

# New designs on Melbourne

Famed for retro pieces, Tongue + Groove has taken a leap forward, says **Jayne D'Arcy**.

**D**ESIGNER furniture emporium Tongue + Groove is new again. Upstairs, the wallpaper has been stripped off, leaving the coloured imprints of the old floral design as an ode to the past. The ceiling is already dripping with the ball-like light fittings of Australian designer Marc Pascal, and soon designs by Mance Design, Denis Smitka, Volker Haug, Greg Bonasera and David Trubridge will also be lighting up the floorboards.

Tongue + Groove, once a choice shop to find mostly imported retro designer furniture, has changed. Move over old stuff, it's time for Melbourne's designers to bring in the shiny new stuff.

The change is the brainchild of Ross Hines, director of Tongue + Groove and of the new collective, the Design Refinery. The reason for moving from retro design to new and local design is straightforward. "It's getting really hard to source pieces," Hines says.

His Australian-designed chair collection from the mid 20th-century has been moved to the shop's bluestone cellar (itself a great display venue), but these classic post-war pieces, still with beautiful lines and a surprising modernity, prove his belief that "Australia has a great history of design".

That Australia also has a great batch of designers became apparent to Hines when local designers Bonasera and Pascal entered the realm of Tongue + Groove a few years ago.

"They're geniuses," Hines says, examining a fragile, limited-edition Bonasera fruit-tree bowl. "You can put a ceramic piece like this on a giant sideboard and it will look great."

Through Bonasera and Pascal, Hines connected with Melbourne's design community and formed the Design Refinery. "I've pulled

in a great pool of local talent," Hines says.

So far they've made a sleek seating and sideboard line that would win any furniture competition and comes with a dash of Melbourne personality. "The Ivan seating line (the single, double and three-seater) is named after Ivan the upholsterer," he says.

The three-seater is low, long and certainly points towards the mid-century, but this time, Hines says, better technology and materials are used. "They're built to last,"

Hines says. "The angles are ergonomic, it's quite petite and it won't take over your lounge room. It's designed for an apartment, not an aircraft hanger."

Tongue + Groove's series of furniture is linked through uniform low lines and steel and timber "sandwich" legs. The hoop-pine Lewis sideboard has concealed panels for electrical cords, drawers that open at a mere touch and a very smooth finish. If that sounds good but dull, check out Tim

Fleming's limited edition (five only) version. It's covered in black pre-financial crash stencilled images of oil fields, dollar signs, suitcases and, if you look carefully, Fleming himself with a crow in his hand.

The Lewis sideboard will be a canvas for other artists and Hines is itching to get more locally designed furniture and interesting objects

into the shopfront. Object-wise, flavour of the month is the Hines-commissioned "pop tree" — a 52-centimetre-high Christmas tree that packs flat and was designed by local architect/designer Michael Frazzetto.



The Tongue + Groove crew at the refurbished store. From left: Justin Hutchinson, designer; Kevin O'Connor, cabinetmaker; owner Ross Hines; Ivan Mattucci, upholsterer. Inset, three of the new "retro" pieces.

Also on display are bowls made with hand-collected street-sweeper bristles and Fleming's very collectable hand-cut "OK" hand mirrors (a hand making the OK sign).

There's a creative force at work here, too, as the studios upstairs are occupied by industrial designers Justin Hutchinson and Dhiren Bhagwandas and award-winning Paper Tiger Stool designer Anthony Dann.

It certainly is an amazing pool of Melbourne talent and Hines is converted. "I want to build pride in local product. This is the future," he says.

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