makers, and to foster the sharing of expertise through apprenticeships and seminars using our own and international teachers and practitioners.
2. To be a collective voice for Furniture Designers/Makers, pursuing positive marketing strategies, raising the image and enhancing the viability of designing and making furniture as a vocation. Exhibitions will be promoted to raise standards of quality and excellence.
3. To communicate between ourselves and with others in related fields, overcoming the effects of working in isolation. Worldwide contacts will be pursued, and intercultural exchange promoted.
4. To influence resource management in line with our specialised use, to lobby for appropriate plantings of timber trees,24 and to co-ordinate the distribution of quality domestic trees appropriate for furniture making (Dowle “Furniture”).

These objectives give a good indication of where this exclusive group saw itself in the mid 1980s. It was exclusive because: 1) it demanded quality standards; 2) its members strived for professional commitment to the activity: i.e. they attempted to earn their living by making furniture or related activities (i.e. teaching woodworking); and 3) it was small. The aims above can be summarised:

23 This was the 10th New Zealand Woodworker because Touch Wood provided issues 1 to 14.
24 While the Furniture Group advocated speciality plantings of both indigenous and exotic (black walnut, blackwood and ash) timbers, and the scarcity was discussed in articles that appeared in Touch Wood (Brokenshire “West Coast”; “Timber”), its voice had little impact. Swale writes that in 1979, special purpose needs were not being met (11), and in 1999-2000 the government “drastically reduced” (12) the domestic availability of indigenous timbers for special purposes such as furniture. Exotic timbers will be discussed later in this chapter.
• The Group was anxious to train a younger generation (apprentices), a necessary strategy to ensure skills in the future; it sought enhancement of existing skills by emulation of national and overseas experts.

• It recognised the merits of collective action for marketing, education and strategic reasons—the CCNZ’s successes were salutary—and saw exhibitions as a proven avenue for public awareness.

• Communication was deemed essential, both within New Zealand and globally, and an “informal bi-monthly newsletter” (Dowle “Furniture”) was distributed to members. Brokenshire, a woodturner rather than furniture maker, had expertise in publishing and anticipated Touch Wood as the Furniture Group’s mouthpiece.

• The Group’s get-togethers meant a gathering of peers instead of the mixed-skills constituency at Guild meetings.

• Practitioners were concerned with timber resource “management,” a prospect that was self-interested, in its desire for furniture-specific overseas and indigenous species, at the same time as being community-minded in long-term care for natural resources.

25 A report on the Contemporary Classics exhibition in the CCNZ Gallery in Wellington in 1988 where eight furniture makers showed their work stated: “As always, furniture has a strong following, and we have many visitors who do not normally frequent the Gallery” (“Gallery News”).
The objectives were sound, thoughtful and future-oriented. But membership stood at little more than two dozen, there was physical (and psychological) distance between isolated pockets of production (Auckland, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, Nelson and Christchurch were the nodes for studio furniture), and limited income precluded the expense of flying to national body gatherings. The Furniture Group had an Annual Meeting in 1988 in Auckland to coincide with the New Zealand Contemporary Furniture Exhibition (to be discussed in the next section) where thirteen members attended (“Clubs” 4). The aims/manifesto above came out of a Seminar and Annual General Meeting held in July 1989, again coinciding with an exhibition, Quality by Design, in Wellington (Grouden “Two”). The Group was mentioned in the October 1991 edition of Craftnews (“Allied”) with Peter Maclean in Hastings as the contact. Maclean, François Aries and Brian Grouden were elected by the membership to take a turn at coordination (Grouden “Two”), but it “fizzled out” (Dowle “Re: the Furniture”). With the death of the Crafts Council in July 1992 (unsuccessfully kept on life-support until February 1993), evidence of furniture makers became sporadic in commercial journalism.26

According to Korvenmaa, “[s]igns of professional distinction are organisations specific to individual fields and a trade press” (21). Craft Context, the final publication by supporters of the former CCNZ, announced the advent (“Introduction”) of the Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ) in 1993. A marriage of the New Zealand Association of Interior Designers and the New Zealand Society of Industrial Designers, DINZ was divided into five disciplines: “Craft, Fashion, Graphics, Interiors and Product.” Furniture was absorbed into DINZ but focus shifted in the DINZ publication, ProDesign, from furniture-making and the furniture community at large to furniture design. Thus the facility for promoting public awareness, raising image, enhancing viability, speaking collectively and lobbying specifically for studio furniture—the Furniture Group’s aims—disappeared with the loss of a dedicated periodical.

A national studio furniture collective was gone, but what happened to the Guilds? Collegial beginnings gave way to acrimony as some makers matured, specialised and began to earn a living at their craft: “Like a number of other groups, the Canterbury Guild seems to be working through the painful questions of amateur versus professional members, exhibition standards and who sets them, what are exhibitions actually for, what is a guild actually for. Issues that have destroyed groups overseas, particularly in the States” (“Guilds, Clubs” 8). Malcolm Macpherson wrote these remarks based on guild, club and association information supplied to him in 1988. Subsequent issues of The New Zealand Woodworker showed strength in some clubs while others foundered. For instance, at a meeting on 4 July 1990, with only six members in attendance, it was determined that the Auckland Guild of Woodworkers had “no future” and its affairs would be “wound up” (“Sad”). On the same page Macpherson wrote, “… it would be a mistake to regard the death of the Auckland guild as the symptom of a general malaise,” citing Southland, Timaru, Nelson and Putaruru clubs as survivors. However, these groups remained viable because of their diversified foci (turning, carving, houseware/toy making). Perusal of the internet in 2009 finds many woodworking guilds and associations (Appendix 5) throughout the country, 39 of which are affiliated with the National Association of NZ Woodworkers Inc. (National Association). Over 40% of these clubs are devoted to woodturning and another 15% specify turning as part of their title or list it as a sub-group of the club. There is no association of one-of-a-kind furniture makers.

Studio Furniture on Display

The Guilds held regular public and private exhibitions of members’ work that served a number of purposes: fund-raising by means of entrance fees and sale of goods; attracting membership; education;27

---

26 I did a quantitative analysis of journal articles surveyed by Index New Zealand (under the auspices of the National Library of New Zealand) from 1991 to 2000. Using the Keyword search ‘carpentry’ (the classification used for ‘furniture’ by the Index), the result was a total of 7 articles.

27 The Waikato Guild of Woodworkers has an extensive display at the annual Waikato Home and Garden Show, Hamilton, where it demonstrates turning on an electric lathe and a club-built pole lathe (Personal observation 2007).
improvement of standards (i.e. practice perfects); and self-esteem. There were, in addition, a number of exhibitions throughout New Zealand beginning in 1983 that played a significant role in bringing recognition to studio furniture. These exhibitions also brought attention to the professional wood artisans, thereby advancing their careers.

1. The Alternative Furniture Show

Christchurch is New Zealand’s second largest furniture manufacturing centre (Conway 1999) so it is not surprising that the Canterbury Guild was the first to be established. Neither is it surprising that the first major studio furniture exhibition took place in Christchurch as a counterpart to the annual Canterbury Furniture Manufacturers Federation exhibition.

Knowing that “a solo furniture maker’s major problem is marketing and publicity” (Slade “Solid” 23), the organisers of Solid Wood: the Alternative (Figure 86) envisaged it as a means to inform the public of the alternatives to manufactured products. In September 1982 Colin Slade and Iain Wilkinson managed to assemble nine practitioners willing and able to commit $500 each to mount the show. The Canterbury Horticultural Hall, close to the Christchurch Town Hall where the manufacturers held their Furniture Show, was secured as a venue. The makers saw the merits of including interior decorators and designers: their displays would add colour; and they could educate the public about interior design and furniture, and advise the makers on exhibition layout. A few more participants would also spread the costs. In the end, the May 1983 event cost $5,100, split by the twelve exhibitors, and garnered $100,000 worth of commissions (Slade “Solid” 24).

The show was opened by the Mayoress of Christchurch, Lady Hay, and attracted radio, television and press coverage. Solid Wood’s juxtaposition with the longstanding recognised Furniture Show, which was open to the public for three days each year, brought publicity in itself. The care that had been taken to provide uniformity in the individual booths contributed to the perception, by the estimated 20,000 visitors who “swarmed” (Slade “Solid” 24) (Figure 87) the Horticultural Hall on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday (10am to 9pm), that this was a professional enterprise. In addition, “…an enormous number of people found themselves for the first time in the presence of craft and were unable to resist touching, sitting on and exclaiming about the things they were seeing. . . . their obvious delight was shared by the makers…” (Slade “Solid” 25).

Two newspaper articles highlighted the merits of studio furniture: 1) Ansley did a costing of comparable storage units at the commercial fair and the craft one. The prices were on a par (“Furniture?”); and 2) Colin Slade criticised the commercial display for lack of design flair and use of veneered manufactured boards rather than solid wood (“Canty”). E.L. Little, chairman of the organising committee for the Canterbury Furniture Show, did not respond to Slade’s remarks but said instead: “We get up to 30,000 people at our show each year so they are obviously satisfied by what they see here (“Canty”). At this time, studio furniture in the South Island was competing primarily with the Canterbury

---

28 A feature of the monthly Waikato Guild meetings is a display of members’ work and ‘critique’ by Fred Irvine, an accomplished turner and instructor at Waikato Institute of Technology. The membership relishes the praise and attention that their latest creations garner (Personal observation).

29 James Dowle, Ken Le Compte, David Putland, John Shaw, Colin Slade, David Thurston, Iain Wilkinson, Geoff Wright, Marc Zuckerman. Some of the men were members of the Canterbury Guild, while others were coralled by networking.

30 Anna Thomas, Caroline Fitzgerald, Sandalwood Design Studio.

31 An unrealistic estimate of $2,500 for advertising was adhered to thanks to the generosity of Jeanette Elliott whose enthusiasm for the project prompted the reduction of her publicity consultancy fee (Slade “Solid” 24).

32 The exhibition was described in Designscape (Buckenham), the national publication of the New Zealand Industrial Design Council, as an alternative to the “conventional mass-market furniture” shown at the Furniture Fair in the Town Hall. Bruce Ansley waxed lyrical: “This haven of rimu, beech, kauri, matai, elm, English cherry and red oak was unmatched by the display at the town hall, where the crowds, although larger, were respectful rather than reverent” (“Furniture?”).

33 The Canterbury Furniture Manufacturing Trade Show began in 1969 (Dean 14). For its fourth edition it moved from being distributed through several venues to being primarily at the new Christchurch Town Hall. In 1975 the entire exhibition was housed in the Town Hall (“Canterbury Furniture”). By 1979 the wares of 40 furniture vendors were shown in conjunction with upholstery fabrics (“Furniture 79”).
Furniture Manufacturers Federation, and Slade was reminding the public of previous criticisms of their Trade Show. In 1976 the New Zealand Industrial Design Council visited the Show to assess the design component of the wares on display. Its verdict was, “it is sadly evident that, apart from a few very fine exceptions, the designer is left out when it comes to furniture manufacture ("Industrial Design"). Décor, described as “the Official Journal of the New Zealand Furniture Manufacturers Federation,” responded:

To us, the arrogance and complete lack of knowledge and understanding displayed by the Industrial Design Council on this occasion was only a window on the Council’s basic unworthiness. We listened with interest to the tales told by several manufacturers of the
Council turning thumbs down on designs which later notched up huge sales at home and on export markets (K. King).

Kelvin King, Décor's editor, further suggested that the Industrial Design Council be axed as a government cost-saver for its "gross behaviour at the Canterbury Furniture Show," and added, "what we need is a forum for design improvement and product development, an undertaking that could involve industry at various levels without an overwhelming bureaucratic control system." He wanted an agency outside the Furniture Manufacturers Federation to take the initiative on design as long as interference with manufacturers was minimal. Seven years later, during Solid Wood, the manufacturers were still pleading that consumers lead market trends, and therefore design.34

In 1983, Little declared that one-off makers could not provide finance, had no venues to show their work, and had a five-year waiting list for delivery of work. Slade countered that his waiting list was one year. The 'lack of venue' was addressed when the participants at Solid Wood committed to a reprise the following year; a queue formed of potential future contributors. Although "the more original and exciting designs, while attracting much interest, were slower to sell" (Slade “Solid” 24), the exercise proved the value of the exhibition.

The Alternative Furniture Shows (the phrase “solid wood” was dropped to encompass other materials) occurred annually from 1983 to 1993. In a review of the 1985 exhibition, Noeline Brokenshire proposed that the Crafts Council or the QEII Arts Council consider funding a touring exhibition of selected pieces so that "all New Zealanders would be exposed to alternative designs and particularly to well-crafted furniture" (Brokenshire “Alternative ‘85” 22). Neither agency took up the challenge, but the Alternative organisers displayed twenty pieces from the 1986 show in Nelson, and in July 1989 mounted an edition called Quality by Design: the Best of New Zealand Designed Furniture at the Michael Fowler Centre in Wellington (“Roundup” 12). The Furniture Group, in place by this time, assisted with publicity. Dunedin saw an edition of the Show in March 1992 (Smith).

The quality varied and, as the shows went on, conservatism in design provoked criticism of the designation “alternative” (Brokenshire “Alternative ‘86”). Nevertheless the Alternative Furniture Show was significant for a number of reasons:

- commissions, either confirmed at the Show or due to contacts made there, provided revenue for makers;
- the Show brought the public's attention to the phenomenon of quality hand-crafted furniture in a familiar trade show format;35
- any reluctance to deal with an unknown person in a remote location was overcome by meeting the makers in their booths;
- the public was informed of the existence of makers who could design and construct bespoke furniture, an alternative to ready-made. Until July 1988, the New Zealand furniture industry enjoyed Government protection from imports (Shanahan 84), and often derived its designs by copying European36 styles (“Made” 153, 157). Studio furniture demonstrated itself to be a legitimate alternative to mass-manufactured or imported furniture;
- the repeating venue permitted makers to display developing designs and improving skills. For instance, David Haig's rocking chair evolved from a 1985 rendition (Figure 88);
- the Show inspired careers. Dag Guest, a Christchurch maker recalled:
  So I'd been looking around [for another job] anyway and we'd been to the first Alternative Furniture Show and found it really interesting and talked to people and thought maybe this

34 Further discussion of government and industry involvement in design appears later in this chapter.
35 In writing about the development of the Alternative Furniture Shows after three years’ running, Colin Slade noted: “. . . there is on my desk a letter from the editor of the British Woodworker congratulating us on our initiative and adding that nothing like the show has ever been attempted in the United Kingdom” (Slade “Development” 23).
36 “Very few manufacturers employ designers and not just because of cost. Many entered the furniture industry because of their own design aspirations. For some, inspiration comes from overseas exhibitions. A few also find inspiration in the work of New Zealand furniture designers in exhibitions such as ‘Framed’ (Wellington 1997)” (V. McLean 14).
is something I could do, not knowing anything about it. I was so busy with work and other things; I didn’t actually do anything about it until I gave up my job. . . . So I decided I’ll make furniture. I basically cleared a space in the garage and started making furniture. And I waited: the next Alternative Furniture Show was four months away so I went into that (Guest).

The last Alternative Furniture Show review appeared in *Craft New Zealand* in the Spring of 1992. Slade’s words were pessimistic. The 10th anniversary edition was described as “crisply designed” by Anna Thomas, who, like Slade, took part in the first, yet “the show’s content has not overall kept pace with its presentation” (Slade “Alternative”). The high point for the series was 1988, with twenty-two exhibitors “showing an excitingly wide variety of work.” This buoyancy coincided with the collegiality of the Furniture Group and the pivotal Contemporary Furniture Exhibition at the Auckland Museum (described below). 1992 saw only 12 participants, of whom two were new. Slade lamented that a large proportion of the work was “conventional” and “reproduction” thereby negating the Show’s title. With a few exceptions Slade summarised the work as “well made, well proportioned, but unremarkable.”

By 1992, the effects of import liberalisation were being felt. Four years earlier, the furniture community was reaping the rewards of its hard work to raise standards and convince the public of studio furniture’s worth. When protection for New Zealand-made goods was removed through economic and political decision-making, these achievements were undermined and the viability of handmade furniture became questionable. The last Alternative Furniture Show was staged in October 1993. Its reputation as a showcase for “fine individual craftsmanship” (Slade “Alternative”) did not diminish in its eleven years of existence. The other end of the spectrum, innovative furniture design, was served by Artiture in Auckland.

2. Artiture

The First Annual Artiture Exhibition took place in a “dilapidated old Queen Street building” (Cameron 14) in Auckland in 1987. The outré setting suited the aim of the organisers: “to design furniture that was art, not constricted by the necessity of the pieces having to be a commercial
proposition” (Cameron 14). Their inspiration was post-modernism and the Memphis Group, a collection of Italian furniture designers/makers who espoused the beliefs that furniture could be art, and design overruled traditional materials, forms and functions (Woodham 160-161). One piece epitomised the Auckland team’s intentions: Carin Wilson’s Royal Pain in the Arse Chair (Figure 89).

Wilson displayed three chairs in the first Artiture. Two were contemporary leather and timber chairs, demonstrating his woodworking skills, while Royal Pain was sculptural, humorous and imbued with narrative (page 147). By 1987 Wilson was living and working in Auckland amidst designers; he had travelled internationally on a study tour to look at craft education and as a Board Member of the World Crafts Council. In other words, he was aware of other modes of making and had moved away from the tradition-based aesthetic of his former Christchurch colleagues. Yet he was still capable of fulfilling commissions that demanded high-quality traditional craftsmanship.

Figure 89. Carin Wilson. Royal Pain in the Arse
The image appeared on the first page of an article about Artiture in New Zealand Crafts, Spring 1987. Royal Pain was described by Nanette Cameron as the “tour de force” of the exhibition (16). The photography for all but one of the published pieces was against the rumpled drapery seen here, negating the crispness and assertiveness of the furniture. This chair will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins thought highly of this chair and felt that the scale and quality of Wilson’s work “gave viewers much to think about” (At Home 264). But he discounted Wilson’s belief in ‘crafted’ work. Wilson’s advocacy of the connection between maker and product was regarded by Lloyd-Jenkins as passé: “It brought with it a certain romanticising of the crafts, in a decade that on the surface no longer believed in the power of such sentiments.” Despite Wilson’s endorsement of and capability with conceptually-based furniture, his philosophical stance was that craft goes hand-in-hand (pun intended) with what is made. Royal Pain was a marriage of craft and conceptual design.

Unlike the Alternative Furniture Shows (AFS), the first Artiture had few makers: the participants were primarily designers whose work was made by others. The second rendition, opening in June 1988 at the more upscale venue of the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga, included a few more makers, particularly members of an Auckland woodworking cooperative, City Workshops. City Workshops had its own retail outlet, on Karangahape Road (Grouden “Brian”), but participation in Artiture gave the makers exposure to a more diverse audience, and offered the audience the potential to buy a wider range of furniture.

37 Only one New Zealander, Jeremy Reynolds, fully adopted Memphis (Figure 90). His work was scorned by some in the furniture fraternity. In a Letter to the Editor of New Zealand Crafts Marc Zuckerman wrote: “It is embarrassing that this magazine promoting a high standard of craft in this country and sent to many foreign countries features such uncraftsman oriented furniture. I can understand an article of interest on this particular furniture maker but a full [colour] feature on him implies that he produces furniture with a high standard of craftsmanship and quality” (Zuckerman “Standards”).
38 Peter Rogers, metalworker and dealer in Art Deco and 50s furniture; Marilyn Sainty and Diana Firth, clothing designers; Jan Hewitt, architectural student; Mike Tree, furniture designer; Biz Dempster, watercolour artist; Paul van Omnen, photographer; Michael Glock, interior designer (Cameron 14).
Even so, sales did not match those for the South Island AFS. Peter Rogers declared that this was due to New Zealanders’ preference for imported items (Strever), although I would argue that furniture buyers could more readily imagine living with classic designs, like Colin Slade’s or David Haig’s, than with Greg Smith’s sculptural aluminium chair or Diana Firth’s garden ensemble (Figure 91). Furniture requires a considerable financial investment and a buyer assesses a new piece’s compatibility with what is already owned. Smith’s chair would not suit the majority of domestic environments, and Firth’s colourful and charming Bird Folly was just that: a “foolish and useless but expensive undertaking” (“Folly”).

The fifth Artiture (1991) was staged at the Auckland Institute and Museum, conferring it with a high profile and many viewers. It also had a commercial sponsor, Levene, whose financial assistance permitted publication of a catalogue (Figure 92) of the 30 juried pieces (Holder 52). The following year, selections from 1991, plus additions (Figure 93), toured six venues in five cities in Japan (Wilson “HB Furniture” 120). Wilson deemed this tour an opportunity for New Zealand to confirm itself as a supplier of “correctly designed” furniture and to build on the country’s image as “clean, green, and beautiful” (105). The Japanese tour was considered a bridge between the two countries. A timeline in The Crane and the Kotuku (Beatson 118-119) states that Artiture appeared in Japan at the invitation of Keiji Sugii after he had seen the 1990 exhibition in Auckland. Artiture was shown in Tokyo, Hamamatsu, Nagoya, Shizuoka and Kyoto. Haruhiko Sameshima photographed the work.
environmentally conscientious” (Wilson Fax). He speculated to his colleagues that Government should support private initiatives such as the Artiture tour; he also felt that New Zealand corporations (Air New Zealand, Bank of New Zealand) needed to be cognisant of presenting a unified design image to Japan, even in their office interiors. While one-off national endeavours such as Expo 70 in Osaka displayed New Zealand at its best, Wilson’s observations of corporate offices in Japan prompted his opinion that New Zealand design could be in place on a day-to-day basis. Wilson believed that design should stand alongside sports and primary products as ambassadors of New Zealand’s capabilities (Wilson Fax).

Artiture VI journeyed from its origin at the Auckland Museum to the Manawatu Art Gallery and Levene’s Lower Hutt Store (“HB furniture”). Reviews of the previous Artitures usually commended their innovation, “human interest” (Malcolm 48) and locally-made contemporary design. However, Artiture VI received critical commentary from Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins and G. Elliot Reid in Art New Zealand. The authors stated that the first exhibition produced a “sudden growth” in furniture designers whose every idea was gobbled up (67), but credited Artiture as being a vehicle for, rather than instigator of, change:

Between its first and sixth outings Artiture has witnessed (but not always participated in) a significant growth in New Zealand’s design literacy, initiated in part by the availability of design publications and a growth in design-based (often locally sourced) retail concerns. The period saw the designer-as-commodity replace the designer-as-production tool—a change wholeheartedly embraced by design-educators, who abandoned industry-based training in favour of art-based conceptualization (Lloyd-Jenkins and Reid 67).

The authors were saying that by the sixth rendition, Artiture was, like the Alternative Furniture Show, getting stale. In 1987, just before New Zealand markets were opened to imports, the furniture at Artiture I was ‘awe-some.’ Five years later the “design literacy” mentioned above was due to the presence of design from overseas, seen in magazines and stores, and the change in education described by Lloyd-Jenkins and Reid: the designer-as-production tool—that is, craft—was replaced by the designer-as-commodity—product or industrial design. The few design critics who engaged in commentary highlighted the dichotomy, exacerbating the split between craftspeople and designers.
The Art New Zealand review also censured the exhibition: the inclusion of “designer miscellanea” (lifestyle accessories) was thought too commercial; the use of expensive materials by one designer produced the adjectives “reactionary, excessive and irresponsible” (Lloyd-Jenkins and Reid 68); appropriation of a Māori name was deemed unthinking and redundant; and the designers’ failure to engage manufacturers in design possibilities was considered a lost opportunity. The criticisms were valid and represented the kind of rap-on-the-knuckles that was needed in order that craft and design mature. Nevertheless, Artiture was credited with being “the only national gathering of this type” (Lloyd-Jenkins and Reid 69). In 1994, when the original convenors including Carin Wilson called it quits, no individual or team came forward to produce a substitute (Schamroth “After” 42).

A comparison of the Alternative Furniture Show (AFS) and Artiture is revealing. The AFS was almost solely wood whereas Artiture showed varied materials—metal, glass, clay tiles, fibreglass, plastic. The AFS was set up as a trade show and Artiture was modelled as an art exhibition, thereby creating contradictory juxtapositions: craft was marketed in an industry/trade show format and design was marketed in an art show format, whereas the reverse is more compatible. The AFS catered to designer/makers; Artiture demonstrated how designers, with the assistance of industry, could produce slick prototypes for urban design. In summary, the shows opposed each other, a healthy happenstance for studio furniture because the range of aesthetic possibilities was broadened and knowledge transfer amongst makers and with the public could occur. At the same time, the shows’ differences represented the two camps into which furniture fell.

Those producing for the Alternative Furniture Shows esteemed craftsmanship, self-generated quality and integration of the functions of designing and making: they were self-employed, maintaining control over their goods and how they were made. In others words, they exemplified the John Ruskin/William Morris ideology of man’s connection with his labour. Those producing for Artiture valued design. They certainly wanted their designs to be as well manufactured as possible, when and if they got to the manufacturing stage, but their reliance on mass-production tooling and processes ensured what David Pye called “the workmanship of certainty”: each rendition is perfect and the same. In the meantime, Artiture was a showplace for ideas, that were individually prototyped, in order to encourage development by the furniture industry. With respect to the definition of studio furniture, all the AFS participants fit the parameters, albeit with an absence of conceptual content, whereas Artiture participants, being reliant on others to realise their designs, fell outside the adopted definition. Referring back to Lloyd-Jenkins and Reid, the designer-as-commodity who is at arms’ length from making is not a studio furniture maker.

In the final incarnations of the AFS and Artiture the “edge” was gone from each. Slade put it this way: “... if both these shows are disappearing in opposite directions, one must wonder what the future holds for the presentation and consequent survival of the mainstream furniture movement” (Slade “Alternative”). Slade’s “opposite directions” referred to well-produced but stylistically-conservative furniture on the one hand and innovative designs with potential industrial production on the other. But the survival of the furniture movement had an additional concern: a nation-wide economic recession at

---

40 The dearth of knowledgeable and articulate craft critics in New Zealand, as well as the reluctance to write negatively about fellow-members of a small community, means that constructive criticism rarely appears. In his column in The New Zealand Woodworker in 1988, Colin Slade wrote: “The professional wood movement is pretty small in this country and therefore quite intimate. ... Selected exhibitions tend to be judged by people who are familiar with much of the work they are looking at and who are often friends of the maker. This is very civilised of course, but it does make tough objective criticism difficult if not scarce” (Slade “Letter” Dec. 1988).

41 Pye distinguished the workmanship of certainty from the workmanship of risk. The latter is defined as: “the result of every operation during production is determined by the workman as he works and its outcome depends wholly or largely on his care, judgment and dexterity” (52).

42 Dr Alan Bollard addressed the Property Council of New Zealand in 2004: “The bubble burst in late 1987 when the US share market crashed. It suddenly became obvious that asset prices had been out of line with economic fundamentals. We had witnessed a sustained period of misplaced investment, with the returns from this investment proving to be low. ... The consequences for New Zealand were serious. Some companies went bankrupt and the economy went into a recession. It didn’t recover from this recession until 1992. In terms of the loss of output relative to potential output, this recession was probably New Zealand’s second worst of the twentieth century” (Bollard).
the time affected all discretionary spending. One of the eternal perils for studio furniture is that its purchase, except by collectors for whom money is no object, is forgone in periods of financial stress.

3. **The New Zealand Contemporary Furniture Exhibition**

![Catalogue Cover, New Zealand Contemporary Furniture Exhibition](image)

Figure 94. Catalogue Cover, New Zealand Contemporary Furniture Exhibition

The Contemporary Furniture Exhibition and Framed (described in the next section) were displays in which the opposite furniture camps—designer/makers and designers—rubbed up against each other. The first, the New Zealand Contemporary Furniture Exhibition (Figure 94), was announced in June 1988 by means of an entry form on the inside front cover of The New Zealand Woodworker. The Auckland Institute and Museum, in conjunction with New Zealand Home & Building, invited designers and furniture makers “in all disciplines, working in all media” (Auckland Institute Announcement) to participate in “the premier showcase in 1988 for new furniture designed and made in New Zealand.” The judge was to be “a prominent New Zealand authority on design,” and would base his selections on their “originality of design and skill of execution.” Work (a single entry per participant) was to be delivered to the Museum in late August for exhibition from 2 to 18 September. Justine Olsen, the Curator of Applied Arts at the Museum, could not have anticipated the furore that this tight, sedate brief eventually generated.

The Furniture Group identified exhibitions as one of its mandates (page 97), and the Group joined forces with the Auckland Museum and Olsen to conceptualise and facilitate this exhibition. The initial response was enthusiastic, with over ninety expressions of interest (McCarthy 116). In the end, seventy-five entries were shipped to Auckland, but only twenty-four were deemed to have met the criteria by the judge, George Ingham, from Canberra (Olsen “New” 8). The appointment of Ingham, the Head of the Wood Workshop at the Canberra School of Art whose career encompassed decades of furniture-making, was a wise one in light of the potential bias of a New Zealander, but the notice that the judge was not a New Zealander came in a Press Release dated 9 August (“Exhibitions” NZ Woodworker 15).

Ingham’s exclusion of works by prominent designers and makers such as Remi Couriard, Peter Rogers, Richard Priest, Marilyn Sainty, and Carin Wilson (P. Shaw 228; Wilson “But” 13) sent shock waves through the furniture community and prompted a hastily assembled salon des refusés at the Gow Langsford Gallery. This salon, initially endorsed by Ingham and the Museum to permit the public to judge for itself, became suspect because it was not limited to the rejected work nor was the work in the same state as when it was judged (Olsen “New” 8). Nevertheless, the resulting publicity was better than money could buy.

Amongst the selected entries for the Museum display, which satisfied three criteria—quality, innovation and function (McCarthy)—were those by Furniture Group members: Dawn, Dowle, Haig,

43 Later information added support from the QEI Arts Council (“Exhibitions” NZ Woodworker 15).
44 An Auckland Museum Archives list has names and addresses of 93 “Entrants” (“New Zealand Contemporary”).
45 According to Olsen, some pieces had been improved (Olsen “New” 8).
Ikin, Maclean, Matthews, Mulvay, Shaw, Slade, Trubridge, Zuckerman (Furniture Group). This was confirmation of the standards of the Group. The materials in the Contemporary Furniture Exhibition ranged from pressed pineboard to corrugated iron, steel and glass (Figure 95).

Trubridge's Occasional Chair (Figure 95), purchased by the Museum (Olsen “Auckland”), employed kauri, rosewood and tubular steel. Justine Olsen, writing about the purchase, commended its economy of design, New Zealand geographic reference, and selection of materials. She further stated: "Trubridge’s move from creating furniture which is foremostly practical to work in which design is the major consideration is important, for it reflects a developing trend in New Zealand. An increasing interest has occurred in furniture design by people from outside the traditional cabinet-making fields” (Olsen “Auckland”). The New Zealand Woodworker did not publish the last sentence of Olsen’s letter: “Architects, artists, fashion designers have contributed to the exhibition scene spearheading the design consciousness” (Olsen Letter 16 Nov. 1988). Her comment harkens back to design-as-commodity but Ingham was not influenced by any perceived design consciousness. His criteria were quality-oriented:

---

46 Furniture Group membership as of March 1988; Putland, Thiele and Siebertz were identified as future members. The full list of 24 exhibitors: Vic Albon, Kevin Carrucan, Ian Dawn, James Dowle, Diana Firth (with maker Bryan Heighton), David Haig, Gary Hunt, Humphrey Ikin, Michael McDonald, Peter Maclean, Vic Matthews, Roger Mulvay, Roman Novak, David Putland, Stephane Rondel, John Shaw, Roland Siebertz, Colin Slade, Peter Sullivan, Jürgen Thiele, David Trubridge, Toni Watkins, Martin Wenzel, and Marc Zuckerman (Auckland Institute News).

George Ingham, schooled in industrial and craft furniture design consciously selected on the grounds of design quality, function, technical ability and finally quality of production. The exhibition did not intend to perpetuate the craft approach and I seriously believe it didn’t. There was a predominance of craft furniture in the exhibition merely because some of the finest furniture makers in the country work in wood. The industrial prototype was as important to feature as the crafted work (Olsen Letter 11 Jan. 1989).48

Carin Wilson, whose *Lair for a Lounge Lizard* (Figure 96) was rejected, used one word to describe the *Contemporary Furniture Exhibition*: “safe” (Wilson “But” 14). In a vitriolic essay,49 he articulated his belief that George Ingham had erred on the side of “good craftsmanship and the noble tradition of handwork” instead of championing creativity. What Wilson thought New Zealand needed instead was “a full-on, no-limits, go-get-em overdose of indulgent creativity. Forget the method and tie it together with string if that works for you” (Wilson “But” 14).50 Not surprisingly, he preferred the Gow Langsford display: it was “more colourful and stretched the regular perceptions about furniture to a greater extent. There was more humour about it, and a greater inclination to play with ideas at the risk of functionality. Method and resolution gave way to inspiration and innovation” (Wilson “But” 15). On the other hand, Peter Shaw writing in *Metro* called the *salon des refusés* “a dispiriting collection of largely ill-finished and quirky pieces” (P. Shaw 228).

Wilson’s pique can be partially explained by the rejection of *Lounge Lizard*, a piece which represented a philosophical epiphany (described in the next chapter). At the same time his remarks about the need for more creative design, especially directed towards the woodworking contingent, were justified. James Krenov and Alan Peters had admonished woodworkers to improve design; in the four years since their visits, there was minimal advance in the design component of hand-crafted furniture. Wilson had a foot in both the traditional and designer furniture camps. He had acquitted himself as a woodworker by being selected from amongst his peers for the commission for a boardroom table and chairs for the QEI1 Arts Council in 1985 (Mulvay). Yet he also championed design and the need for its

---

48 Olsen was responding to Trubridge’s letter of 3 Jan. 1989 in which he stated that there was “far too much emphasis on craftsmanship and ‘wood reverence’ (the Krenov legacy). The design has mattered far less than these things – all of which leads to rather stuffy, unimaginative and very meticulous woodwork.” He asked if the *Contemporary Furniture Exhibition* “perpetuated this approach” (Trubridge Letter).

49 TVNZ devoted a portion of its *Weekend* programme to the “rejects” and Wilson took over one *Kaleidoscope* episode to elaborate on his views (Slade “Function” 39).

50 During a 2008 interview, Colin Slade recalled Wilson’s “tie it together with string” comment. The phrase must have been considerably bandied about to have been remembered intact (Slade Personal 2008).
progress in New Zealand. Wilson’s role as provocateur was not appreciated by some51 but he was not
deterred, and was partially vindicated when Artiture made several appearances at the Auckland Institute
and Museum, beginning in 1991. By then, the methods that represented the creativity of the designers
had been honed.

Colin Slade summed up the importance of both the Contemporary Furniture and Gow Langsford shows:

. . . on the one hand is the art world which refuses to admit the craft of furniture as a
discipline worthy of respect, and on the other hand is the industry with too few examples of
fine art furniture to be inspired by, and a strong consumer profit motive to deter it from
being so inspired. It’s a wonder that there is any furniture of individual merit being
produced in this country, and the fact that there is is a credit to the perseverance and
dedication of the small band of people in that movement (Slade “If It’s Craft” 12).

Slade identified the two camps I mentioned earlier: craft, and what he called “fine art furniture.”
Because he connected fine art furniture with industry, he meant experimental furniture designed for
production. He acknowledged the need for both, and was generous in his comments, given that the
“fine art furniture” he referred to was found wanting. Yet the rift between the camps existed then and has
remained because of the disregard for crafted furniture. The unworthiness of crafted furniture is
epitomised in two texts which claim to be histories of New Zealand design. Except for mention of Carin
Wilson, Humphrey Ikin and David Trubridge, studio furniture is absent from Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins’ At
Home and Michael Smythe’s New Zealand by Design, both of which concentrate on the “metropolitan
elite of designers” (C. Thompson “Confronting” 203).

In a letter to James Dowle, in his capacity as President of the Furniture Group, Olsen provided the
income and expenditure for the Exhibition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td>$9,452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses absorbed by Auckland Museum</td>
<td>14,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$23,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income: QEII Arts Council Grant</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ Home &amp; Building – advertising, publicity, artwork, loan of display fixtures</td>
<td>no cost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She projected that a similar 1990 exhibition could not be sponsored for less than $50,000 (Olsen Letter
14 Feb. 1989). There was no repeat of the Contemporary Furniture Exhibition.

4. The Human Touch

Chapter 2 outlined the controversy that followed the Craft Council’s implementation of the Index
of New Zealand Craftworkers. The Index was a juried selection of the best crafts-men and -women, in
all media; its purpose was to facilitate queries from a national and international audience about quality
New Zealand crafts. Artists assigned to the Index between 1987 and 1990 were chosen by means of
slides of current work submitted with their applications. The Index was, therefore, a filing cabinet
drawer of those slides, along with contact information, in the Crafts Council of New Zealand offices in
Wellington. The first Index nominees included five furniture makers: Humphrey Ikin, Vic Matthews, John
Shaw, Colin Slade and Marc Zuckerman. Subsequent Indexes added other furniture makers: in 1989
Carewood (Jürgen Thiele and Martin Wenzel), James Dowle and David Haig were appended (“Index”);
in 1990 Kazu Nakagawa and David Trubridge (“Crafts Index”) were named.

The Human Touch was a way to make visible the work of those selected for the Index. It was held
at the Bath House in Rotorua, 3 November 1989 to 29 January 1990 (“Human”). John F. Perry, Director
of the Bath House, commented on the significance of Human Touch: “It represents for the new
institution a degree of professionalism not seen in an in-house exhibition before. The catalogue and the
promotion material produced is our most adventurous to date. The movement into the stimulating arena

51 In a post-Contemporary Furniture letter to Justine Olsen, George Ingham stated, “I’m only sorry we could not be
there to take on Mr Wilson and his supporters. I would love to lock horns with that bloke (perhaps some time in the
near future).”
of New Zealand craft (one of the most dynamic and exploding facets of our cultural fabric) is a new
departure for our institution” (Perry). It was therefore appropriate that the Index, symbolic of
professionalism, be shown in a venue that was striving for that standard.

Paula Savage, the Exhibition Coordinator, delineated the “international” criteria by which the work
had been judged: “originality, innovation and inspiration, sensitivity and mastery in the use of chosen
materials and the creation of work of consistently high standard” (Savage “Contemporary”). She stated
that Human Touch was aimed at government, corporations, overseas visitors, craftspeople and the New
Zealand public. The opening for Human Touch coincided with the CCNZ Annual General Meeting
(Slade “Crafts” 35), which meant that craftspeople in attendance viewed the exhibition. However,
Rotorua’s out-of-the-way location, rather than Auckland or Wellington, limited the number of visitors to
what was described as “an articulate expression of the aesthetic and social heritage of New
Zealand” (Savage “Contemporary”).

The furniture consisted of a chair and writing case by James Dowle (Figure 97); a pair of chairs
and a music stand by Vic Matthews; a bench, armchair, and sidetable by Humphrey Ikin; a cabinet by
John Shaw; and a chair and pair of stools by Colin Slade (Figure 199). A price list was included with the
catalogue. Amy Brown,52 in her review of the exhibition, was critical: “In wood, I admired James
Dowle’s Writing Case and John Shaw’s Warratah [sic] Cabinet which I found charming – otherwise the
woodwork didn’t do much for me, excepting Jack Hazlett’s [turning].” Referring to the entire display, she
added, “If I have a major criticism it is that so much of this work is so predictable. There’s no magic, no
fire and while it is more than competently executed there is no soul in the work” (Brown 11).

Another major criticism was that no Māori crafts were included, a notable absence given that
Rotorua is the home of Te Puia, the national Māori carving and weaving schools. However, since
craftspeople had to apply for selection to the Index, the missing practitioners—both Māori and Pākehā—
were explained by their failure to seek recognition. Brown hints that there were reasons why Māori did
not apply but does not elaborate; Jenny Patrrick, then Chair of the QEII Arts Council, and author of an
essay in The Human Touch catalogue, stated that “a way must be found to include” Māori and
Polynesian craft artists (Patrrick “Who” 10). While the absence of Māori crafts was a serious
shortcoming, I would argue that a selection process that entailed application and review was egalitarian;
the inclusion of craftspeople who did not follow that route would have further alienated CCNZ members
who already resented the elitist Index.

52 Brown (1940-1996) was an author and playwright with particular interests in Māori arts and fibre.
Patrick's essay constituted an analysis of the then-existing Index list. It contained 38 men and 26 women which, as Patrick pointed out, contradicts the usual predominance of women in crafts. She wondered whether men are more forthright in putting themselves forward. Most of the practitioners were full-time. Ceramics had almost equal numbers of men and women but that was the only medium in which there was parity. She made special note of the gender imbalance in wood:

...this is the second biggest section with 13 members on the Index. Perhaps woodworkers are more organised than most and have submitted work for selection more readily; perhaps woodworkers are riding a high at the moment and are encouraging each other into higher standards. This does happen from time to time within a craft discipline. Where are the women though? Perhaps we are being influenced by Maori custom which forbids a woman to be a carver. In the ceramic field women have proved that they can hump clay and fire a kiln with the strongest of men. ... So it shouldn't be lack of ability in the machinery or muscle area that keeps women out of woodworking. A couple of generations back, my great aunts carved wooden chairs and table tops and picture frames along with many other accomplished young ladies. Perhaps the cycle will turn and women will invade the furniture and carving world again.

Patrick was not saying anything new nor did she suggest the Craft Design programmes as an opportunity to affect the imbalance. She continued her essay by discussing the geographic distribution of Index practitioners, noting that Christchurch was a woodworking centre, Nelson a ceramics centre and Auckland had concentrations of jewellery and glass. As for age and training, Patrick stated that the majority were in their forties and fifties and, because many were self-taught, it stood to reason that it would take years to develop a high-quality portfolio to submit for the Index. It was at this stage of her essay that she mentioned the forthcoming graduates of the Diploma in Craft Design and their ability, being younger, to shift the demographics of the craft profession. Patrick speculated that this cohort might also inspire the “self-taught oldies” to rekindle the magic and fire that Brown thought was absent from The Human Touch.

The CCNZ’s successor, the Arts Marketing Board of Aotearoa New Zealand (AMBA), published Icons of New Zealand: Contemporary Craft & Retail Outlets in 1994 (see Figure 61), an effort similar to the Index of New Zealand Craftworkers. A selection panel and review process decided who would be included in Icons (Wilson “Re: Exhibition”). As a marketer of all visual arts, AMBA addressed Pākehā and Māori crafts by publishing separate booklets for each. Like the CCNZ, AMBA identified ten furniture makers as icons, although they were not the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Icons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Dowle</td>
<td>François Aries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Haig</td>
<td>Greg Bloomfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humphrey Ikin</td>
<td>Jim Grimmett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic Matthews</td>
<td>David Haig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazu Nakagawa</td>
<td>Humphrey Ikin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Shaw</td>
<td>Vic Matthews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Slade</td>
<td>Kazu Nakagawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jürgen Thiele</td>
<td>David Trubridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Trubridge</td>
<td>Carin Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc Zuckerman</td>
<td>Marc Zuckerman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By this stage Dowle and Slade were not making furniture; François Aries immigrated to New Zealand in 1986 (Aries) and Greg Bloomfield had returned from the United States. Jimu (officially Jim) Grimmett

---

53 Patrick refers to the women’s carving that began this chapter.
54 Maori Art: a Buyer’s Guide was the companion to Icons of New Zealand. The concept that Pākehā craftspeople were “icons” while Māori were commodity suppliers is an unfortunate cultural faux pas from an organisation whose board contained two media/marketing “experts”: Albert Stafford and Ian Fraser (“Introducing the Board”). The complete list of board members is cited on page 72: footnote 65.
had been making furniture in Nelson since 1975. Whether Index or Icons, identification of ‘the best’ studio furniture brought continuing recognition to the medium and makers.

5. **Framed: A Studio Furniture Survey 1997**

*Framed* (Figure 98) was an initiative of the Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt where it was on display from 5 April until 2 July. This national show, inviting makers to create new work (Ikin “Curators”), moved to the Waikato Museum of Art and History from 9 August to 21 September. Humphrey Ikin and Carin Wilson acted as co-curators. Bob Maysmor, Director of the Dowse, noted in his Introduction to the catalogue that there had been increasing interest in furniture design in New Zealand in the last two decades. He mentioned the Nelson polytechnic course in furniture and affirmed this asset: “studio furniture in this country has the further potential to raise its profile and be stimulated by a new generation of designer/artists entering the field” (Maysmor “Introduction”). The Nelson programme ceased in 2002.

Ikin's catalogue essay described how he and Wilson were overwhelmed by the number and diversity of entries. As a result, *Framed* was a survey of studio furniture at that time:

> So the exhibition became, in effect, a slice through to highlight this cross-section: the work of younger designers who had not exhibited previously, alongside the not so young; experienced practitioners beside recent design graduates. There are those for whom making all their own work is an essential part of both the process and the result, and those who always prefer to utilise the production skills of others. There are pieces which are clearly “one-off”, for reasons of both idea and means, with those for which there is the intent and real possibility of considerable ongoing production, and finally there are pieces which use “furniture” more as subject-matter than outcome, alongside the most pragmatic by choice (Ikin “Curators”).

There were twenty-three exhibitors and a diversity of materials on display including aluminium sheet, medium-density fibreboard, steel, rattan, glass bricks and various hard- and soft-woods. The work could collectively be described as high tech, industrial, minimalist and contemporary. *Framed* was a

---

Figure 98. *Framed: A Studio Furniture Survey 1997*

Christopher Grattan’s chair of laminated plywood and aluminium tube appears on the catalogue cover. Grattan earned a degree in three-‐dimensional design from Unitec in Auckland in 1996 (Dowse 52).

Figure 99. *Weyerhaeuser Studio Furniture Awards, 2000*

Weyerhaeuser’s motivation in sponsoring the awards was to demonstrate the potential value that could be added to timber grown and processed nationally, especially *pinus radiata* (“Art of Fine”).

---

55 Greg Bloomfield, Mark Brunton, John Calvert, Adrian Cooling, Chiara Corbelletto, Michael Draper, Edward Fuller, Christopher Grattan, David Haig, Megan Huffadine, Gary Hunt, Tim Larkin, Vic Matthews, Tim Miller, Kazu Nakagawa, Joanne Oliver, John Shaw, Shelley Stuart, David Trubridge, Katy Wallace, Tanya Wilkinson, Peter Young, Marc Zuckerman (Dowse 52-53). Of the women, Corbelletto and Huffadine are sculptors; Oliver, Wallace and Wilkinson were Bachelor of Design students or recent graduates.
snapshot, chosen by Ikin and Wilson, of New Zealand studio furniture in 1997, but its all-inclusive nature did not sit well with some of the makers.

Amongst the artists’ files in the archives of the Crafts Council are three “Open Letters,” from David Haig, Tim Miller, and David Trubridge whose work was part of the display. They were in response to a letter from Carin Wilson that followed a Forum held in conjunction with Framed. The Forum was an attempt by makers to find some cohesion. Haig stated that he felt no affinity with the industrial design on display: “I personally feel I have much more in common with craft-artists in completely different media, than with many of those whose work is represented in ‘Framed’. I’m certainly not saying that this work has no validity, simply that I cannot see the common interest or relevance with my own work” (Haig Open). David Trubridge countered Wilson’s accusation that “fragile egos and insecure individuals, too unsure of the products of their passion and . . . too disinterested in the successes of their colleagues” were the explanation for “‘loose, sloppy and chaotic’” (Wilson Open) relations amongst the makers. Trubridge was of the opinion that the problem wasn’t apathy but “diversity. There isn’t enough common ground. We are all coming from different directions with totally different agendas” (Trubridge Another Open).

Tim Miller,56 who could be described as representative of industrial design wrote: “Things have changed in the last ten years. . . . In my view a new breed of furniture makers has emerged. They are trained as designers and as designers they explore a far wider range of materials expressing their inherent qualities and combinations to achieve the best unique effects. Many ‘designed’ pieces of furniture are still made in small workshops and in small batches” (T. Miller Open). He summarised the polarity: “There are two types of furniture makers. One is a designer maker and the other is the artist crafts person. . . . In my view, this is where the problem lies and was the source for the conflict of opinion at the forum.” These letters highlight the rift between the studio furniture makers, as defined in this thesis, and those trained in design who applied their skills to furniture. Although what they made was the same, how they made it was different. Wilson and Ikin’s attempt to celebrate the diversity in Framed, in fact, juxtaposed difference. The Contemporary Furniture Show was a synopsis of studio furniture in 1988; Framed represented the state of affairs ten years later, as a consequence of the advent of design education.

6. Nelson Furniture Exhibitions

Phil Osborne, who studied under John Shaw at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology, inaugurated biennial furniture exhibitions at the Bishop Suter Gallery in Nelson. Working as a freelance curator, Osborne invited makers to contribute to the first, Movement, in 1996; from the second, Gathering Momentum, in 1998, through to the fifth in 2004, selection was undertaken by two judges:57 one a furniture maker and a second from an art/craft/design discipline (Osborne Personal 2).

The Exhibitions were a showcase for the work of the Nelson Furniture Collective. The Collective was formed in February 1998 in order to formalise the association of makers that appeared in Movement two years previously. By September 1998, 45 designers and furniture makers, formerly or presently living in Nelson, were members. The Collective’s spokesperson, David Haig, said its aim was “to support existing and emerging furniture artists and promote Nelson as a centre of excellence for high quality and innovative furniture design” (“Furniture Makers”). Gathering Momentum was the Collective’s first public display of work.

In 2000 and 2002 Osborne was able to procure the sponsorship (Figure 99) of Weyerhaeuser New Zealand, Inc., an American company that managed pine forests in the Nelson/Marlborough area. The company contributed a Pine Award and the Overall Award, and there were smaller sponsors58 for the

56 Miller studied at Rycotewood College, as did John Shaw, and emigrated to New Zealand in 1994 to teach Industrial Design (Dowse, inside back cover).
58 For instance, in 2000: Arts Council Nelson for the Craft Art Section; Paratiho Farms for the One-Off Section; Wilkins and Field for the Batch Production Section; NMIT for the Student Section (Suter 2000 3).
winners in other categories. Each exhibition from 1996 to 2002 had a catalogue with a thematic essay by a prominent designer, craftsperson or critic;59 the latter two publications evolved from a large tabloid format to more compact booklets. Photos of the makers and their furniture, with a brief artist statement, made the exhibitions user-accessible and reflective of Nelson’s community environment.

The Weyerhaeuser Awards brought the Nelson Furniture Collective together not only on Opening Night but in organising the events over an eighteen-month period; they gave makers incentive to produce new work and informed the public of furniture’s presence in the neighbourhood. In 2002 a Student Section was dispensed with because the NMIT programme in furniture had closed. Osborne hoped that this would only be a temporary situation, as he acknowledged: “students bring new ideas and energy and are the next generation of furniture designer/makers” (Osborne “Introduction” 4).

Homegrown: Looking at Contemporary Furniture, the final of the series in 2004-05, had no sponsor and therefore no catalogue (Osborne “Re: Furniture” 2009). Nevertheless, Peter Gibbs described it as “a well-balanced exhibition of extraordinarily high quality” (“Leading-edge”). As will be seen in the next section, under ‘Woodwork Education in Nelson,’ Osborne’s biennial curatorship was reconstituted as an annual show in Nelson beginning in 2007.

7. Kawerau Woodskills Festival

Kawerau, situated in the Bay of Plenty near the Kaingaroa Forest, was established in 1953 as a mill town (Kawerau). Initially operating under the name Tasman Pulp & Paper Company,60 the town’s primary employer is devoted to sawmilling, pulp and papermaking. The existence of Kawerau is a consequence of governmental decisions in the late 1940s regarding the advent of a pulp and paper industry using national exotic forest plantings. Lacking the financial means to engage in the activity itself, government put the proposal to tender (Roche 300) and negotiated with Tasman to enable a scheme. When the plants were operational Tasman used subsidised (316) *pinus radiata* pulp logs to foster a private enterprise aimed primarily at export.

In 1981 Tasman Pulp and Paper was incorporated into Fletcher Challenge, a company that expanded its interests into Canada and Chile by the mid 1980s (Roche 364-365). Although the company diversified so that by 1985 only 23% of its group earnings came from pulp and paper (Roche 365), Fletcher Challenge invested $120 million in upgrading the Kawerau plant to improve the quality of its newsprint and make its pulp price internationally competitive. Improved technology provoked an announcement of 500 redundancies in the existing workforce. The Northern Pulp and Paper Workers’ Federation called a strike beginning on 17 July 1986. The walkout lasted for 10 weeks, and although the workforce received some concessions, it was a victory for Fletcher Challenge’s aims to bring New Zealand labour in line with overseas competitors. As Roche noted, “corporate objectives such as profitability, growth and expansion predominate[d] in industrial forestry” (441).

Kawerau is a product of the evolution of forestry in New Zealand in the latter half of the twentieth century. The system changed from one of state forest management to the dominance of private- and primarily foreign-owned companies. In 1987, due in part to the all-encompassing liberalisation of New Zealand’s economy, the national agencies formerly charged with oversight of forests were re-structured into three new branches: the Department of Conservation (DOC), the Ministry of Forests, and the Forestry Corporation (Roche 383). DOC took up the non-commercial aspects of forestry; the Ministry oversaw the contextual (research and advice) and regulatory functions; and the Forestry Corporation61 administered production and processing. The creation of DOC was in response to public concerns about management of indigenous forests, and the use of forests for leisure and recreation.

60 It is now Norske Skog Tasman/Carter Holt Harvey (Kawerau).
61 Two subsidiary companies were created to maximise returns: New Zealand Timberlands Limited was devoted to wood sales and Prolog Industries Limited addressed itself to processing (Roche 384). Mention of Prolog was made in the caption for Figure 84 in this chapter.
The Kawerau Woodskills Festival began in 1989 as a regional event; it became the National Woodskills Festival in 1991. Its announcement in The New Zealand Woodworker (“New national”), with an offering of $10,000 in prize money for competitions in “all of the woodworking disciplines,” delineated the categories as carving, ethnic carving, wood turning, jewellery, toy making, furniture and cabinet making, marquetry, fretwork, wood building design, and chainsaw carving. It survives as a gathering for woodworkers, especially turners and carvers, as of the time of writing. And with the advent of the furniture programme at the Universal College of Learning (UCOL) in Palmerston North in 1997 and the opening of the Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson in 2005 (to be discussed in the next section), the Kawerau event became an important venue for students to show their work (Figure 100).

The National Radiata Award, which solicited entries for the first time in 1989, became part of the Woodskills Festival in 1991. Initiated by The New Zealand Woodworker and Forest Research Institute, the prize of $5,000 was awarded to a submission that “enhance[d] the image of Pinus radiata” (“National” 1989). The call for entries went on to state that the winning entry “will be used to promote the use of radiata within New Zealand and overseas. It will demonstrate good design, appropriateness of use and will probably be original in conception” (“National” 1989, my italics). This statement suggests that originality was not a significant criterion in judging; the award, with emphasis placed on promoting appropriate use of the material. While the concept of assessing ‘good design’ without regard to originality seems paradoxical, the disclaimer about originality avoided potential questions concerning copying or reproduction.

Winners were chosen by means of a reproduction (colour photograph, slide or transparency) (“National” 1989), and David Trubridge won in 1989 with a sun-seat and table (“National” 1990). By 1994 the sponsorship changed hands—it was now Tasman Forestry Radiata Pine Furniture Design Awards and New Zealand Home & Building—and Trubridge’s Hornpipe (Figure 101) took the Grand Award as well as topping the Innovative Use category (“Not” 153). Kawerau Woodskills Festival still has a competition category for pinus radiata but it is not dedicated exclusively to furniture.

Figure 100. Student Prizewinners at National Woodskills Festival
Richard Morris, Occasional Table. Black poplar, swamp rimu (left). Morris studied at UCOL. First Prize, Furniture Section 2007 (“Perfection”).
Adam Webb, Hall Table. American cherry, American maple. Webb, from the Centre for Fine Woodworking, won First Prize, Furniture Section 2009 (Centre “Newsletter” Nov. 2009).

Figure 101. David Trubridge, Hornpipe Bench. Pine (lower right)
David Trubridge came to New Zealand in 1985; he had been a recognised furniture maker in England and took up the practice here. Hornpipe is an example of his handcrafted work. In 2000 he produced his first Body Raft and took it to the Milan Furniture Fair. Since then he has eschewed studio furniture and concentrated on designing and manufacturing furniture and light fittings.

62 The judges were Dr John Kininmonth, Regional Director of Research, Ministry of Forestry Research Institute, Rotorua; Mark Pennington, Senior Tutor, School of Design, Wellington Polytechnic; and Malcolm Macpherson, Editor, The New Zealand Woodworker (“National” 1990).
8. Galleries

The exhibitions above occurred because of dedicated individuals or groups. They required a seminal idea, rallying of participants, searches for funding, informing the media, setting up displays and on-site attendance, plus making the work itself. A craft practice such as furniture-making is physically and mentally exhausting; the additional tasks of marketing and promoting one’s wares become onerous when the maker is trying to earn a living. Although galleries and organisations such as the Crafts Council took a commission on sales, the benefit of removing exhibition facilitation from the makers’ shoulders was equitable compensation.

There were a number of galleries throughout the country that regularly showed studio furniture. These venues required adequate space to display large pieces and a willingness to give floor area to goods that were not an ‘easy sell.’ Furniture frequently takes months of exhibition before a customer makes the commitment to its purchase; some retailers don’t have the patience or cannot afford the delay. Below is a record of the prominent venues. Some were mainly devoted to the exhibition and sale of painting and sculpture and showed furniture when the market was buoyant. Also included are public venues, some of which have been named previously, that held solo or group furniture shows. A complete listing of furniture exhibitions is documented in Appendix 7.

Dunedin

The Dunedin Chapter of the CCNZ had two gallery incarnations: Carnegie Centre, Moray Place (“In Touch” (11) 21); and the Otago Museum from September 1989 (K. Thompson 22).

Christchurch

- The Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) was established in 1880 in Christchurch and had its own premises beginning in 1889. It held exhibitions of local and international artists and taught classes. From the mid 1960s craft exhibitions (Figure 102) appeared on its schedule (Feeney) and by the early 1980s it welcomed the annual shows by the Canterbury Guild of Woodworkers. In 1996 the CSA Gallery on Gloucester Street was refurbished and its name changed to the Centre of Contemporary Art (COCA) (Centre of).
- Cave Rock Gallery was opened by the Brokenshires in Sumner in 1987, and moved to the Christchurch Arts Centre in 1988 (“Galleries”). Cave Rock Gallery is, at the time of writing, still in the Arts Centre, under new ownership.
- Woodcraft Gallery was opened in 1987 in the Arts Centre by Charles and Joy Boyle. Solely dedicated to quality woodwork—furniture, carving, turning, sculpture—it was described as unique: “There is no other woodcraft gallery of this standard in New Zealand” (“Exhibitions” Touch Wood 25).63

South Island

A travelling exhibit, About Wood: an Exhibition of Contemporary New Zealand Woodwork (Figure 103), funded by the Southern Regional Arts Council, travelled the South Island in 1989-91. Curated by Mark Christensen, a turner/furniture maker from Westport, it served two purposes: “to stimulate greater interest in and awareness of good woodwork and the presence of fine woodworkers in the South Island”; and “to provide an event for local woodworkers and woodworking groups to use as a spotlight on their own activities” (Christensen 8). The shows64 were loaned to Community Arts Councils, particularly to locations that might otherwise not have access to such displays. As well as turning and carving, About Wood showed chairs by Dowle, Haig and Slade, and a cabinet by Shaw (Macpherson “About” 11).

63 This description is undoubtedly by Noeline Brokenshire, although it does not include her usual signature “N.B.”.
64 There were other media shows too: About Fibre, About Prints (Christensen 8).
Wellington

- Bowen Street Gallery: a dealer gallery primarily devoted to painting and sculpture; showed exhibitions by Greg Bloomfield.
- Crafts Council of New Zealand. The Crafts Council organised exhibitions on its various premises in Wellington as well as in other locations.
- Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt. The Dowse Art Gallery opened in 1971 and showed craft from its beginning; it also collected ceramics. In 1981, when James Mack was appointed Director, the Dowse changed its name from Gallery to Museum and was known for its craft emphasis. With Mack’s departure in 1988, the Museum became wider-ranging in its exhibitions while maintaining a goodly representation of displays in all craft media; it added furniture to its collections. From the late 1990s the Museum shifted focus to design and changed its name to The New Dowse in 2007 (Dowse Art).
- Janne Land Gallery – primarily painting and sculpture but showed work by Humphrey Ikin.
- New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (NZAFA) showed craft exhibitions, usually of a group nature, as early as 1950. For example, the World Crafts Council, New Zealand Chapter held an exhibition there in July 1970 (WCC Newsletter Mar. 1970 1).
- City Gallery Wellington (Figure 104) is a non-collecting public gallery whose focus is visual arts, architecture and design (City Gallery).

Palmerston North

Te Manawa – funded by the Palmerston North City Council, the institution was formerly titled the Science Centre, Manawatu Museum & Art Gallery. Its regional focus encompasses local artists such as furniture maker Greg Bloomfield.

Wanganui

The Sarjeant Gallery was built in 1919 and is funded by the Wanganui District Council. It primarily displays fine art. In 1989 the exhibition Out of the Woods was mounted to identify the work of artists and craftspeople who had been invited to participate in the Wanganui Wood Symposium (see Conferences and Gatherings this chapter); Afterwoods, 31 March - 6 May 1990, was the Symposium’s outcome. Concurrently with Out of the Woods, the Gallery displayed The New Zealand Pieces, a solo exhibition by Australian sculptor, Gay Hawkes. While in New Zealand on a QEII Arts Council Waewae Tapu: Distinguished Visitors Programme, Hawkes created furniture and sculpture at Waiariki Polytechnic in Rotorua. The resulting exhibition was shown in Rotorua (Bath House), Wanganui, New Plymouth (Govett-Brewster), Lower Hutt (Dowse) and Auckland (Gow Langsford). Hawkes used found materials (Figure 105)—weathered timber, driftwood—to fashion “sculpture intended for everyday use” (Savage “The New” 9). Savage described the work as “meticulously crafted and assembled with sturdy joinery techniques . . . functional, both physically comfortable and mentally challenging” (9). The Waewae Tapu Scheme that brought Hawkes from Australia recognised “the need to bring visiting experts to New Zealand to conduct classes, workshops and seminars which

---

65 Major exhibitions such as the Winstone Crafts Biennale 1987 (Auckland Museum), and 2nd NZ Craft Biennale 1989 (Auckland Museum) included furniture. Peter Gibbs reviewed the 2nd Biennale: “Japanese-born Kazu Nakagawa has been in this country for three years and now lives on Waiheke Island. His merit-award-winning entrance table of white ash and black walnut was a masterpiece, setting subtle curves against tight straight sections to give dynamic balance” (Gibbs “Gem”).

66 A report by E.A. Plishke [sic], an Austrian architect and design critic, in the Arts Year Book of 1950 summarised a “comprehensive Craft Exhibition” as an “enterprising new departure” (Plishke 40) for the NZAFA; furniture was not included at that time.
will enhance the professional development of people working in the arts” (Savage “The New” 11). Hawkes’ furniture represents bush carpentry, certainly known in New Zealand, but Hawkes’ regard, as a sculptor, places her in the art milieu. I would argue that such an expensive touring exhibition would not have been financed for a New Zealand bush carpenter. This discrepancy falls within the parameters of the ‘art/craft debate’ whereby fine art, in this case sculpture, is regarded as superior to craft.

**Hawkes Bay**

There are two primary venues: the Hawkes Bay Exhibition Centre in Hastings (Figure 106) and the Hawkes Bay Museum and Art Gallery in Napier. The former supports curator-initiated exhibits thereby facilitating furniture; the latter has curators on staff who generate most of the exhibitions.

**Auckland**

- Aberhart North Gallery – a dealer gallery that closed in the late 1990s.
- Artis Gallery, Parnell – a dealer gallery that has been in operation for over 20 years and represents established New Zealand painters, sculptors and photographers.
- Auckland War Memorial Museum (formerly the Auckland Institute and Museum) – the Museum was founded in 1852 and has occupied its present site since 1929. It staged several contemporary furniture exhibitions in the 1980s and 1990s and has several pieces of studio furniture on permanent display in its gallery Encounter: New Zealand Design and Decorative Arts.
- Compendium Gallery opened initially in Devonport in September 1983 (Clarke), then on Lorne Street in central Auckland (“Gallery on”) and was owned by Pamela Elliot. It held a number of Invitational Exhibitions of Wood and solo exhibitions of furniture makers.
- Eon – Founded by Angela Roper, Eon began in Kingsland, then moved into the central city. Eon confined itself to New Zealand design, including furniture and housewares; it represented 120 designers (Rotherham). In its final incarnation there were three aspects to the company: a retail store with online capacity; designer services; and a product design team that created brands that other retailers marketed. Eon staged exhibitions: David Thomas and Katy Wallace co-curated Solid States in 1999 (Lloyd-Jenkins *At Home* 303). The company overextended itself and closed in 2008.
- Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga. The Gallery was established as an arts venue in the early 1980s by a group of arts-minded citizens. In 2000, the Fisher Gallery and the Pakuranga Community and Cultural Centre were amalgamated to create Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts. It has staged several furniture exhibitions.
- Objectspace opened on Ponsonby Road in July 2004 as a recurrently funded organisation under the auspices of Creative New Zealand (Clifford).
- RKS (Rodney Kirk Smith) Art. Smith (1937-1996) operated RKS Art for 25 years until his death (Radford). He was a promoter of new talent and invited Humphrey Ikin to make work for two exhibitions in his gallery.

**Trade Shows**

- Designex ’86 was conceptualised by the New Zealand Association of Interior Designers. Carin Wilson showed a chair in 1986 and it was an important showcase for student work (Wallis & Campbell 111); David Trubridge participated in 1989. Commitment to this event was expensive: *The New Zealand Woodworker* noted that Designex 88 charged $1,776 plus GST for 3m² for 3 days (“Guilds, Clubs” 7).
• New Zealand Craft Shows, managed by the Dunkley family, is a commercial craft show that recurs annually in major cities. New Zealand Craft Shows received a $4,000 grant from the QEII Arts Council in its inaugural year, 1983 (New Zealand Craft Shows).

Woodwork Education

1. Teacher, Primary, Intermediate, Secondary and Continuing Education

What opportunities existed and are currently available at primary, secondary, tertiary or continuing education level for woodworking education in New Zealand?

First, it is pertinent to inquire about craft teachers. As noted in Chapter 2 (page 34) Dr C.E. Beeby, Director of Education, inaugurated the teaching of art and crafts in schools in the 1930s, and the training of art and crafts specialists at teachers’ colleges. Doreen Blumhardt, one of those specialists, recalled that she taught both students and teachers in Wellington during the 1940s (page 34); in 1946 she trained more teachers in Auckland. The result was a core of Area Organisers who visited schools to assist teachers in implementing art and craft programmes. The fruits of Beeby’s initiative are recorded in the catalogue for the 1940 Centennial Exhibition Education Court: “From the primary schools there is a varied display of the arts, wood-work and metal-work, needlework and weaving, and interesting projects in English, history, geography and nature study” (Centennial). In the 1950s some of the area organisers taught at teachers colleges, thereby influencing the next generation. The faculty, including Blumhardt, and their college students were known for their craft, to the degree that some became full-time makers rather than teachers (Blumhardt).

In the 1950s the instructors (Figure 107) who taught wood- and metal-work were former tradesmen whose practical abilities were supplemented by a year at teachers college. They taught a syllabus, introduced in Intermediate schools in 1955, called “Handcraft in Wood and Metal” that was intended as a counterpart to vocational training (Ewing 251). Students were taught basic techniques and proper use of tools and could make objects such as a tray, stool or bookcase. Technical drawing preceded making but the emphasis was on hands-on construction.

Major curriculum changes took place in New Zealand primary and secondary schools in the 1960s. A new syllabus “Art and Craft in the Primary School” was introduced, and the fashion in which it was implemented depended on local teachers and equipment. It should also be noted that woodwork was not seen as a craft but as a ‘technical art.’ Robert Beardsley, writing for Touch Wood, described what was happening at Ashburton College in the 1960s: in Forms 1 and 2, for boys only, manual training was taught including “important joints such as dovetail, cross-halved, housings, etc.” (Beardsley 17). The secondary school syllabus was prescribed by the Department of Education; practical and theory in woodwork was supplemented, by some pupils, with technical drawing. By 1974-75 Beardsley had some girls in his classes at Rangiora High School though the numbers were small. At the same time, the syllabus was revised to make woodwork less trade oriented (Beardsley 19) and by the end of the decade students were given more freedom in choice of materials and projects. For instance in Form 6, open to boys and girls, the more skilled and confident had produced a tea wagon (Beardsley 20). Another article in Touch Wood described the work of Pauline Sutton, a 7th form student in Lower Hutt (Butchers), who had help from the Wellington Woodworkers Guild.

Enrolments in secondary school classes in woodworking, and clothing and textiles appear in Figure 108 (the raw data is included as Appendix 9). Computer studies have been added to the chart as an indication of a competing discipline to which students gravitated. The major contributors to the decline of woodworking enrolments were: 1) the suspension of woodwork as a School Certificate subject. Bleakley noted that wood- and metal-work were, for the most part, restricted to those proceeding towards the School Certificate exam (66); and 2) its removal from the list of nationally recognised subjects. Once woodworking was no longer a means by which secondary school
graduation could be achieved, its presence in the curriculum was at the behest of local administrators, and the availability of facilities and teachers.

Instruction in woodwork in primary schools is also dependent on local resources. Rudolf Steiner Schools taught woodwork classes to both boys and girls during the 1970s and 1980s (Stevens 7), and continue to do so where expertise and facilities permit. In recent years carpentry has been introduced into preschool. The skills training it brings is regarded as advantageous: problem solving, fine and gross motor development, involvement in mathematics and science, creative expression and exploration, and emotional experience—autonomy, frustration, pride, disappointment, self-esteem (Sutherden 8). I would argue that inculcation of these skills is beneficial at all ages, and is manifest in the enrolment in adult woodworking classes.

Returning to Beardsley’s 1987 article, details of his experience with community education were provided. He instructed night classes which ran for 26 weeks, two hours per session; the maximum of 20 students, of both genders and a range of ages, were self-motivated. He derived pleasure from what he described as “true community classes” (Beardsley 20) and seemed delighted by the adult learners: “One lady, up to her eyeballs in shavings told me she found woodwork so relaxing after a day at the kitchen sink!” Woodworking was also popular for women at Papanui High School in Christchurch (Braxton).68 Starting in the mid 1950s with three classes for men and one for women, by 1965 there

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>W M &amp; E</th>
<th>Homecraft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>37 (23+14)</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>56 (35+21)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>51 (31+20)</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>39 (26+13)</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>45 (21+24)</td>
<td>discont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>61 (36+25)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>37 (20+17)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>45 (25+19)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>75 (31+44)</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>66 (28+38)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>55 (24+31)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>64 (25+39)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>75 (39+36)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>86 (53+33)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>87 (51+36)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>no wood</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>no wood</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>no wood</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>no wood</td>
<td>75 (39+36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 107. Teacher Training Enrolments in Woodwork & Homecraft

W M & E stands for woodwork, metal & engineering. From 1963 to 1966, there was no separation of the disciplines. For 1967 through to 1981 the first figure is a total; the first figure in brackets is woodwork, the second is metal and engineering. From 1986, the statistics are not differentiated by discipline. It should be noted that over periods of time the categorisation of Ministry of Education statistics changed.

From 1967 to 1981, it is known that woodwork instructors were being trained for placement in schools throughout New Zealand. The numbers were small, in comparison to teachers trained in homecraft, but there was sufficient demand for the training to persist at least from 1963 when the Ministry started recording statistics. Once trained, woodworking teachers were in the system; part of the reason for a fall-off in woodwork training was a saturation of the market.

graduation could be achieved, its presence in the curriculum was at the behest of local administrators, and the availability of facilities and teachers.

Instruction in woodwork in primary schools is also dependent on local resources. Rudolf Steiner Schools taught woodwork classes to both boys and girls during the 1970s and 1980s (Stevens 7), and continue to do so where expertise and facilities permit. In recent years carpentry has been introduced into preschool. The skills training it brings is regarded as advantageous: problem solving, fine and gross motor development, involvement in mathematics and science, creative expression and exploration, and emotional experience—autonomy, frustration, pride, disappointment, self-esteem (Sutherden 8). I would argue that inculcation of these skills is beneficial at all ages, and is manifest in the enrolment in adult woodworking classes.

Returning to Beardsley’s 1987 article, details of his experience with community education were provided. He instructed night classes which ran for 26 weeks, two hours per session; the maximum of 20 students, of both genders and a range of ages, were self-motivated. He derived pleasure from what he described as “true community classes” (Beardsley 20) and seemed delighted by the adult learners: “One lady, up to her eyeballs in shavings told me she found woodwork so relaxing after a day at the kitchen sink!” Woodworking was also popular for women at Papanui High School in Christchurch (Braxton).68 Starting in the mid 1950s with three classes for men and one for women, by 1965 there

67 Bleakley also pointed out that the teaching of woodwork in Intermediate School, where students were not working towards an examination, allowed instructors to be more innovative and encouraged exposure to a range of materials and techniques, and exploration of design.

68 This two-page spread with seven photos appeared in the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly, the magazine that has chronicled New Zealand women’s lives since 1932.
Figure 108. Graph of Woodwork, Clothing & Textiles, and Computer Studies Enrolments
The chart was created from the Ministry of Education’s statistics of enrolment.
Part of the explanation for the fall-off in woodwork enrolments was that from 1992, School Certificate Wood was phased out and ceased in 1996. Also in 1996 there was a separation of ‘nationally recognised subjects’ from ‘locally developed courses.’ Whereas woodwork became local, clothing and textiles was nationally recognised.
Computer studies were first recorded in 1982. The sharp decline in enrolments for 1987 (1985: 25,912; 1987: 10,163; 1989: 34,931) is due to the absence of figures for Forms 3, 4 and 5. No description is provided as to what constitutes “computer studies,” nor is it clear how computer studies differ from another subject “design and technology.” Were the latter to be combined with computer studies the numbers would be considerably higher.
The New Zealand education system, for the period of discussion, is outlined below. This system changed in 2002 with the inauguration of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Old system</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>year 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Standard 1</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Standard 2</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Standard 3</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Standard 4</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Standard 5</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Standard 6</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Form 1</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Form 2</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Form 3</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Form 5</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>School Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Form 6</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>University Entrance/6th Form Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year 13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Form 7</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>University Bursary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were two classes exclusively for women and one mixed class; most of the students were housewives or nurses. The evening lessons took advantage of buildings and equipment that otherwise sat idle, and the women enjoyed being able to make furniture for their homes as well as relax amongst friends. The popularity of these ‘hobbycraft’ classes was manifest in the December 1982 and February 1983 issues of New Zealand Crafts where a listing of 22 polytechnics, high schools, and colleges offered woodwork instruction in 1983. Adult education was heavily patronised through the subsequent years, but in 2011 the National government cut funding to this education sector. David Shearer, a Labour Member of Parliament, stated that 165,000 fewer people were enrolled, with a reduction from 212 to 23 schools offering classes (Shearer).

Before moving on to the tertiary sector, it is essential to take note of what happened in primary, intermediate and secondary schools as a consequence of the revamping of the Ministry of Education in 1989. The established art education syllabus was set aside in the 1990s and the entire realm of craft was separated from ‘The Arts’—drama, dance, music and visual arts—and placed under the wing of technology (Hardie). New Zealand’s adoption of Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum in 1995 made technology a core subject in all schools, with technology having a number of streams: materials; information and communication; electronics and control; biotechnology; structures and mechanisms; process and production; and food. The most widely practiced are materials and food technology (Jones et al. 114) because they suit the former wood/metal and home science teachers. Since the focus of the technology curriculum is not the acquisition of skills or in-depth knowledge of a material, the continuation of traditional subjects like woodworking is at risk—existing specialist instructors may be replaced by generalists. The Ministry of Education’s aim in instituting the technology curriculum was to:

- provide exciting opportunities for all students to develop and extend their technological ideas and to explore creative solutions to practical problems
- enable students to gain skills, knowledge, and competencies that would equip them for further (tertiary) training, or employment in technological areas and to contribute to New Zealand’s social and economic development
- provide students with opportunities for interactions with business and industry that would help students understand and adapt to a rapidly changing world and to take a confident part in shaping the future (Ferguson 18).

Simon King, the Head of Graphics, Design and Technology at Mount Aspiring College in Wanaka and a former member of the National Executive of the Graphics and Technology Teachers Association identified the current situation (S. King). Most boys’ schools and most co-ed schools have a woodworking course: 50% are trade oriented and 50% technology oriented. Students who are trade-focused complete unit standards devised by the Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation; the training is identical to an industry apprenticeship and preferable because teachers can assist with completing paperwork that is onerous to employers and employees. King says he incorporates elements of design into trade instruction but he is essentially teaching technique to equip graduates to enter the building industry. Technology-oriented students are provided a theoretical understanding of a diverse range of materials and ways of working with them, as well as the social aspects of the place and impact of technologists in society. Because many technology teachers are

69 Wanganui Boys’ College – full year of instruction in general woodwork & cabinetmaking; Newlands College, Wellington – Elementary, Intermediate, Advanced Woodwork; Wellington High School Community Institute – Beginners, Intermediate, Advanced Woodwork; New Zealand Technical Correspondence Institute, Lower Hutt – cabinetmaking; Southland Community College, Invercargill – woodcraft. Woodwork was offered at Queen Elizabeth College, Palmerston North; Nelson College; Collingwood Area School; Aranui High School Community Learning Centre, Christchurch; Ashburton College; Papanui High School; Timaru College; Gore High School; Takatimu Area School; Aoere College, Papatoetoe; Edgewater College, Pakuranga; Rutherford High School, Te Atatu North; Wanganui Senior Technical Division; Shirley Boys’ High School, Christchurch; Mairehau High School, Christchurch; Kaikorai Valley High School, Dunedin; Eastern Southland, Winton (“Educational 1983” 21-26; “Educational” 27-28)

70 Ann Lane, Head of Technology at Cobham Intermediate School in Christchurch, confirmed that the teaching of traditional technologies such as woodwork, metalwork and textiles depends on the enthusiasm of individual principals for those topics. Some principals regard video production and new media as preferable.
graduates of university design programmes (to be discussed shortly), practical skills are lacking and it is possible to fulfil a secondary school technology curriculum without any making whatsoever. King,71 and those with a wood- and metal-working background, can instruct pupils in design/making: one Level 3 technology course requires a conceptual design for a client and a one-off solution for a client entailing design/build. However, in 16 years of teaching in both Auckland and Wanaka, King has had only one student enrol for scholarship in technology by means of furniture, despite the role model he provides.

Education authorities, parents and society still relegate practical instruction to less capable students, and regard design as an academic subject for university-directed graduates. As Brian Easton points out, this approach aligns with “human capital theory” that sees education solely as a way of enhancing a student’s future earnings and benefits to the country. King deplores the disconnect between design and making and would welcome a revision in thinking whereby academically-able students could combine creative and practical knowledge. Since teenagers are rarely capable of envisioning their future prospects, adults are responsible for broadening or limiting their attitudes and choices.72

Now I turn to post-secondary education. As mentioned previously, Carin Wilson’s arrival on the Crafts Council Executive consolidated efforts to provide diploma-granting woodworking instruction at polytechnics. Wilson also initiated visits to New Zealand by international woodworking instructors. The impact of James Krenov’s visit has already been discussed but its consequences were extensive for the community of Nelson.

2. Woodwork Education in Nelson

Like Humphrey Ikin, John Shaw was influenced by James Krevov’s writing: “. . . I was introduced to Jim Krenov’s books which was the first time I had come into contact with his philosophy. To anyone in my situation the way he talks about wood was a revelation” (J. Shaw “John Shaw: Furniture” 29-30). Admiration of the books prompted Shaw to attend Krenov’s Wellington workshop and he established a rapport with the American. Krenov invited Shaw to come to the College of the Redwoods and, with the assistance of a QEI Arts Council grant, Shaw spent nine months in California during the 1984-85 teaching year.

Students who learned woodworking under Krenov have exacting skills and their work is known for its artisanry, Scandinavian starkness and simplicity, and attention to timber. Their designs might become more flamboyant once they leave the College—Krenov was known for being uncompromising— but adherence to the standards of consummate crafts(wo)manship remains consistent (Figure 109). Shaw returned to Nelson in September 1985 with the Krenov regimen intact and was immediately hired by the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology to be a tutor for their new Craft Design diploma; by January 1986 he had drafted a curriculum for fine woodworking and was engaged for two years (Shaw Personal 2008).

It will be recalled from Chapter 2 that the Certificate in Craft Design was offered at nine polytechnics throughout the country starting in February 1986. Wood was part of the prospectus at Northland, Carrington, Waikato, Waiariki, Hawkes Bay, Wanganui, Nelson, Otago, and Southland (“Craft”) (see Figure 49). By 1988, when the Diploma in Craft Design came on stream, Nelson was the primary deliverer of furniture instruction. No other polytechnic had a full-time tutor with a comparable skill set and reputation to John Shaw.75

During his tenure Shaw was the only furniture tutor and he recalls this period as one of the high points in his career (page 182). He valued cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural exchange and during the

---

71 Simon King trained as an engineer and was a professional craftsperson before undertaking teacher training in the early 1990s. He was involved in the Dunedin chapter of the CCNZ and facilitated Humphrey Ikin’s visit to Dunedin in 1988 (page 157).

72 King pointed out that options available in year 10 determine the student’s future.

73 “Krenov’s intensity and unwillingness to compromise, the very qualities that fuel his furniture, can make interaction with him difficult” (Binzen).

74 Personal knowledge of the work of College of the Redwoods graduates.

75 Howard Tuffery was the part-time wood tutor at Wanganui Regional Community College; he spent a brief period working with Kevin Perkins in Australia (Gibson 10).
first term of 1989, he invited Australian Chris McElhinney as an Artist-in-Residence. Assisted by support from the QEII Arts Council, McElhinney followed his period of working alongside students with a weeklong course in chair design (Slade “Chris”). Carin Wilson undertook a similar residency in 1997 (Wilson CV).

Thirteen years after coming on board, Shaw left NMIT (Shaw Personal 2008), by which time the Institute’s emphasis had shifted from craft techniques to creativity, and from furniture to wood as a sculpture medium. Shaw’s departure, which he attributes to the natural cycle of his life, was also predicated on the institutional changes that occurred in 1989. Polytechnics were no longer under the purview of a Department of Education attempting to provide similar opportunities to residents throughout the country. Instead, the technical institutes were empowered with establishing their own range of curricula, and became competitive with each other and universities (Abbott). The Ministry of Education was charged with advising government, monitoring the implementation of policies, and distributing funds. Abbott indicates the Ministry’s rationale: “By making the polytechnics autonomous institutions and funding them according to student numbers, it was hoped that they would become more market oriented and more responsive to the needs of industry” (103). At the same time the New Zealand Qualifications Authority was established to control standards, liaise with industry regarding needs, and conduct national trades examinations.

Shaw says there was increased accountability in terms of more rigorous assessment, and a mandate to raise student numbers while reducing contact hours. Administrative demands and pressure to write degree programmes were taxing, thereby minimising time for studio work. Shaw resigned in 1999 and returned to making furniture, amassing sufficient commissions to earn a living.
His affiliation with the Nelson Woodworkers Guild during this period ultimately led Shaw back to teaching. The pleasure of working on a group project with the Guild rekindled Shaw’s pedagogical passion (Moriarty) and the timely surfacing of a financial backer, Andrew Bruce, permitted a serious search for premises. Collaborating with his brother-in-law, David Haig, in 2004, Shaw inaugurated a beginners’ cabinetmaking class one afternoon a week using personal equipment; at the same time, funding permitted promotion and the establishment of a charitable trust to operate the school as a business. The Centre for Fine Woodworking (CFW) held its first class in dedicated premises in September 2006 (Figure 110); the first graduates of the nine-month, full-time course displayed their finished products on 11 December 2007 (Centre “Newsletter” Jan. 2008). The display attracted the same enthusiasts as had attended the Suter furniture shows.

The CFW teaching schedule is organised as a series of components. Completion of all of the components constitutes the full course; individuals can choose to come and go as time, finances and needs permit. To date this model has worked—classes are well-subscribed and a changing student body (Figure 110) permits a wider range of exchanges for students who commit to the long haul, with opportunities for peer recognition in national competitions. The Centre is not accredited under the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. The disadvantage for New Zealand students is that CFW courses are not eligible for student loans, nor does the Centre receive government funding. However, fees, when compared to those charged in North America or Europe, are attractive (at times of advantageous exchange rates) and a significant proportion of aspiring woodworkers come from overseas to study and see New Zealand. For this reason, Shaw and Haig are determined that tutoring reflects what they characterise as New Zealand attitudes: relaxation, sense of humour, practicality. Faculty is carefully chosen so that the Centre’s reputation consists of quality craftsmanship plus Kiwi sensibilities. Shaw said, “we are contributing to the future generation of New Zealand woodworkers” (Shaw Personal 2008); it can also be said that the Centre for Fine Woodworking is contributing to New Zealand’s reputation as a fine woodworking destination.

3. Woodwork Education in Christchurch

Remi Couriard (Figure 111) was born in Jersey, Channel Islands, and immigrated to New Zealand in 1971, with qualifications from City and Guilds of London Institute in carpentry and joinery. He was employed as a cabinetmaker with various firms in Christchurch until 1974 and then became self-employed. Beginning in 1973 (Couriard “Re: Sir”), he was hired by Marc Zuckerman to help build his home near Hokitika and “Remi taught Marc the basics of hand woodworking” (“Profile: Marc” 8). Couriard taught woodworking at Christchurch Polytechnic (Mackey 113), Teachers College, and Risingholme Community Centre (Canterbury Society of Arts “Remi”), and was a founding member of the Canterbury Woodworkers Guild (Couriard CV 2011). He participated in the Alternative Furniture Shows, beginning in 1983, and was the coordinator of the Show in 1989; he exhibited in other venues as well (Figure 112).

In 1985 Couriard received a QEII Arts Council grant for a five-month study tour of the United States, Canada, England and France: he visited James Krenov, Jon Brooks and Wendell Castle (Couriard Letter). The following year he founded L’Etacq College of Fine Woodwork Techniques and Design, described as “New Zealand’s first private college” (Couriard Letter) dedicated to the medium. Advertisements for classes in tool sharpening, carving, construction techniques, and furniture-making appeared in Touch Wood (July 1986), New Zealand Crafts (Spring 1987) (Figure 111), and The New Zealand Woodworker (June 1988).

Couriard was principal of L’Etacq and primary instructor; he employed additional tutors such as David Thornley (design and history), Wendy Cox (sketching), and Colin Slade (chairmaking) for specialist


77 Fees: 1st February - 3rd December 2010 were $25,200 inclusive of GST with a non-refundable deposit of $6,300 (CFW website 2 Dec. 2009).
skills. A listing of 1987 Summer School and Term 1 courses contains plenty of information about dates and costs but is less precise about the practical outcomes (L’Etacq College). Ansley’s article in the Listener in 1992 stated that 20 students had graduated (Ansley 33) during five years of operation: it is notable that Couriard’s endeavours were recorded in a national magazine and the author implies that Couriard initiated the article. His students certainly benefitted from Couriard’s advocacy and promotion (Allom). He organised exhibitions of his and his students’ work in multiple locations in Christchurch.78

The regard in which Couriard’s skills were held was evident in his being commissioned to carve plaques to commemorate the tenures of three of New Zealand’s Governors-General. He described his pleasure in these commissions:

[Sir Paul Reeves] was such a soft considerate tall gentle giant. I first met him when I personally delivered to Government House his coat of arms. As I was greeted into the front foyer of Gov. house there he and his wife were along with a small group of officials. I could go into great detail of the next part. However to cut this short we had a fun exchange, with showing him my carving!

As with each Governor I carved for, each were personal showing lots of interest with my skills, and how I had developed each detail within the “Coat of Arms.” Certainly Dame

Figure 111. Remi Couriard and L’Etacq Advertisement
Couriard is pictured in his role as a walking guide in Jersey.

Figure 112. Woodwork by Remi Couriard
Installation photo of The Chair Show, CSA Gallery (Figure 102), 1991: Couriard’s cedar garden seat is in the foreground. The heraldic plaque was made for the Governor-General, Dame Catherine Tizard, and is one of three such plaques displayed in the Governor-General’s Residence. The others honour the tenures of Sir Paul Reeves and Sir David Beattie.

Cath Tizzard [sic] was another outstanding person. Plus our social drinks of Gin and Tonic’s! (“Re: Sir”).

By 1992 L’Étaq offered a one-year diploma under the auspices of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (Ansley 32) for a course fee of $13,000. The final paragraph of Ansley’s article was terse: “So I called Remi. Alas, he said. The bank. Not enough students with $13,000 to spend” (Ansley 33). Remi Couriard returned to Jersey in 1993 and continues to practice and teach furniture-making in his homeland.

With Couriard’s departure, Christchurch once again relied on community resources for instruction in woodworking. Dag Guest, a contemporary of Couriard’s, took over classes at Risingholme Community Centre. He recalled (Guest) that he started teaching in about 1986, by which time he had been making furniture for over a year. He taught for fifteen years and described the demand for courses:

We started off, there was one class on, a chap called Remi Couriard, who was one of the members, was teaching at the time and then he gave it up and asked me if I’d teach. And there was one class on, then within two years we had three classes. Afternoon classes, two evening classes and they wanted more. I just didn’t have the time (Guest).

4. Conferences and Gatherings

Conference, symposium, convention, festival—the primary functions of these events is to disseminate knowledge to the communities that hold them. There were a few of these during the years that furniture-making had a visible presence in New Zealand. Appendix 8 contains a preliminary outline of events for craft and furniture during the period 1978 to 2009.

Furniture Group Seminar

9 July 1989: a panel wherein Carin Wilson, Justine Olsen, John Leuthart (Wellington City Art Gallery), Chris McElhinney, and John Scott discussed the purpose and functions of galleries and museums, exhibition versus commerce, furniture as art or craft, and the future (Grouden “Two”).

National Wood Conferences, Australia

New Zealand furniture makers attended the Second National Wood Conference in Adelaide, 31 August – 2 September 1985. Noeline Brokenshire gave a presentation on Touch Wood, Colin Slade talked about woodworking in Canterbury and Christchurch, and Carin Wilson gave an overview of the New Zealand scene (National Wood); 79 David Trubridge was an observer (Trubridge “Last Word II” 36). Two years later Trubridge attended the Third Conference in Canberra, 27 November to 6 December, and wrote his impressions for Touch Wood (March 1988) and The New Zealand Woodworker (June 1988).

Wanganui Wood Symposium: January 1990

Bill Milbank, Director of the Sarjeant Gallery, Libby Gray, Community Arts Officer of the Wanganui Community Arts Council, and John Scott, Director of the Wanganui Regional Community College (Slade “Wanganui”), joined forces to assemble a trio of events focused around the College’s 1990 Summer School programme. Out of the Woods and Afterwoods (Figure 113) were bookend exhibitions at the Sarjeant Gallery (described under Galleries) with the Wood Symposium in between. Sponsored by the QEII Arts Council, sixteen artists whose principal medium was wood (Milbank), ranging from sculptors and Māori carvers to furniture makers, 80 were invited to participate. Each artist received $1,000, accommodation for ten days, and $300 for materials (Trubridge “Wanganui” 30), in order that the participants might realise three objectives: the production of works to comprise the Afterwoods exhibition; individual slide presentations for Summer School participants and the public; and establishment of directions for future work (Rayner 75). Peter Nicholls, a sculptor and attendee described the symposium as an intensive experience, with participants engaging in impromptu informal critiques of

79 Rodney Hayward, from New Zealand, also participated in the Conference programme (Carrigy).
80 Humphrey Ikin, David Trubridge (for 3 days), Marc Zuckerman.
each others’ work that contributed to the end results (Nicholls). Rayner summed up the merits of such an event for all concerned:

*Afterwoods*, then, is the exhibition form the works undertaken at the Symposium finally assumed. The artists have long gone their own separate ways, returning to their studios and relative seclusion once more. For many though, the short time spent in Wanganui was, if not formative, then at least an informative experience. It’s worth mentioning, too, the ‘longer term effects’ of such an event don’t just rest with the participants. The community as a whole greatly benefits, from the encouragement local artists and craftspeople receive for their own work, to the educative and sheer enjoyment value given to the local art-loving public” (96).

**The Pine Symposium**

Envisioned by Jacob Scott, Arts Section Manager at the Hawkes Bay Polytechnic, the Symposium was an exploration of pinus radiata by 25 artists and craftspeople. Held at the Polytechnic from 25 January to 1 February 1993 and, again, made possible by the QEII Arts Council, furniture makers who partook were Ikin, Maclean, Trubridge and Wilson. Margot Mensing, an American fibre artist who, along with her partner, basketmaker John McQueen, was brought to New Zealand to teach in the Summer Programme at Wanganui College, wrote about the event for *Craft New Zealand*. Her description of Maclean’s creation indicates how the Symposium stretched makers to work with the materials at hand and the site:

Peter Maclean extended his furniture-derived tetrahedron shapes into an enormous three-legged pyramid with a swinging sandstone ball dangling from the centre structure. The blue logs with their steps of incised orange triangulations running up one log and big bolts on another log immediately became playground equipment. In this merging of sculptural form with function, both the material and site are considered, as are the ephemeral and the long-lasting. Its installation was a community effort as many artists lent a shoulder to hoist it into position (Mensing 16).

Events such as these provided inspiration for future projects and enabled the networking incorporated in studio furniture’s definition.

**Korero A Te Whatu: The Persuasive Object**

Held at Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland from 16 to 19 April, 1998, this conference for the craft community was intended to “address its future in Aotearoa New Zealand and to explore the reshaping of the traditional vision that defines craft practice” (Daly 46). Initiated by Creative New Zealand (Carroll), 300 attendees heard papers and attended workshops in ceramics, glass casting, silversmithing, jewellery, tivaevae (Cook Island quilts) and woodwork81 (Carroll). Its overseas guests

---

81 Humphrey Ikin taught a manuka workshop.
included Wendy Kaplan (American art and craft historian), Tanya Harrod (British craft and design historian), and Tom Dixon (British furniture designer). Such speakers represented the theoretical aspect of craft, while workshops demonstrated the practical.

New Zealand speakers Helen Schamroth (fibre artist and author) and Helen Mason (potter and former editor of *New Zealand Potter*) presented their views of New Zealand’s craft history, pointing out the dearth of public records and written documentation. Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins provoked debate by his keynote address that argued ‘traditional’ craft was synonymous with ‘lack of relevance’, and ‘contemporary’ craft was the “correct perspective” (Daly 46). Andrea Daly noted that this dichotomy was “questionable,” seated in modernist ideology. Summarising the contributions of national and international speakers, Daly posited several factors necessary for the survival of craft: education that combines practical and theoretical knowledge; institutional support by museums and galleries; and formulation of ongoing strategies for the recognition of craft in the public sphere (48).

Daly’s remarks, in 1998, applied to all craft media. Had there been a national body to strategise about the future of craft including its recognition, lobby for the maintenance of existing practical and theoretical education, and organise craft exhibitions in conjunction with museums and galleries, Daly’s survival tactics would have been addressed. In the absence of such a body, craft’s survival was dependent on the efforts of individuals. With respect to studio furniture, practical and theoretical education was already non-existent, and furniture exhibitions at museums and galleries were diminishing. The presence of studio furniture in the public sphere from 1998 onwards has also been through the efforts of individuals.

Concluding her text Daly valued the contribution by overseas presenters but iterated the *raison d’être* for scholarship such as this thesis:

> . . . the shorter papers given by those living and working within New Zealand were invaluable in beginning the process of recognising and evaluating the local signification given to craft practices. Craft must acknowledge the influences that have constructed its current position. The recognition of the relevance and development of craft history and theory in New Zealand is still in an embryonic stage. However it is only with this knowledge that a future for craft in Aotearoa New Zealand can begin to be designed. It must construct discourses that explore and establish the role of the craft object within our culture (Daly 48).

5. National Tertiary Woodwork Education

New Zealanders who wished to pursue state-accredited furniture-making as a career had two options during the latter years of this investigation: 1) enrolment in tertiary courses offered by polytechnics; 2) a furniture industry apprenticeship leading to a National Certificate in Furniture Making. The first is directly relevant to studio furniture and requires lengthy discussion, so I will deal with the industry option first.

Can potential studio furniture makers acquire their skills under an industry apprenticeship? During my 2008 interview with Dag Guest, I asked his opinion on the National Certificate in Furniture Making taught by such schools as the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT). Based on his knowledge of teaching woodworking and participating in the *Alternative Furniture Shows*, he stated that skills were “basic” and geared to the furniture manufacturing industry. The CPIT website (2009) summarises: “Students in the National Certificate in Furniture Making (Level 2) will spend much of the programme constructing furniture items such as tables, chairs, bedside cabinets . . . . Advanced skills included in the level 3 and 4 programmes include the operation of various woodworking machines, assembly of furniture, drawing & calculations, the setting of wood machinery, veneering and laminating” (CPIT). The Certificate comes under the umbrella of the Forestry Industry Training and

---

82 This criticism will be reiterated by Peter Smith in the conclusion of this chapter.
83 The furniture programme at UCOL in Palmerston North, that will be described shortly, is largely a practical course.
Education Council (FITEC). Its 2008 Annual Report stated that 82 National Certificates by Trainees and Modern Apprentices were completed in the furniture sector that year (Forestry 8).

Gavin Mecchia who now heads Furniture by Mecchia (formerly Waikato Turnery Ltd.), a Hamilton company that was passed from his grandfather to his father, takes pride in his involvement in the National Certificate and Apprenticeship. He is a conscientious mentor, spending time with the apprentices as a “counsellor, employee and employer” (Mecchia Personal). Not surprisingly, Gavin conveyed that the apprenticeship experience and acquisition of skills supplementary to the basics depend solely on the attitude and personality of the employer. The range of work at Mecchia—custom cabinetry for luxury homes to restoration and reproduction of family heirlooms—affords his charges enhanced opportunities to learn traditional techniques. For example, Jim Mecchia (Gavin’s father) still uses the lathes that permitted his father to produce wooden columns for Hamilton public buildings; apprentices at Furniture by Mecchia are exposed to this technological heritage.

The National Certificate in Furniture Making affords other exciting opportunities. Jenny Sullivan represented New Zealand at the Youth Skill Olympics in Switzerland in 1997 (“She’s a winner” 24), while she completed the training modules for her Level 4 Certificate. Her employer, Geoff Hind of Rimu Country Cottage at Pahoia, in the Bay of Plenty, was enthusiastic about the newly instituted standards. For apprentices like Sullivan, the National Certificate is a way to acquire skills. Personal development towards the practice of ‘craft’ would require additional dedication.

Returning to the issue of tertiary education for studio furniture, as has been noted in this and Chapter 2, Craft Design courses were put into place in polytechnics throughout the country by 1987 (nine in 1986; two more in 1987). They were dedicated to instruction in a variety of craft media as well as two- and three-dimensional design. Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology, described on page 125, was the primary deliverer of furniture education. In 1987, the second year of the certificate programme, it was projected that the intake across seven polytechnics would total 93 students (Codd et al. 99). In fact, Ministry of Education figures (Figure 114) show that enrolments exceeded expectations by 23 students. By 1989, 43 students were enrolled at the four polytechnics offering the Diploma in Craft Design or level 6 classes. Beyond 1989 it is not possible to gauge the numbers of students dedicated to craft because Ministry of Education statistics do not list them separately.

The duplication of resources for these relatively small numbers—under 250 pupils per year, nationwide, from 1986 to 1989—put a strain on the polytechnics; when the tertiary education system was restructured in 1989, and funding became linked with student numbers, the polytechnics shifted from craft to visual arts curricula. Institutions that had woodworking studios and instruction in furniture-making techniques abandoned those courses, or absorbed the facilities into sculpture departments. While students could still specialise in furniture under the visual arts umbrella, comprehensive training towards becoming a crafts master was no longer available.

The result was that polytechnics changed their focus to furniture design. If Carin Wilson, John Shaw and Humphrey Ikin represent New Zealand’s first generation of studio furniture makers (to use Edward Cooke’s categorisation), it might be said that the second generation is represented by Christopher Grattan, Katy Wallace, Simon James and Tim Wigmore (Figure 115). These students were trained in industrial, product or interior design, and some had the benefit of being taught by makers such as Humphrey Ikin at Unitec and Tim Miller at Victoria University of Wellington. These fortunate few were,

84 The company is also known in New Zealand spinning and weaving circles for its spinning wheels and looms.
85 This estimate was reported by spokespersons from Carrington, Hawkes Bay, Waiairiki, Nelson, Christchurch, Otago and Southland at a National Evaluation Craft Education Conference in November 1986. Northland, Wanganui and Waikato did not provide numbers; Parumoana did not attend the Conference.
86 Small numbers dictated consolidation under the “Art, Music and Handicrafts” umbrella.
87 In December 2000 I was interviewed for, and subsequently offered, a posting by NMIT to teach woodworking students in their final year of a diploma and write curriculum for a proposed Bachelors’ degree in the same medium. The students finished their diploma in 2001, with Tim Larkin in charge, and the programme was terminated.
88 Katy Wallace was a Unitec graduate in 3-D design in 1994; Simon James has a degree in Spatial Design from Auckland Institute of Technology (Zander 127); Tim Wigmore graduated from Unitec’s 3-D design programme. Grattan, whose chair was on the cover of the Framed catalogue, had a BDes from Unitec.
and in the case of Miller’s students are, able to receive advice on technique and assembly to achieve quality prototypes, but the ultimate aim of this training was design for industry. At the time of writing, this aim is intact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 114. Enrolments in Craft Design Certificates and Diplomas at New Zealand Polytechnics**

1986 was the first intake of Craft Design Certificate students. Certificate students were at Level 3; Diploma students, at level 5 and 6, began in 1988. Statistics for the number of Level 3 students for 1989 are not contained in the Ministry’s charts; the total number, 201, for Level 5 suggests that Levels 3 and 5 are combined. Level 8 is a post-graduate year. From 1990 the Certificate and Diploma courses are not listed separately but are instead under the umbrella title “Art Music & Handicrafts.” Beyond 1989 it is difficult to assess the numbers of Craft Design students.

The numbers are small. Taking 1987 as an example, with 208 students distributed over 11 institutions, there were an average of 19 per school. The replication of resources for each group of 19 was not cost effective.

**Figure 115. Work by ‘Second Generation’ New Zealand Furniture Designers**

_Katy Wallace. Unit A (1 & 2). 1997_ (left). These shelving units appeared in _Framed_. Made of aluminium sheet and zinc plated rod, they bolt together in a high-tech 1970s aesthetic. The components were subcontracted and assembled by hand; as a prototype, it was intended for mass production.

_Simon James. Hawk Table and Chairs_ (centre). Manufactured in oak or ash, these items are part of a multi-faceted range of furniture and accessories that are retailed in the Simon James flagship store in Auckland as well as stores throughout New Zealand and abroad.

_Tim Wigmore. Giddyup Rocking Stool_. Wigmore makes prototypes for the components—for instance the support structure—and when quantities of those components are returned to him by a manufacturer, he does the assembly and finishing.

*ProDesign* report in April/May 1996 reported on employment prospects: “In New Zealand, around 5000 students are currently enrolled in design courses. The four design schools that run product design courses ‘produce’ an estimated 10-15 graduates per year. For young product designers, finding employment in the [New Zealand] industry is difficult, because positions in companies that practice product design are limited and few manufacturers can justify setting up in-house design departments” (Klose 76).
In 1997 the Universal College of Learning (UCOL) in Palmerston North (Figure 116 and 117) began offering a Diploma in Furniture Design and Making (Halewood). This is the only tertiary programme in New Zealand and, at $5,256.50 per year for a two-year, full-time course, is affordable. As UCOL’s website states, it offers “a practical, hands-on experience with lecturers that are qualified furniture makers. The practical component makes up 80% of the programme” (UCOL). In addition students take business courses that provide skills for self-employment or to take to an employer. During 2011, there were 14 students in first year and 12 in second (Halewood “Re: Greetings”). With two

Figure 116. UCOL Furniture Design School
Student work, from left to right: Stu Brown, Spyhopper Drinks Cabinet. Sharyn Hoult, Square Peg in a Round Hole (table). Joshua Norris, Moondance Display Cabinet

Figure 117. Andy Halewood, Grace (below)
Halewood and Daniel Reilly are the instructors at UCOL. I visited the school in 2008 and talked to Halewood about the programme. The students receive a kit of tools and begin their making in first year with a box for an oil stone. Subsequent projects include a bar stool and a sideboard. In second year steambending and veneering are taught and students complete a project of their own design. Halewood stated that the bespoke furniture programme is propped up by certificate courses in carpentry. Halewood exhibits his work and had a piece accepted in the Waiheke Community Art Gallery’s juried exhibition, Design/Make: Sideboard in 2008. Grace came first in the Pine Section at the Kawerau Woodskills Festival 2011 (UCOL “UCOL”).
concentrated years of furniture design and making, graduates of this course are comparable to their counterparts in the United States and Britain.

In summary, if you want to be a studio furniture maker in New Zealand you can: study at the Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson or the Universal College of Learning in Palmerston North; learn woodworking skills via various means—continuing education if available (hobby classes), private tuition or self-teaching—with design training acquired piecemeal; or seek educational opportunities overseas. It will be noted that I do not include tertiary design programmes as a route to studio furniture. My discussion of this omission forms the conclusion of this chapter.

Conclusion

New Zealand design history is replete with evidence that furniture-making has been practiced since colonisation. One portion of that history is studio furniture whose definition, established in North America, has been shown to apply nationally. The work of James Chapman-Taylor predated the period of study in this thesis but his output and approach, in the early part of the twentieth century, aligned with the tenets of studio furniture, affirming that New Zealand supported and recognised its practitioners when they appeared. One-of-a-kind furniture that was made in small shops and sold through galleries or commissions has graced homes, offices and public spaces throughout the country for about 100 years. During the three decades to which this thesis is devoted, the majority of makers of studio furniture were self-taught yet highly skilled as a result of long-term commitment and learning. The men, and a small number of women, explored materials and techniques that met clients’ needs as well as their personal desire for self-satisfaction and financial reward by means of craft.

I chose to begin my history of New Zealand studio furniture in 1979. In that year the Canterbury Guild of Woodworkers, the first of many such associations, was formed, making public and collective an activity that had previously been clandestine and solo. The guilds along with the Crafts Council were catalysts for visibility, professional careers, educational change and the presence of studio furniture within the country’s cultural context; a community of furniture makers worked together and flourished. By the late 1980s, the medium reached its apogee as described by Colin Slade: “During 1988, a watershed year for New Zealand furniture, there were more furniture exhibitions and more furniture makers participating than at any time in the movement's short history” (Slade “Function” 39). The very fact that this statement appeared in the New Zealand Listener, a widely-read national magazine, was evidence of furniture’s stature at that time. Ten years later, Framed took place at the Dowse Art Museum signifying the state of studio furniture at the threshold of the 21st century.

Over this twenty-year period the national context for furniture underwent significant change: import restrictions were lifted, state industries were privatised, the education system was restructured, the global economy became predominant, and the ubiquity of computers affected all aspects of society. Concurrently, the national crafts organisation rose and fell, and the national studio furniture association lost momentum and disappeared. Instruction in furniture design and making was replaced by design for industry whereby students concentrate on computer-generated outputs that may or may not have full-size physical manifestations. Framed in this way, design does not require mastery of skills for making; design is a component of the workmanship of certainty (page 107) whereby perfection is achieved by others in the manufacturing phase by means of industrial processes.

By contrast, holistic craft as defined in Chapter 1 (page 4) incorporates every phase of design/making/installation/reflection; it is achieved by day-after-day, year-after-year reflective practice. My account of New Zealand studio furniture confirms this ethos. The value of a life-long ‘apprenticeship’ is product excellence for the consumer and, for the maker, knowledge that their output is to the best of their ability. This knowledge is craft as care (page 4), a philosophical ethos that also develops over time and through experience; craft as care evolves through years of reflection on humanity, the environment and the prevailing ‘accepted’ modes of societal functioning. Craft as care is about how things are produced,
aligning studio furniture makers more comfortably with holistic makers of ceramics, glass and fibre than with furniture designers.

During the 1990s New Zealand downgraded the value of holistic craft training by adopting visual arts and technology education. In the furniture medium, this resulted in the juxtaposing of furniture makers with furniture designers. In the United States, Cooke’s research encompassed a large enough population of studio furniture makers that he did not have to do so. Nationally, the groups have been combined under the belief that the “new craftspeople” (Lloyd-Jenkins “We’re”) are a natural evolution from their mortise-and-tenoning forebears. Design critic Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins90 believes that industrial design is the new craft:

> When the free market appeared in the 1980s, large-scale design-led manufacturing disappeared. It took a while but something new emerged, a way of thinking about manufacturing objects that was essentially local—that which would internationally be called ‘craft’ here calls itself ‘design’. . . . [New Zealand has] produced a unique approach to ‘industrial’ design that has yet to be exploited to its full potential. The idea that craft might be a design incubator for the emergence of a new approach to manufacturing offers creative potential in a nation now familiar with the term ‘Creative Industries’ (At Home 311).

New Zealand’s design history provides no evidence of “large-scale design-led manufacturing.” As recently as 2003 an initiative sponsored by Industry New Zealand, “Success by Design,” attempted to persuade manufacturers of the value of design. Its limited success was due to a significant factor: public education. In its efforts to establish a design climate in the late 1950s the New Zealand government consciously embraced design for economic, rather than aesthetic reasons, seeing it primarily as an ingredient in goods for export (C. Thompson “Modernizing”). The long-term consequence of this focus has been that the national culture regards design as of “distinctly secondary significance” (C. Thompson “Design” 62). In conjunction with this attitude,

> [i]t is a simple fact that the majority of manufactured commodities consumed in New Zealand are and have always been produced elsewhere, and until recently New Zealand consumers were constrained as to what commodities and services they could acquire through import restrictions and, more significantly, the activities of a cabal of importers and distributors representing overseas manufacturers who were not only able to determine availability but were in the extraordinary position of being able to influence both government policy and what might best be described as public taste (C. Thompson “Design” 61).91

Under this circumstance government did not need to concern itself with a national design ethos because it was being provided by sanctioned promoters of offshore design. Thus, New Zealand society was one where the public was not design literate and vested interests profited from maintenance of the status quo. Import liberalisation resulted in the availability of a wider variety of goods but without concurrent aesthetic education, consumers and local manufacturers remained unenlightened about what constituted good design generally, and specifically, quality furniture design and manufacture. Within this context neither craft nor design made inroads into industry. The country has witnessed furniture designers such as David Trubridge and Simon James take their designs through manufacturing to national and international marketing but a handful of examples does not amount to Lloyd-Jenkins’ “emergence of a new approach to manufacturing.”

As an indication of the status of design amongst future career choices, in 2009 only 2% of tertiary students were enrolled in Graphic and Design Studies (“Students Enrolled”). Nevertheless, the wholesale adoption of rational design education instead of interdisciplinary craft and design training has eroded the

90 Lloyd-Jenkins studied for a Diploma in Design at Carrington Polytechnic (now UNITEC) in the early 1990s. He subsequently earned an MA in art history from the University of Auckland.
91 Christopher Thompson’s research on New Zealand ceramics manufacturing underpins his assertions (“Confronting”).
future for holistic craft. New Zealanders who trained under the design aegis see themselves as the “renewed crafts movement,” revelling in technological change (Lloyd-Jenkins “Does” 55) and chomping-at-the-bit for recognition. When the Crafts Council was disestablished, the new craftspeople were anxious that their predecessors cede control of the craft community to permit an infusion of fresh blood (Lloyd-Jenkins “We’re”). But a regime change must embrace the quality of a maker like Alan Peters in order that the credibility of craft be maintained. Craft cannot be updated by disposing of heritage and taking shortcuts. Excellent traditional craft can sit side-by-side with excellent contemporary craft. Peter Smith, one of the authors of An Evaluation of the Diploma of Craft Design in New Zealand Polytechnics, stated: “the apparent conflict between innovation or originality and precedent or tradition is a dangerous simplification of the creative process, popularised largely in the twentieth century to sustain the Modern Movement” (Lealand and Smith 84).

By adopting a definition for studio furniture that embraces design and making, and confirming its presence and evolution in New Zealand, I am able to identify appropriate practitioners to represent this medium. In the next chapter I look at six makers who were chosen because of their contribution to studio furniture’s history: five represent the circumstances of the ongoing survival of studio furniture, and one is representative of why some makers are not currently making. While the makers are unique, they also typify their peers; an amalgam of their individual stories creates an overview of the community and studio furniture as a holistic practice.

92 In his review of Framed, Lloyd-Jenkins highlighted the work of Christopher Grattan and Katy Wallace. He wrote: “But then, is it craft? Surely craft is about traditional methods? Not any more - this new craft is a design hot-house. Although Wallace may have thrown away the adze, her work is as handmade as any work of old - it’s the attitude that has changed” (“Handmade”).

93 Smith was affiliated with the Auckland College of Education at the time of co-authoring Evaluation and is described (83) as an art historian, painter and art educator.