

***Modernising Furniture:***  
***Four Melbourne Designers 1946-60***

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## Introduction

There has been an enthusiastic regeneration of interest in mid-century modern furniture and design in today's society. Interior design and lifestyle magazines feature numerous advertisements and recommendations for replica mid-century modern furniture (Figure 1). Television shows, including those long-running staples of Australian television – the soap operas *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* – showcase many recognisable mid-century modern items in their set design, such as Charles and Ray Eames' 1956 Lounge Chair and Ottoman (Figure 2) and George Nelson's Sunburst Clock c.1964 (Figure 3). Reality television shows based on the concepts of renovating and interior design also make abundant use of these items in their furnishings, and Target, one of Australia's largest retailers, recently began selling replica Eames plastic dining chairs (1951).

While it was not uncommon to find chairs by mid-century modern designers discarded on nature strips two decades ago, these items are now enjoying an undeniable resurgence in popularity and are fetching high prices at auction.<sup>1</sup> This can partly be explained by the vogue of all things 'retro', which is one of the current buzz words in home furnishing and design, and partly due to the

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<sup>1</sup> A 1955 easy chair by Grant Featherston sold for \$17,520 at Shapiro Auctioneers sale of twentieth and twenty-first century design on August 7 2013, greatly exceeding the pre-sale estimate of \$5000-\$7000. Peter Fish, "Take a Seat: Featherston Chair Snares Record," *Australian Financial Review* August 15 2013, 39.

designs themselves. They look just as good today as they did in the six decades which have passed since their creation, and the modernists' concerns with good design and functionality also stand the test of time.

While the proliferation of replica mid-century modern furniture currently on the Australian market could be seen as a debasement of the original designs, somewhat at odds with the integrity of the original furniture, this aggrandisement of replica furniture has raised public awareness and interest in the designers and design period. In response, an exhibition of Australian mid-century modern furniture is being planned for 2014.<sup>2</sup>

While the furniture made by the designers to be examined in this thesis shared similarities with furniture being made in the United States of America and Europe, particularly in their approaches to use of materials and concern with form, the Australian designers also attempted to find ways to regionalise their designs, either through the use of native materials or to cater more specifically to the tastes of the Australian market.

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<sup>2</sup> Curated by Kirsty Grant, the Senior Curator of Australian Painting, Sculpture and Decorative Arts to 1980 at the National Gallery of Victoria, "Mid-Century Modern: Australian Furniture Design" is scheduled for May-October 2014 and will feature the work of designers including Douglas Snelling, Grant and Mary Featherston, Roger McLay, Fred Ward, Fred Lowen, Schulim Krimper, Clement Meadmore, Michael Hirst, George Korody, Steven Kalmar, Gordon Andrews, Gerald and Isobel Doube, Aboriginal Enterprises (Bill Onus), Robert Klippel, Janet Dawson and Kjell Grant. It will be the first major exhibition of Australian mid-century modern furniture staged in Australia.

While a great deal of literature has been written about mid-century modern furniture, the vast majority of it focuses on European and American designers. This thesis seeks to address the work of Australian designers, focusing on four Melbourne-based designers, from 1946-60.

Melbourne was a creative centre during this fourteen-year period, with some of the best-known modern Australian artists and designers working out of the city. This thesis will examine the furniture designed by Frederick Charles Cecil Ward<sup>3</sup> (1900-1990), Fritz Karl Heinz Lowenstein<sup>4</sup> (1919-2005), Grant Featherston (1922-1995), and Clement Lyon Meadmore (1929-2005), during this time, and will answer the question of how international design as well as Australian post-war aesthetics and society were manifested through their furniture.

There has yet to be a definitive account written of the work these designers produced in the post-war era, and how Melbourne as a city responded to the emerging modernism of these designers. This thesis seeks to address this gap. It will also explore the craftsmanship of the designers, the materials and production techniques used, and the styling and marketing of the furniture. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to include a wide-ranging examination of

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<sup>3</sup> Known as Fred Ward.

<sup>4</sup> Known as Fred Lowen.

the consumption of the furniture produced by the four designers and how it was used in Australian homes during the time period examined. However, it will be shown that the majority of the furniture produced by these designers sold in large quantities and was used extensively throughout Melbourne and other cities.

There are a small number of books on design in Australia which cover the period 1946-60, offering insight into the theme of changing Australian society's taste and aesthetics in the post-war period. While some of them scrutinise the work of the four designers examined in this thesis, they provide only a superficial investigation, focusing on a large number of designers and products produced over a number of years. One such book, *Private lives: Australians at Home Since Federation* (2008) by Peter Timms,<sup>5</sup> inspects a number of areas, including architecture and the changing Australian home, as well as a large section on television and the changing lounge and dining rooms, aspects most relevant to this thesis.

Michael Bogle's book, *Design in Australia 1880-1970* (c.1998),<sup>6</sup> also covers a wide range of areas over a long time period. In the introduction Bogle writes:

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Timms, *Private Lives: Australians at Home since Federation* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Bogle, *Design in Australia 1880-1970* (North Ryde, NSW: Craftsman House; [Tortola, BVI]: G+B Arts International, c.1998).



The cultural tension created by the three strong polarities of Australia's design community – a profound attachment to Britain, the seductiveness of the International style of Europe and America, and the continuing call for a regional philosophy of design – is a recurring theme in this book.<sup>7</sup>

These divisions play a significant role in this thesis, though will be examined in greater detail than Bogle's book by viewing them specifically through the lens of the work of the four designers who will be investigated.

Bogle's book with Peta Landman, *Modern Australian Furniture: Profiles of Contemporary Designer-Makers* (1989),<sup>8</sup> is also light on detail regarding the four designers to be examined, instead providing a broad account of contemporary furniture designers up to the year 1989.

*Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia* (2008)<sup>9</sup> provides the most comprehensive account of modernism in Australia across a wide range of areas, with a particular focus on architecture and industrial design. Of most relevance, it pays individual attention to the careers of Fred Ward and Clement Meadmore. It examines the Modern Home Exhibition in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Bogle and Peta Landman, *Modern Australian Furniture: Profiles of Contemporary Designer-Makers* (Roseville, NSW: Craftsman House, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Philip Goad, Andrew McNamara, and Ann Stephen, *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).

Melbourne in 1949, and investigates the milk bar and café culture which emerged in Melbourne in the post-war period. These aspects will be further explored in this thesis, with particular attention to how they relate to the work of the designers in question.

In a similar vein, *The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties* (1993)<sup>10</sup> provides an overarching account of design in the 1950s, covering a diverse range of areas, including fashion, art, advertising and gardening. While the book includes information on the four designers in question, it is not an extensive account of their work.

Nanette Carter's conference paper "Blueprint to Patterncraft: DIY Furniture patterns and packs in Post-War Australia" (2011)<sup>11</sup> provides the most up-to-date and respected information on Fred Ward's DIY (do-it-yourself) furniture available and has been a valuable resource. Taking Carter's research a step further, through independent research this thesis has concluded that Ward's Timber-pack furniture, discussed in chapter one, is the first example of flat-pack furniture available on the global retail market, preceding IKEA by a decade.

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<sup>10</sup> Judith O'Callaghan, *The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties* (Haymarket, NSW: Powerhouse Publishing, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Nanette Carter, "Blueprint to Patterncraft: Diy Furniture Patterns and Packs in Post-War Australia," in *Design History Society Annual Conference: Design Activism and Social Change* (Barcelona, Spain 2011).

There are few publications which deal specifically with mid-century Australian furniture. The catalogue *One Hundred Modern Chairs* (1974)<sup>12</sup> by the former Senior Curator of Decorative Arts at the National Gallery of Victoria, Terence Lane, is one of the first publications to examine furniture in an art historical context, and includes a section on Australian-designed chairs, but Lane was aware of its shortcomings:

The survey of the 'modern' chair in Australia in the years between 1900 and the present day which is offered by this exhibition is necessarily brief and incomplete. No serious study of Australian furniture of the period has yet appeared, and it is not within the scope of this exhibition to rectify that shortcoming.<sup>13</sup>

*Featherston Chairs* (1988) by Lane<sup>14</sup> provides the most definitive account of that designer's chair designs available, with no other publications on Grant Featherston emerging in the twenty-five years since then.

One of the most in-depth accounts of the time period 1946-60 is provided by Fred Lowen in his autobiography, *Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist* (c.2000).<sup>15</sup> Lowen describes the experience of leaving his native Germany for Australia during the Second World War, his early forays into design through

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<sup>12</sup> Terence Lane, *One Hundred Modern Chairs* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Unpaginated

<sup>14</sup> *Featherston Chairs: National Gallery of Victoria 30 March-7 August 1988* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Fred Lowen, *Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist* (Castelmaine, Vic.: Prendergast Publishing, 2000?).

his work turning wooden salad bowls on a lathe, and his establishment with fellow Dunera boy Ernest Rodeck of their company Fler. Lowen provides some insight into the market for the furniture he designed for Fler, and the market in Australia at the time:

European immigrants, academics and more progressive young people were our target market, and Fler could grow comfortably as this section of the market expanded. The Fler name had reached some forward-thinking retailers who approached us for supplies. Some competition came from Grant Featherston who had designed modern free-form chairs, with upholstered plywood shells that became very popular.<sup>16</sup>

The book provides a first-hand account of the state of design and furniture in post-war Melbourne, however the majority of the information falls outside of the 1946-60 time period covered by this thesis. Similarly, Lane's essay in the book *The Europeans: Émigré Artists in Australia 1930-1960* (1997),<sup>17</sup> published by the National Gallery of Australia in association with its exhibition of the same name, examines Lowen's journey to Australia and establishment of Fler, concisely summarising much of the same information from Lowen's autobiography.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Butler (ed.), *The Europeans: Émigré Artists in Australia 1930-1960* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1997).

Aside from references in *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, there was little written about Fred Ward, particularly his work from the period 1946-60, at the commencement of this thesis's research. This changed in June 2013 when a monograph on Ward was published, *Fred Ward: Australian Pioneer Designer 1900-1990*,<sup>18</sup> providing a comprehensive account of Ward's life and work as a designer. However, the book does not examine Ward's work in a specifically modernist context, unlike this thesis.

Clement Meadmore is best-known as a sculptor, not a furniture designer, and the vast majority of scholarship on Meadmore focuses on his sculpture. Aside from mentions of his design work in the previously noted books, the majority of information on his furniture design has been found in magazines from the 1950s, particularly *Architecture and Arts*, which regularly featured Meadmore's designs during that decade.

Because of the heretofore lack of an extensive examination of the four designers and their work from this time period, the majority of the research presented in this thesis comes from primary sources from that period, notably home and lifestyle magazines which were concerned with interior and

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<sup>18</sup> Derek F. Wrigley, *Fred Ward: Australian Pioneer Designer 1900-1990* (Canberra: ANU Printing Service, 2013).

industrial design, with the *Australian Home Beautiful*<sup>19</sup> in particular widely used to gain an understanding of the social conditions and issues and concerns of Australians in the post-war era.

Each of the four chapters of this thesis will examine the work produced by one designer during the period of 1946-60. Pertinent information about modernist design principles, how Australian post-war society changed, and how the designers reflected these changes with their furniture, will be discussed and examined throughout the four chapters. Of particular note, two important events of 1956 – the Olympic Games and the introduction of television – will be examined in detail throughout the thesis. It will also detail the work of modern architects working in Melbourne who championed the work of modern furniture designers.

The exciting and innovative furniture the four designers in question produced during the period of 1946-60 shaped not only the city in which they lived and worked, but would have ramifications in Sydney and other regions of the country. They helped to establish a new aesthetic in post-war Australia, one which embraced modernity and innovation in architecture and design, and moved away from the British-influenced styles of the past. They are worthy of investigation at this time in the scholarship of Australian design history.

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<sup>19</sup> Hereafter this will be abbreviated to *Home Beautiful*.

## Chapter One: The Making of Modern Melbourne

Prior to, during, and following the Second World War, there was a diaspora of artists, architects and designers from Europe. Some of them came to Australia, including one of the designers this thesis examines, Fred Lowen. These creative professionals brought with them their European aesthetics and influences, providing a modern perspective on art, architecture and design within Australia.

Modernism encompassed a wide range of areas: painting and sculpture, writing, (such as that associated with the Angry Penguins group), fashion, architecture and design. For the purposes of this thesis the modernist work produced by the designers to be examined will be discussed under the definitions associated with modern architecture and design. Christopher Heathcote has identified that there are many theories of modernism.

The term has been identified with the breakdown of mimesis, a fascination with the formal possibilities inherent in artistic media, the consequences and excitements of the machine age.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 1995), 25.

The breakdown of mimesis, or imitation, was vital to changing the way Australians thought about art and design in the post-war era. Nanette Carter has determined that the emergence of modernist design in Melbourne in the 1930s was the result of a deliberate shift by Australian designers away from British influences and towards an international way of thinking.<sup>21</sup> Australian architecture and design was still heavily influenced by Britain at the start of the twentieth century, with styles such as Tudor and Queen Anne popular with the middle classes. Furniture was made to imitate the historical revival styles popular in Britain, with woods French polished and stained to aid to the patina of the antique.

Modernism, with its concerted attempt to move away from mimesis, allowed designers like Fred Ward to begin to think of creating a national identity which was recognisably Australian. He used Australian timber in his furniture, eschewing stains and polishes which would disguise the properties of the wood. Instead, he allowed the characteristics of the Australian timber to be seen, promoting and celebrating its importance.

The possibilities of the machine age were of particular interest to those at the Bauhaus, the influential German school of art and design which operated in

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<sup>21</sup> Nanette Carter, *Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939* (Bulleen, Vic.: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 28.



Germany from 1919 to 1933. The Bauhaus explored the ideas of mass production, examining ways the products it created could be produced en masse for a wide market. These ideas were highly influential in Europe and were brought to Australia by many artists and designers, including Lowen, who sought to find ways of bringing his furniture to a wide audience. Grant Featherston would also attempt to reach wide audiences through mass production, echoing the work being undertaken by the noted American designers Charles and Ray Eames.

Form and functionality of products was also of great importance to modernists. "Form follows function" was a mantra followed by many modern architects and designers. The phrase was taken from Louis H. Sullivan's 1896 article "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered"<sup>22</sup> and simplified to "form follows function", succinctly summarising the concerns of designers that a building or product's form should directly relate to and complement its function and purpose.

The removal of decoration and ornament was a defining characteristic of modern architecture and design, particularly in the buildings designed in what

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<sup>22</sup> Louis H. Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," *Lippincott's Magazine* March (1896). "It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognisable in its expression, that form ever follows function. *This is the law.*" 408

has been named the International style – the form of modernism which emerged in the United States of America as a result of former Bauhaus designers who dispersed there after the Bauhaus’s closure, including its last director, Mies van der Rohe – and can be seen in the furniture of Ward and the designers in question. Function was of great importance to Ward, whose Patterncraft and Timber-pack furniture was specifically designed to provide a function for a certain group of people in society. As Lakshmi Bhaskaran has observed: “International style was almost synonymous with that of ‘good design’ where products were designed in accordance with the formal, technical, and aesthetic principles of modernism.”<sup>23</sup>

The concept of so-called ‘good design’ was a major concern of the modernists who defined it with the key characteristics of simple, utilitarian and undecorated design, smooth finishes, the use of industrial materials and minimal surface modelling. There was also an associated moral issue, with the idea that “design could be used as a democratic tool for social change”.<sup>24</sup> This also underlined the modernists’ belief in the removal of decoration and ornamentation from design, linking excessive decoration with “the debasement of society”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lakshmi Bhaskaran, *Designs of the Times: Using Key Movements and Styles for Contemporary Design* (Mies, Switzerland: Roto Vision, 2005), 154.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

The designers to be discussed in this thesis subscribed to many of these modernist ideas, which manifested in different ways but which also had many similarities. While they were influenced by international schools of thought and production methods, Ward sought to create Australian designs, attempting to stamp a national imprint on a country which was still British in its dominant cultural values and associations. Lowen and Featherston were concerned with promoting a commercial, modern aesthetic for contemporary Australian consumers, and Meadmore was a sculptor at heart, experimenting with ideas of space and light to create his unique steel rod furniture.

A fierce supporter of the project to create a national identity, Robin Gerard Penleigh Boyd (1919-1971) was an architect and critic who wrote extensively on Australian architecture and design, and championed modernism in Australia. In his book *The Australian Ugliness*,<sup>26</sup> first published in 1960, Boyd argued that Australia, as a nation, did not know what it was, and therefore was comprised of an ugly mix of clashing styles. He dubbed this ugliness, prominent by the twentieth century, 'Featurism' and described examples of it from most major Australian cities, including Melbourne. Boyd wrote: "The state of Victoria lustily developed Australia's devastating combination of unconcern with essential form and over-concern with features."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Modernism, in comparison, was concerned with essential form and the removal of unnecessary decorative features – an aesthetic at odds with Featurism. During the period of 1946-60, there existed a backlash against Featurism among many designers, who moved to change public tastes from the conspicuous displays of wealth which Boyd wrote about, to simpler, less ostentatious designs through the work they produced. Boyd was unstinting in his condemnation of Featurism:

By definition Featurism stands for the subordination of the whole and the accentuation of selected separate features... the featured features are not required functionally by man or beast. They mean very little and they do absolutely nothing. They are the gratuitous adornments known throughout most of art history as ornament, or, when their lack of meaning is especially obvious, decoration.<sup>28</sup>

Also playing important roles in the shaping of an Australian modernist zeitgeist, particularly in Melbourne, were the photographers Wolfgang Georg Sievers (1913-2007) and Mark Strizic (1928-2012). Both European émigrés, Sievers' and Strizic's photographs helped create a modernist 'look' in Melbourne. Martyn Jolly writes:

The artists, designers, architects and photographers who fled to Melbourne to escape Nazism made enormous contributions to Melbourne's growth as a cosmopolitan city, and Sievers photographed much of it... He... photographed the cutting edge modernist

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 246.

architecture of fellow émigrés Frederick Romberg and Ernest Fooks... He photographed their work in the International architectural style, with dynamically receding horizontal lines, sternly orthogonal vertical lines, and cleanly isotropic spaces.<sup>29</sup>

Strizic photographed the streets of Melbourne in an attempt to draw attention to the city's architecture and create a visual language.<sup>30</sup> He helped to document Melbourne's transition into a modern city. Importantly, he also photographed modern furniture being designed in Melbourne, his black-and-white images drawing attention to the simplicity of shape and line in the designs, and illustrating the pared-down modernist sensibilities visible in the designs and highlighting the smoothness and beauty of the timbers used.

While stirrings of modernism in design were visible in Australia during the 1920s, Nanette Carter has described the 1930s as the “watershed decade” for

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<sup>29</sup> Martyn Jolly, *Wolfgang Sievers 1913-2007: Work* (Caulfield, Vic.: Glen Eira City Council, 2007), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Emma Matthews, *Mark Strizic, Melbourne: Marvellous to Modern* (Fishermans Bend, Vic.: Thames & Hudson Australia, 2009), 14. “The cultured European émigré [Strizic] observed in his adopted country a remarkable difference in attitudes and ways of living from that of Europe. He saw a society that placed little value on its architectural heritage and that had little regard for the visual aesthetics of the urban environment. During the 1950s Melbourne was still very much a ‘Victorian community overseas’. People stood for *God Save the Queen* in the cinema, drinking alcohol in hotels after 6pm was outlawed... [and] women wore hats and gloves to the city... The 1956 Olympic Games provided an opportunity for the city to declare its place in the international community. An air of carefree optimism accompanied the event as a palpable effort was made to make the city modern. The removal of all inner-city Victorian lean-to verandas, thought parochial and old-fashioned embarrassments for Olympic visitors, and the revisions in the Uniform Building Regulations that saw the lifting of height restrictions on buildings in central Melbourne... are examples of the changes that took place in an effort to bring the city into the mid-twentieth century.”

Australian modernist design.<sup>31</sup> It was during this decade that Australian designers and architects began to explore and apply modernist principles in their work. As Carter noted:

Paradoxically perhaps, the onset of the Depression in 1930 contributed to the development of modernist design and architecture, and their public acceptance. Melbourne designers including Fred Ward... benefited from retailers' reluctance to order expensive luxury imports and from government trade tariffs that encouraged investment in local design and production.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned, the effects of the Great Depression spurred on this early interest in modernism, which continued into the 1940s. The modernistic paring back of ornament and decoration in design and the focus on form and functionality suited the austerity of the times. Attempts to combat the 'cultural cringe' phenomenon also played a major role in the spread of modernism, with designers making a conscious choice to celebrate Australian talent rather than rely on links to Britain. This confluence of events and ideas in post-war Australia was reflected by the furniture made by Ward, Lowen, Featherston and Meadmore.

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<sup>31</sup> Carter, *Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939*, 110.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

## Fred Ward (1900-1990)

Fred Ward was born in Melbourne on July 26 1900. His career as a furniture designer began in the 1930s, but it was after the Second World War ended that it truly flourished. Ward trained as an artist at the school of drawing at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) from 1918-20 and later worked as a freelance illustrator and cartoonist for publications including the *Bulletin* and the *Herald*.<sup>33</sup> He married Elinor Roper Martin in 1925 and began designing furniture for their new house at Eaglemont, near Heidelberg, around 1930. His initial forays into this new area were the result of necessity rather than a desire to make a career out of furniture design. The couple needed furniture for their house and Ward, mindful of the economic downturn of the Great Depression, took it upon himself to make it rather than buy it. Elinor wrote about the venture in her diary:<sup>34</sup>

Fred set out to make furniture more suitable for the new place – simple well-proportioned pieces which fitted well into the rooms... pieces were made as needed, little stools and tables, a rocking chair... as friends called in they liked our place and loved the furniture and started to ask if Fred would make a piece for them. Knowledge of this spread until as Christmas came they came out in droves and bought things left and right, bought our seats out from under us, until no more could be spared.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Ward, Frederick Charles Cecil (1900–1990)," Australian Dictionary of Biography online, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ward-frederick-charles-cecil-15863>.

<sup>34</sup> Excerpts of the diary are published in Derek Wrigley's book *Fred Ward: Australian Pioneer Designer 1900-1990*.

<sup>35</sup> Wrigley, *Fred Ward: Australian Pioneer Designer 1900-1990*, 45.

The timing and popularity of this venture was fortuitous. Elinor wrote:

At this time also, the Arts and Crafts (Society) had asked Fred to furnish a room for their December exhibition and when this was done they had photographs taken and gave us some of these. Suddenly, Fred thought, 'if these people like my things perhaps I could sell some to a shop, maybe even a dozen', we decided to try.<sup>36</sup>

And thus Ward's career as a furniture design began. The photographs taken at the exhibition were shown to representatives from the Myer department store and he was designing prototype furniture for Myer by 1932.<sup>37</sup>

By 1934 Ward was working for Myer full-time, supervising its fine furniture workshop. He designed the Unit range of furniture, made from cost-effective native timbers. The pieces, or units, could be purchased individually as budgets allowed. The range was advertised as "modern through its flexibility",<sup>38</sup> with the pieces suitable for use in a variety of rooms of the house or apartment – the furniture was light, not bulky, and thus suitable for apartment living, and also had the advantage of being upholstered with soft

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ward opened a shop in Collins Street to sell his furniture, later selling the business to Cynthia Reed, sister of John Reed of the famed 'Heide Circle'.

<sup>38</sup> Carter, "Blueprint to Patterncraft: Diy Furniture Patterns and Packs in Post-War Australia," 4.



covers which could be changed cheaply and fashionably with changing tastes.<sup>39</sup>

Australia's entry into the Second World War temporarily interrupted Ward's career. His work for Myer was put on hold while he assisted the aircraft industry's war effort. Australia had no aluminium smelting or fabricating industry at this time so aircraft needed to be manufactured with timber. By this time, Ward had amassed considerable knowledge about the characteristics of various Australian timbers and he assisted in the production of wooden-framed Mosquito aircraft using native coachwood.<sup>40</sup>

In the United States of America, the war also interrupted Charles and Ray Eameses work in furniture design. Charles, in collaboration with Finnish architect and designer Eero Saarinen, had won New York's Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) competition of 1940 – "Organic Design in Home Furnishings" – with their designs for moulded plywood chairs and modular storage units.<sup>41</sup> The designs were manufactured and exhibited at MoMa in 1942 but the fabrication of the chairs had been an expensive and time-consuming process, making them unsuitable for mass production, which was

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Wrigley, *Fred Ward: Australian Pioneer Designer 1900-1990*, 57.; Ward was also charged with preparing blueprint plans and drawings for the Australian variant of the British Beaufighter aircraft through the Department of Aircraft Production.

<sup>41</sup> Naomi Stungo, *Charles and Ray Eames* (London: Carlton Books Limited, 2000), 14.

of major concern to Eames and many modernists. He and Ray continued experimenting with moulded plywood, determined to produce a single-shell moulded plywood chair which could be cheaply and easily manufactured.

Like Ward, the Eameses joined the war effort by entering the aircraft industry, being commissioned to develop plywood aircraft components and plywood splints for wounded soldiers.<sup>42</sup> Through this military contract the pair now had access to information on the latest developments in synthetic glues and plywood production<sup>43</sup> and after the war they used this new knowledge to their advantage. Having realised they would be unable to produce a suitable single-shell chair (the risk of breakage when weight was applied was too great) they decided to instead separate the back and seat for ease of production. Separating the pieces would allow them to be joined in multiple combinations, and if one piece cracked it would be more economical to replace than an entire chair.<sup>44</sup> The chair they conceived in 1946 was made of two pieces of moulded plywood attached with rubber shock mounts to a metal frame. The steel legs would become a hallmark of their chair designs. They called it the Dining Chair Metal (DCM) (Figure 4) and it was their first

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, c.1995), 212.

<sup>44</sup> Ray Eames, John Neuhart, and Marilyn Neuhart, *Eames Design: The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989), 59.

major success in mass-producible furniture. It was also a commercial success.<sup>45</sup>

The Eameses understood American post-war society and aesthetics and aimed to design furniture which was suitable for that market. Mass produced, well designed and aesthetically appealing in their simple, modern lines and shapes, the furniture they designed during the period of 1946-60 held similar goals to the furniture designed by Fred Ward. Being lightweight in nature was an important consideration for the Eameses, as it was for Ward. With many Americans living in apartments due to housing shortages following the war, lightweight furniture replaced the large-scale, heavy furniture which was popular in the previous century. Australians were dealing with a similar social climate and the designers to be discussed in this thesis responded in many of the same ways as the Eameses.

In Melbourne, Ward returned to his work for Myer after the war but found that many of his colleagues in the furniture workshop had decided to start their own design practices. "The excitement of peace seemed to be propitious for a 'new start' in which 'good design' (the latest buzz word) could play a

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<sup>45</sup> Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*, 228.; The Eameses entered into partnership with the Herman Miller Furniture Company which manufactured the chairs and sold them at prices which appealed to the public in the tough post-war economy. By 1951, 2000 DCM chairs were being sold per month demonstrating their popularity with customers.

significant role.”<sup>46</sup> Ward too began to branch out, and it was around this time that he began to develop his Patterncraft range of furniture.

According to Christopher Heathcote, in post-war Australia:

Australians would gauge the quality of their lives not in terms of simple material well-being, but with new moral and cultural concerns. There was also an overall weakening in the British-orientation of intellectual, cultural and social pursuits... the idea germinated that instead of allowing their culture to be defined and interpreted by others, Australians should as a nation become more assertive.<sup>47</sup>

The sheer scale of the Australian war effort undoubtedly played a significant role in this social change. The population of Australia in 1939 was estimated to be 6.97 million<sup>48</sup> and approximately one million Australian men and women served during the war in various roles. More than 30,000 Australian servicemen were taken prisoner and approximately 39,000 were killed during the war.<sup>49</sup> Such huge losses while fighting on behalf of the mother country must have had an effect on this “weakening” of Australia’s relationship with Britain, forging the way for artists and designers to attempt to create a new

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<sup>46</sup> Wrigley, *Fred Ward: Australian Pioneer Designer 1900-1990*, 61.

<sup>47</sup> Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Website, "100 Years of Australian Lives - Population: Second World War (1939–1945),"

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features952012-2013>.

<sup>49</sup> Australian War Memorial Website, "Second World War, 1939–45,"

<http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww2.asp>.

national identity through the work they created. This social change started, foremost, with babies, as Heathcote details:

Australians settled down and got on with their personal lives... they stimulated the 'Baby Boom', becoming the most fertile generation in the nation's history. As 1950 approached there was full employment, steady economic growth and the country entered an unprecedented decade of affluence. Home-building soared and suburbia started to spread.<sup>50</sup>

The Baby Boom and subsequent building boom played a major role in the shaping of modern design in Australia. Architects such as Boyd and his partners Roy Grounds and Romberg had the opportunity to design houses which adhered to modernist principles. Marriage rates also boomed<sup>51</sup> and this great number of newlyweds needed furniture with which to fill their new homes.

Ward's innovative Patterncraft range was developed specifically to meet this new social need. Inspired by sewing patterns, which were regularly featured in newspapers and magazines such as *Australian Home Journal*, Ward co-opted the idea and extended it to furniture. Ward's wife detailed his desire to help returned servicemen:

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<sup>50</sup> Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Only eight per cent of men and four per cent of women were unmarried. Ibid.

Fred wanted of course to do something to help returning soldiers, some of them missing a leg, or otherwise damaged. Their money was first spent on a spree and then on buying a house – not much left to furnish it and start again... he had the idea of designing some basic pieces of furniture so simple that any man could make them with the few tools in every house... But how to get directions to the men was the question. The answer was at hand. The *Herald* already had a service of patterns for making home frocks and such things. Patterns could be cut to fit the parts of timber used to make a table, a stool, a chair and soon even a drawer or a bed. Tam Purvis [sic] and his wife who ran the paper pattern service already were enthusiastic. At once they joined up and Patterncraft was born. Fred designed the furniture, making the first pieces himself. The Purvis pair cut the paper patterns to fit the timber. The *Herald* ran the patterns and sold them with plenty of ads also in *Home Beautiful* where I wrote the articles showing how to furnish a room for an incredibly small amount of cash... The patterns sold like hot cakes.<sup>52</sup>

The home lives of Australians during the 1940s and 1950s were very much oriented toward the concept of DIY. Editions of *Home Beautiful* magazine from these decades prominently feature DIY projects for the men and women of the house.<sup>53</sup> This atmosphere was ideal for a concept such as Patterncraft, with Australian men and women already accustomed to undertaking DIY

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<sup>52</sup> Elinor Ward quoted in Carter, "Blueprint to Patterncraft: Diy Furniture Patterns and Packs in Post-War Australia," 5.

<sup>53</sup> During the war years women were shown in photographs in the magazine undertaking a variety of DIY tasks such as hanging wallpaper, painting, and sewing cushions and soft furnishings. This was undoubtedly partly due to the fact so many men were away from home as part of the war effort.

projects from their exposure to them in magazines, and Ward's altruistic concept became a popular and profitable venture for the designer.

Patterncraft furniture was launched on the cover of *Home Beautiful's* October 1947 edition (Figure 5) and was represented by several pages inside (Figure 6) along with an article by Elinor and instructions for preparing and assembling the furniture (Figure 7). Elinor wrote:

If you have been hamstrung by production shortages; if you are a person who hates waiting for something to happen; or if you are champing at the bit to get that house of yours looking decent; take a look at the drawing of the room which laughs at such troubles. *Home Beautiful* Patterncraft furniture designs have been used in this economical and practical room for the times... Everything in this room is available today, and a good deal of it can be made under your own roof, even if you have never tried before.<sup>54</sup>

After describing the room in the illustration she went on to offer encouragement and advice to potential customers:

...if you have never made furniture before, this is the furniture for you. It has been designed expressly for the complete amateur, the novice, the beginner... take your courage in both hands and start in... it [Patterncraft] embodies quite a new approach to the problem of furnishing in these times, and presents a very good solution if you are

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<sup>54</sup> Elinor Ward, "Lounge Furniture for the Times," *The Australian Home Beautiful*, October 1947, 18.

at all up-and-coming. If you have qualms about timber supply, the tip is to ask any local timber yard for just enough to do you [sic] one or two pieces at a time, explaining that you are “having a go” at making something for yourself.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, the Wards were aiming the Patterncraft range squarely in the market of low-income households, many of which comprised Australia’s post-war society, and people with no experience in building furniture – especially women – while also appealing to the DIY and “have a go” types who would appreciate the contemporary “up-and-coming” sensibility. One of the captions accompanying the photographs in Figure 8 echoes these ideas.

Many “Patterncraft” designs are so simple that they can be successfully built by women... Almost every saw cut is a straight one and in most designs this hard work has been reduced to a minimum.<sup>56</sup> (Figure 8).

Women gained more prominence in domestic life in post-war Australia, taking on responsibilities such as building furniture which would not have occurred prior to the war.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>56</sup> , ibid., 30.

<sup>57</sup> It is interesting to note that Elinor played a significant role in promoting Fred’s designs in post-war Australia, when women were in the workforce in large numbers. While Fred designed furniture for the readers of *Home Beautiful*, Elinor’s writing attempted to gain the confidence of these readers, and encourage them to buy her husband’s products. The husband-and-wife team was another sign of Australia’s changing social climate, where the woman made an equally important contribution to the partnership. This was part of a wider



Within a year of Patterncraft's launch, twenty-six patterns were available. Elinor's advice about making one or two pieces of furniture at a time, along with the rollout of new designs in increments also suited the post-war economics of many householders, enabling them to furnish their homes with matching furniture over a period of time as they could afford it, a practice Ward had successfully used with his Myer Unit range.

The Patterncraft designs were uncomplicated, undoubtedly to make them easy to assemble, and shared similar features, such as dowel rods, used on the back and sides of chairs, in order that all pieces in the range would match. This encouraged customers to add pieces as they could afford them while ensuring that they would all eventually match. The designs were simple and sturdy, which suited Ward's target market.<sup>58</sup>

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phenomenon, both locally and internationally. Grant Featherston's wife Mary, for example, also assisted her husband as a design partner, as did Ray Eames in America. Of particular interest is the design of the cover of *Home Beautiful* which launched the Patterncraft range [Figure 5]. The placement of the furniture and the position of the woman in the foreground is remarkably similar to that of the *Home Beautiful* magazine placed on the table in the 1947 cover. This mimicry of a previous issue of the magazine was no doubt a concerted attempt to position Patterncraft as being of importance to *Home Beautiful* readers, as something worthy of being in a past issue. This clever advertising ploy propagated the idea that Ward's designs were the ideal.

<sup>58</sup> In 1951 Ward released a range of tables and chairs called Blue-print. Similar to Patterncraft, blueprints were sold through *Home Beautiful* which allowed people to construct the furniture at home. The Blue-print range removed Patterncraft's characteristic use of dowel rods and replaced them with a more sophisticated spreader bar. Ward also added more finishing touches, such as grooves around the edges of tables, providing a different aesthetic for customers.

## Precursor to IKEA

The next logical step in the progression of the ideas behind Patterncraft was Timber-pack. This range went a step further in promoting ease-of-use for the customer as it provided pre-cut pieces of timber ready for assembly, eliminating the need for customers to first obtain their own wood and then trace and cut the pattern. It can be argued that Ward's innovative Timber-pack range anticipated in Australia the hugely successful flat-pack furniture produced by the iconic Swedish company IKEA beginning in the 1950s.

Timber-pack was launched nine months after Patterncraft, in July 1948 (Figure 9). It is widely accepted – and the idea perpetuated by the company itself – that the first flat-pack furniture in the world was invented by IKEA, in 1956, when one of its workers removed the legs of a LÖVET table so that it would fit into a car and avoid damage during transit.<sup>59</sup> Lesser known, the American furniture designer Erie J. Sauder (1904-1997) of the Ohio-based Sauder Woodworking Company had previously designed a knock-down table in 1951 that could be assembled by the average person with minimal skills. The company claims it invented the concept of ready-to-assemble or flat-pack furniture.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> IKEA Website, "History: About Us: 1940s-1950s," [http://www.ikea.com/ms/en\\_AU/about\\_ikea/the\\_ikea\\_way/history/1940\\_1950.html](http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_AU/about_ikea/the_ikea_way/history/1940_1950.html).

<sup>60</sup> Sauder Woodworking Company Website, "Sauder Woodworking Company History: Key Dates," <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/sauder-woodworking-company-history/>.

Ward's Timber-pack range pre-dates these achievements by three years and therefore appears to be the first example of flat-pack furniture in the world. This is not only important in the design history of Australia, but is of great significance on an international level.

Timber-packs were released for previously released Patterncraft designs and included designs for bed ends, dining and lounge room chairs, hanging telephone and book shelves, magazine racks as well as a range of children's toys. They were successfully sold through *Home Beautiful* for many years and appealed to the magazine's target demographic, who wanted products which made their lives easier. Home and kitchen gadgets were another indication of this changing society, with women spending less time in the kitchen preparing meals than in previous decades.<sup>61</sup>

An article in the February 1949 issue of the magazine was titled "Quick to fix" and was about quick-to-prepare dishes for dinner for busy working women. "The family need not have hot three-course dinners every night of the week",<sup>62</sup> the article read, and reinforced the fact that many women were part

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<sup>61</sup> The magazine had a section devoted to the latest in home and kitchen gadgets, such as devices for slicing apples in one movement, juice extractors, toasted sandwich makers, and salad shredders, indicative of the modern times, which stressed convenience and time saving in the home.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Moffat, "Quick to Fix," *The Australian Home Beautiful*, February 1949, 65.

of the work force and had less time to prepare large dinners than in previous years, particularly prior to the war.

This shift was reflected by house designs, which in turn affected furniture design. Houses built after the war were smaller than they had previously been, and many people also lived in small flats, or apartments. With space at a premium, house designs began to become “open plan”, an intrinsically modern characteristic:

Changing economical [sic] and social conditions are demanding a new approach to the design of the small home. The Australian climate and way of life demand the needs of family housing shall be met in a gracious, spacious and liveable manner. The answer to this is found in the “open plan” which can be achieved by abolishing floor-to-ceiling partitions between the lounge, dining room and kitchen.<sup>63</sup>

Furniture also took advantage of the pleasant Australian climate, with outdoor living becoming an important part of family life. Ward designed a number of pieces of furniture specifically for the garden, including a lawn chair and a chaise on wheels. Not only could people take advantage of good weather, the space lost indoors could be made up by spending time outdoors. Separate formal dining rooms in houses also became rarer. Without the “hot

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<sup>63</sup> "Modern Forecast - the Living-Dining-Kitchen," *Australian House and Garden Annual* 1955, 11.

three-course dinner”, there was little need for a dining room, with many families opting to eat in the kitchen at a small table, or – after the introduction of television to Australia in 1956 – in the lounge room instead.<sup>64</sup>

In 1955 the cover of the *Australian House and Garden Annual* declared: “This is the day of the small home! – 164 pages of ideas for furnishing, decoration and things to make” and featured a photograph of a small kitchen with a table and Eames DCR chairs. The *Australian House and Garden Book of Small Home Interiors* editor’s recommendation was for “small scale furniture”,<sup>65</sup> and an article on page 14 stated: “Eat in the kitchen – and like it”.<sup>66</sup> Further in the magazine were illustrated articles on how to make a divan, lamp shade and bookshelf, stressing “one way to save money – do-it-yourself”.<sup>67</sup>

The popularity of DIY, combined with the new understanding that smaller homes and suitably appropriate furniture were the way forward in Australian design, placed Ward’s Timber-pack range perfectly within post-war society

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<sup>64</sup> An article in *The Australian Home Beautiful* encouraged this thinking: “Modern living must be styled to small quarters. The day of the large home has gone. And who cares? For the small home can be a little jewel, elegant and gracious, inside and out... Be skilful with furniture... Sell or give away old family furniture of Victorian massiveness... Sets of tables and chairs that fit into each other are styled for small rooms... Functional design with simple flowing lines can give grace and elegance to small room furniture. Certain modern designers excel here, and close study of good contemporary design is recommended.” Jan Meredith, “Where Square Inches Count,” *The Australian Home Beautiful*, May 1948, 21.

<sup>65</sup> Editorial, *Australian House and Garden Book of Small Home Interiors* (Sydney: K. G. Murray Publishing Company Pty Ltd, 195?), 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-5.

and aesthetics. By 1951 the components needed for each of the Timber-pack designs – the pre-cut pieces of timber – were being produced by two recent immigrants with skills in wood turning; Fred Lowen and Ernest Rodeck (1919-2013). The initials of the two men formed the name of their company, Fler, and Lowen would go on to become a notable furniture designer in his own right over the next two decades.

## Chapter Two: Comfort by Design

### Fred Lowen (1919-2005)

Fred Lowen was born to Jewish parents in 1919 in Upper Silesia, formerly a part of Germany. He fled to Belgium in 1938 to escape rising Jewish persecution and two years later fled again to England. From there, he was transported to Australia on the *HMT Dunera* and arrived in Sydney on September 6 1940, part of the huge European diaspora as a result of Nazism and the Second World War. He was interred at the Tatura camp where he met and befriended Ernest Rodeck. On Lowen's release, he settled in Melbourne and began wood working in order to earn money. According to Lowen's autobiography, he started out around September 1945,<sup>68</sup> turning small items in a garage including wooden salad bowls and Lazy Susans (Figure 10), which he sold at small stores in Little Collins Street<sup>69</sup> before moving into the department store market with Myer in Melbourne and David Jones in Sydney. Soon, the demand for his woodware was so great he enlisted Rodeck as a partner in early 1946. They combined their initials to form the trade name The Fler Company,<sup>70</sup> and moved into larger premises, in a converted stable in Richmond. Rodeck would do metalwork while Lowen continued working with wood.

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<sup>68</sup> Lowen, *Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist*, 93.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>70</sup> Commonly known as Fler.

An article in *Home Beautiful* in December 1947 illustrated the growing demand for wooden servingware: “The liking for wooden table accessories is growing, and in Melbourne at least, two men and a small number of amateurs are busy supplying an expanding market.”<sup>71</sup> While not named, it is reasonable to assume that the two men in question were Lowen and Rodeck. The article discusses the practicality of wooden salad bowls over the fragility of crystal – the previous standard for salad bowls in Australia, and the use of native Australian timbers, which were particularly suited to this purpose for their light weight and attractive colours and grain. It also stressed the growing interest in wood working in Australia: “Working in wood is fascinating, and it seems that people here are beginning to understand and appreciate the varied uses to which it can be put.”<sup>72</sup> This was certainly true of Lowen, who had no previous wood working experience prior to settling in Melbourne. The article concluded by reiterating the modern properties of the wooden servingware: “Shape is built on simplicity, and a clean sweep of line. I feel these articles are contemporary things, in tune with modern living, which spurns clutter in ornamentation.”<sup>73</sup> These objects were the perfect entrée into the world of modern furniture design for Lowen.

Lowen was introduced to Fred Ward in 1948 by the furniture buyer for Myer, Lou Newton. According to Lowen’s autobiography, Newton suggested Fler

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<sup>71</sup> Lon Oliver, “Wood Joins the Cutlery,” *The Australian Home Beautiful*, December 1947, 20.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*



manufacture bedroom furniture, including wardrobes and dressing tables, but they were unable to due to the small, primitive set-up they had established in Richmond.<sup>74</sup> Ward was still designing furniture for Myer at the time and he designed a chair that Lowen and Rodeck would be able to produce despite their limited equipment. The DC chair (Figure 11) subscribed to the modernist ideals of simplicity and good design. It was small and light, which made it suitable for the new, smaller homes which were popularised post-war, and used native timbers that Lowen was by now familiar with. Newton ordered 500 for Myer and Fler began to deliver them by late 1948.

By June 1949, *Home Beautiful* had devoted an entire page of the magazine to an article about the DC chair under the headline "Simple but Suave". Isobel Kennedy wrote:

Clean, uncluttered lines are what good taste furnishers are seeking these days. The Fler Company, of Richmond, Victoria, and designer Frederick Ward, have evolved a Swedish-style chair. It is in plain, natural woods, with not one unnecessary embellishment... The timber is such a happy change from the inevitably dark, highly-polished, heavy wood which we have been brought up to believe in as 'correct'.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Lowen, *Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist*, 104.

<sup>75</sup> Isobel Kennedy, "Simple but Suave," *The Australian Home Beautiful*, June 1949, 37.

By now, it was clear that the “highly-polished, heavy wood” of the furniture from previous generations was thought old-fashioned and unstylish, while the simple lines and natural timbers of the new modern furniture, including the DC chair, were considered the height of “good taste”. While naming Ward, deliberately, no doubt, due to the success of his Patterncraft range sold through the magazine, Lowen is also named for the first time by the magazine. He is quoted as saying that the chair design was influenced by Swedish furniture. Lowen said: “They are typically Swedish... They represent the entire Swedish way of living – plain lines, no unnecessary ornaments, light, natural woods.”<sup>76</sup>

With the DC chair, Lowen’s career as a furniture manufacturer had begun and it would not be long before he turned his hand at designing furniture. The chairs “sold like hotcakes”<sup>77</sup> at Myer and Lou Newton wanted Lowen to make matching tables. Lowen selected and marked out the timber but outsourced the assembly and polishing of the tables due to the lack of space in their workshop. The tables and chairs sold well, as did Fler’s first products, the wooden tableware, which they were still producing. In contrast to Ward,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.; Indeed, Swedish modern, under the umbrella of Scandinavian modern, is defined by Lakshmi Bhaskaran as having the characteristics of clean lines, simple, sculptural forms and the use of blonde wood. Featherston was also particularly interested in these characteristics. Bhaskaran, *Designs of the Times: Using Key Movements and Styles for Contemporary Design*, 166

<sup>77</sup> Lowen, *Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist*, 105.

Lowen sought out information on international design styles, having a particular interest in Scandinavian and English design. Lowen wrote:

In 1949 I decided I needed to learn more about furniture construction and design, so I went to night school at the Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT). In my class was Clem Meadmore who made steel-rod and string chairs and stools... We learnt the basics of furniture making but received very little stimulus regarding modern design. I subscribed to the English publication *Design*, the official monthly organ of the British Design Council. It was a breath of fresh air. I avidly read and studied design case histories, and the works of designers like Robin Day, Ernest Race and the American Charles Eames.<sup>78</sup>

With the great popularity of Ward's Timber-pack range, he outsourced the crafting of the wooden pieces to Lowen and Rodeck, who were producing the pieces for him by 1951, while Ward concentrated on designing.

Around this time in Canberra, the newly-established Australian National University (ANU) was constructing University House and Ward was commissioned to design the interiors and furniture for the building. He moved to Canberra in 1952, where he remained for the rest of his career. Ward

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 106-07. A version of the DC chair was subsequently offered through Ward's Timber-pack range. The slightly modified chair had different legs – streamlined so as to be the same width rather than narrower at the feet, and was marketed as a 'Swedish-style' chair.

designed more than four thousand pieces of furniture for University House and the ANU<sup>79</sup> as well as undertaking many private commissions.

### **Fler and International Influences**

Lowen travelled abroad in August 1951, visiting his mother and brother in Cardiff and attending the Festival of Britain in London. The Festival of Britain was a national exhibition held throughout the United Kingdom in the summer of 1951, organised by the government to give Britons a feeling of recovery in the aftermath of the war. Held on the centenary of the Great Exhibition, the festival promoted British contributions to science, technology, industrial design, architecture and the arts, and courted export possibilities for Britain. While in London, Lowen contacted English furniture and textile designer Ernest Race, whose designs he had admired in *Design* magazine, and arranged to tour his factory. He also visited furniture shops and the Betula woodware factory, which produced products similar to Fler's salad bowls, platters and cruet sets, and was impressed by the "beautiful finish" of the items, mainly

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<sup>79</sup> *Fred Ward: A Selection of Furniture and Drawings, 2 May-16 June 1996*, (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1996).

made from English walnut.<sup>80</sup> Back in Cardiff, Lowen visited several furniture factories:

All factories had fantastic equipment and machines that made ours look rather outdated. I was most interested in their production methods. On each visit I picked up some good ideas and made notes so that we could improve our own methods. I was keenly aware that I still had a lot to learn.<sup>81</sup>

Lowen was impressed with what he saw in Britain. "British design at that time was far ahead of any other. I was bombarded by many stimulating experiences and impressions and was anxious to absorb them all."<sup>82</sup> He returned to Australia in January 1952 energised and inspired by the examples of British design he had seen, particularly the clean and simple lines of the 'Utility' furniture being made there post-war due to material shortages, and ready to expand Fler's range.

Fler entered into business with Anderson's Furniture in Prahran, Stuart's, a small modern furniture shop in South Yarra, and other local retailers. Fler's target market were the "European immigrants, academics, and more progressive young people",<sup>83</sup> a market which would appreciate modern

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<sup>80</sup> *Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist*, 117.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

design. At the time, retailers would only buy furniture from members of the Guild of Furniture Manufacturers, established in 1947, of which Fler was not a member. After pressure from Anderson's, Fler joined the guild, and exhibited to the public for the first time at its annual exhibition. A lounge chair with a wooden frame, innerspring seat and back cushions that Lowen designed on his return from Britain was awarded first prize in its section, his "first success with my own design".<sup>84</sup> At the same time, Ernest Rodeck left Fler but remained a partner in the business.

Changing style, a new chair designed by Lowen was featured in the September 1954 edition of *Architecture and Arts*. Eschewing any use of timber, this chair was made from aluminium sheet bent to form the shell, sitting in a steel cradle (Figure 12). The seat was foam rubber and the chair was upholstered. The use of steel and aluminium gave the chair great strength and flexibility. According to the article:

Ten months were spent on the design and preparation work, which included scale model prototype – tooling (all specialised tools for metalwork), plus vigorous tests for construction and public opinion. The chair's shape gives complete support to the body in any seating position.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>85</sup> "New Products," *Architecture and Arts*, September 1954, 17.

Unlike Ward, Lowen moved away from his focus on wood, experimenting with new materials and technologies. In America, the Eameses had continued their experimentation with new materials and technology after the war, concerned with making light, well-designed furniture which would suit the post-war small homes America shared in common with Australia. They too had produced a similar chair, in 1948. Early that year the Eameses collaborated with engineers from the University of California, Los Angeles to create a design for MoMA's "International Competition for Low-Cost Furniture Design". The competition catalogue read:

To serve the needs of the vast majority of people we must have furniture that is adaptable to small apartments and houses, furniture that is well-designed yet moderate in price, that is comfortable but not bulky, and that can be easily moved, stored, and cared for; in other words, mass-produced furniture that is planned and executed to fit the needs of modern living, production, and merchandising.<sup>86</sup>

This description not only suited the Eameses design aesthetic, but voiced Ward and Lowen's concerns too. For the competition, the Eameses designed a single-shell chair stamped out of aluminium or steel, a technique they appropriated from the automobile industry, in which fenders were stamped from metal to create single pieces with complex curves. The shapes were then welded together and the aluminium shells were coated with vinyl, and the

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<sup>86</sup> Ray Eames, John Neuhart, and Marilyn Neuhart, *Eames Design: The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames*, 97

steel ones with neoprene, to ensure warmth and comfort for the sitter. The designs were entered in the competition and won second prize but the estimated production costs were higher than the Eameses hoped, so they turned their attention to another material – plastic – hoping to achieve the chairs for a lower cost. Plastic reinforced with fibreglass had been developed and used by the Air Force during the war<sup>87</sup> and by 1948 the Eameses had come to realise the advantages of the malleable material, such as its ability to be moulded into shapes which could conform to the shape of the body, designing plastic sidechairs and armchairs which went into production by Herman Miller in 1950. The Eameses use of materials and concern with the chairs' shape were among the key characteristics of organic design, which took its roots from organic architecture, originally developed by Frank Lloyd Wright and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. They were concerned with a holistic approach to design, where individual elements, such as furniture, should work harmoniously with the architecture and the building's surrounding environment. Lakshmi Bhaskaran lists the key characteristics of organic design as:

Having soft, flowing lines and sculptural forms, the use of both natural materials and synthetics, such as plastic, that can be easily moulded into organic forms, and as being inspired by new manufacturing processes and new materials.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*, 233

<sup>88</sup> Bhaskaran, *Designs of the Times: Using Key Movements and Styles for Contemporary Design*, 146.; Organic design in furniture had been championed in America since 1940's



In Melbourne, Lowen's business was expanding and the need for more space and better equipment arose.<sup>89</sup> Soon after the move, Lowen designed the SC55 chair (Figure 13). Returning to Lowen's earlier use of timber, the chair consisted of a steel frame with springs in the seat and back set into a wooden frame, it had a loose seat cushion and partly attached back cushion, latex foam filling and detachable zip-off covers, which could be easily changed to suit changing tastes and fashions in interior decorating. Rodeck returned to Fler to assist with the engineering of the chair, devising a method to attach 'no-sag' springs to the steel frame and tooling steel clips which allowed the springs to rock back and forth in order to make the chair more comfortable for the sitter.

The chair was a major commercial success for Fler, and the high volume of orders meant that the steel working section of Fler's factory needed to be expanded. Lowen wrote: "We set a fixed retail selling price, often much against the will of retailers who would have liked bigger profit margins – which would have killed the line prematurely."<sup>90</sup> Lowen understood the commercial furniture market he wanted to cater to, realising that charging a

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"Organic Design in Home Furnishings" competition and exhibition at MoMa, won by Eero Saarinen and Charles Eames, but was slower to make its way to Australia.

<sup>89</sup> Fler moved into a large factory in Vermont by January 1955. Here, Lowen employed women to sew the upholstery for his padded chairs and oversaw the manufacturing of his designs, keeping this task in-house, as opposed to outsourcing like the Eameses.

<sup>90</sup> Lowen, *Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist*, 125.

lower price would give the chair a chance to find a place in a market that was still feeling the effects of the slowed post-war economy.<sup>91</sup>

The SC58 chair followed in 1958 (Figure 14). It was a similar design to the SC55, with slight modifications in the armrest, and also proved popular with the public. Matching two and three-seater sofas soon followed, along with the dining tables and chairs Fler had been making since the late 1940s. Fler outgrew its premises yet again, moving into a larger factory, and by 1959 they had factories in Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane, in order to meet the huge demand for Lowen's designs.

In 1959 Lowen made a round-the-world trip, spending time in Rome, Berlin, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Chicago and North Carolina, visiting furniture factories. He was particularly impressed with Scandinavian design, writing:

Everything the Danes did showed an innate feeling for good design and fine craftsmanship... [I] learnt from the Swedes how to do certain operations by machine which we would have done laboriously by hand.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Lowen sold manufacturing rights for the chair to manufacturers in Sydney, Brisbane and New Zealand, providing the steel frames and necessary knowledge in order for them to manufacture the chair. It was a profitable venture for Lowen and brought Fler to markets outside of Melbourne.

<sup>92</sup> Lowen, *Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist*, 134.

Lowen designed a large number of chairs, as well as other furniture influenced by Scandinavian design during the late 1950s, advertising heavily in magazines such as *Home Beautiful* and *Architecture and Arts*, which helped to maintain the popularity of Fler furniture in the marketplace. While Ward had remained committed to using native Australian timbers, Lowen branched out, using imported timbers as well as natives, in order to satisfy his evolving aesthetic. (Figure 15).

Lowen's trip to Scandinavia inspired one of Fler's most popular ranges of furniture – the Narvik dining and lounge range,<sup>93</sup> launched in 1961. (Figure 16). Capturing the sleek Scandinavian aesthetic and using gleaming timbers and comfortable upholstery, the Narvik range proved popular with the public, selling in large quantities. Of particular note, Lowen designed a sofa which folded down into a daybed, lending it a dual purpose (Figure 17). For those living in small homes, particularly in apartments where the lounge room doubled as the bedroom, this space-saving design perfectly suited the needs of this market.

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<sup>93</sup> Named after the city in Norway, emphasising its link with Scandinavian design.

## Television and the Changing Lounge Room

A new market emerged in 1956, when television was introduced to Australia. Timed to coincide with the Olympic Games, which were to be held in December, television would have a profound impact on Australian households and domestic furniture. As early as 1949 *Home Beautiful* ran an article on how television would affect Australian homes:

We have been congratulating ourselves lately... that our average post-war home... compares very favourably with its pre-war counterpart... Windows have ceased to be but holes poked in walls, and have been enlarged sometimes to the extent of replacing entire walls with glass... Let us put a television set into one of our contemporary living rooms and see what happens. The first thing we find is that there's too much light in the room, and we are forced to draw the curtains over the much-admired glass doors to the terrace. The next discovery will be that, for comfortable viewing of the screen, only about thirty per cent of the floor space lavished on the living room by artful open planning is of the slightest use... Then, as no one should sit closer than about ten feet to a TV screen... it is fairly certain that the far wall from the screen will not be far enough away.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the humorous tone, the concern expressed about how modern houses, with their open plans and abundance of natural light, could adapt to the needs of television viewing:

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<sup>94</sup> Edgar Harcourt, "Spare a Thought for Television," *The Australian Home Beautiful*, November 1949, 76.

Home-builders who wish to keep fully abreast of the Television Age must, it seems, be prepared for the elongation and attenuation of living rooms to minimise waste[d] space outside the optimum viewing arc. Windows must be disposed of to preclude glare.<sup>95</sup>

Thankfully, it was the furniture designers, not the architects, who responded with solutions to the problems foreseen by Edgar Harcourt. Curtains could be employed when watching television in order to reduce glare without returning to the dark, windowless interiors of the past. Furniture would solve the problems of space for television viewing. While homes remained small, furniture too would have to be small. Large, overstuffed chairs would have to be banished for good, and smaller chairs, with comfort for the viewer who would now be sitting for prolonged periods while watching television, would be of paramount importance. Fler's SC55 and SC58 chairs were well suited to this purpose, and Fler capitalised on the television market by advertising the chairs as "perfect for TV viewing" (Figure 18).<sup>96</sup>

Fler was taken over in 1966 and Lowen took on the position of design director. However, he was unhappy with his new role and left the company in

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> In much the same way as interior spaces were reconfigured after the separate dining room became obsolete, lounge rooms were reconfigured to suit television viewing. The fireplace, long the focal point of the lounge room, was abandoned in favour of the television, with seating arranged around this new focal point. Small-scale furniture, such as Fler's sleek, narrow sofas and light armchairs, were well-suited to this purpose, allowing enough seating for a family without obstructing views of the television.

1968, starting Twen – named for the young market Lowen wanted to target, customers in their twenties. Two years later the company was renamed Tessa, and Lowen went on to design furniture until the 1980s, experimenting with a huge range of materials and styles to produce a wide variety of successful furniture in many different styles.

### **In Search of a National Identity**

Design historian Judith O’Callaghan has discussed the role science and technology played in the design of modern furniture during the post-war period in Australia. She wrote:

...much emphasis was placed on the role of current research and development. Not only had ‘the new tools and new materials discovered by scientific research’ transformed the appearance of the domestic environment, they had also created new standards of comfort... The United States appeared to be taking the lead in this area, with designers such as Charles and Ray Eames and Eero Saarinen working with moulded plastic and laminated plywood to create forms that were claimed to be more responsive to the shape and weight of the human body. Many of the same technologies were available in Australia after the war, but they were generally not applied within the furniture industry... Grant Featherston... was also interested in the potential of laminated plywood but could not afford the technology...

Comfort by design was a selling point for other successful furniture lines of the 1950s. The SC55 chair... was not only designed by Fred Lowen but also 'mechanically engineered' by Ernest Rodeck.<sup>97</sup>

So while Australian designers were concerned with design concepts from America and Scandinavia they approached some of the manufacturing in different ways, sometimes limited by finances or availability of manufacturing methods. Australian designers were also faced with a lack of recognition for their artistry. While internationally-recognised museums such as MoMa had a history of promoting furniture design competitions and exhibitions, Australia lagged behind Scandinavia, Europe and America in this regard. In Melbourne, modern Australian-designed furniture was not exhibited at the state gallery – the NGV – until a retrospective of Schulim Krimper's work was held in 1959.<sup>98</sup> During the late 1940s and 1950s the public had to go to department stores, such as Myer and Georges in Melbourne, and David Jones in Sydney, or to small private galleries, such as Gallery A in Melbourne – run by Clement Meadmore, to see furniture exhibited.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> O'Callaghan, *The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties*, 162.

<sup>98</sup> Another member of the European diaspora, Schulim Krimper (1893–1971) arrived in Melbourne in 1939. He designed and custom-made modern furniture during the 1950s and 1960s, and, like Ward, predominantly used native timbers.

<sup>99</sup> In comparison, several exhibitions of Scandinavian design were held throughout Europe and North America in the mid-twentieth century, with the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930, which displayed the latest works by Swedish artists and craftsmen, being one of the earliest. The "Design in Scandinavia" exhibition travelled around America and Canada from 1954-57 showing furniture, ceramics, textiles, silver and stainless steel. According to Katrín Eyþórsdóttir the exhibition helped to establish the meaning of the term "Scandinavian design" that continues to today, an ideal she sees as: "Beautiful, simple, clean designs, inspired by nature and the northern climate, accessible and available to all, with an emphasis on enjoying the domestic environment." Katrín Eyþórsdóttir, "The Story of Scandinavian

Fred Ward was one of the designers responsible for establishing the first professional organisation for industrial designers in Australia – the Society of Designers for Industry – in Melbourne around 1947-48.<sup>100</sup> Many Australian designers and manufacturers had, until this time, had a propensity for copying designs, rather than producing original work. Robin Boyd spoke about this during the Boyer lectures series in 1967, “Artificial Australia”, describing: “...our industry’s habitual copying of all kinds of processes and patterns from abroad.”<sup>101</sup> In 1956 Ward spoke about Australia’s lack of national identity and poor manufacturing practices in the area of furniture design:

...there is the dismal fact that we have no national style in furniture... our lack of national style has, I think, come about because people have always tended to regard pieces of furniture not only as useful but also as symbols of social standing, and this confusion has, of course, led to an almost endless copying of the styles of the past... This unintelligent copying... both of past styles and present fashions... persists to this day.<sup>102</sup>

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Design: Combining Function and Aesthetics," Smashing Magazine Website, <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2011/06/13/the-story-of-scandinavian-design-combining-function-and-aesthetics/>.; Another exhibition, “The Arts of Denmark” was held at MoMa in 1960, and the Lunning Prize was established in 1951 to award eminent Scandinavian designers. The Lunning Prize continued until 1970, helping to establish Scandinavian Design around the world during this period.

<sup>100</sup> *Designing Australia: Readings in the History of Design*, ed. Michael Bogle (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 2002).; Some of the objects of the society, laid out in the 1948 membership brochure written by Grant Featherston, were: To organise lectures, exhibitions etc, to promote a wider understanding of industrial design among manufacturers and the public, and to promote honourable practice.

<sup>101</sup> Robin Boyd, *Artificial Australia*, The Boyer Lectures 1967 (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1968), 5.

<sup>102</sup> Fred Ward, "Furniture Design", *Design of Everyday Things*, conference papers, Sixth Australian Architectural Convention, Adelaide 1956, reprinted in *Designing Australia: Readings in the History of Design*, 149-50.



During the period of 1946-60, when widespread copying of foreign furniture designs was taking place, it was the original furniture designed by the designers discussed in this thesis which is worthy of acknowledgment as forming the basis of a post-war Australian modern style. While being influenced by international styles, such as organic design, Scandinavian design and the International style, it was the way these designers responded – by creating original designs which adhered to universal modernist principles – which stands them apart. Importantly, there was diversity in the designs of Ward, Lowen, Featherston and Meadmore. They did not form a homogenous unit, instead, they each interpreted universal modernist ideas, respectively responding to materials and manufacturing techniques in their own ways.

## Chapter Three: The Great Innovator

### The House of Tomorrow

The Modern Home Exhibition was held over eleven days in October and November in the Great Hall of Melbourne's Exhibition Building in 1949 and was presented as a constructive response to the post-war housing crisis. Mindful of the economic downturn, the public was assured that: "Organisers and designers of the exhibition have taken pains to ensure that everything displayed is not only practicable but within the means of anyone planning and building a home."<sup>103</sup> The exhibition aimed to present the principles of modernism through a series of displays of architecture and design aimed at contemporary audiences. Robin Boyd was one of the organisers and designed the "House of Tomorrow" for the exhibition.

A full-scale house built inside the Exhibition Building, the House of Tomorrow was built under the auspices of the Small Homes Service, established in 1947 by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects and the *Age* newspaper to address the issue of housing shortages. Boyd was the founding director and wrote about the service in the *Age*.

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<sup>103</sup> Goad, McNamara, and Stephen, *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, 158.

New houses had been restricted to a maximum size of 1250 square feet<sup>104</sup> during the war years, and although these restrictions were lifted after the war, the material shortages and high labour costs which still existed enforced the continuing need for small houses.<sup>105</sup> Making the best use of space within these small houses was the subject of numerous articles in magazines such as *Home Beautiful* throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The Small Homes Service offered architect-designed plans for houses up to 1250 square feet for a nominal fee. The houses were designed to be built on small blocks relatively cheaply. (Figure 19). Boyd's House of Tomorrow adhered to the modern principles he promoted through the Small Homes Service, making use of a light construction, open-plan design geared to outdoor living, and a flat roof.<sup>106</sup>

The House of Tomorrow offered a complete picture of modern domestic design. Importance was not solely placed on the construction and design of the house, but on the living spaces inside and out. Boyd chose Grant Featherston, an up-and-coming designer to design all the freestanding furniture for the house. Boyd had been impressed with Featherston's first

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<sup>104</sup> About 116 square metres.

<sup>105</sup> O'Callaghan, *The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties*, 165-66.

<sup>106</sup> However, at approximately 1300 square feet it was slightly larger than the Small Homes Service limit.

range of furniture, the Relaxation series of 1947, buying pieces for his own home.<sup>107</sup>

The light fittings used throughout the house were made by Brown Evans & Co<sup>108</sup> and consisted mainly of simple and minimal parabolic 'bullet' reflector shades attached to flexible arms or swivel bases. The fittings could be moved to create direct or indirect light, providing important flexibility for the modern home with its limited space.

Despite its futuristic name, Boyd was adamant that the House of Tomorrow be 'real' and suitable for contemporary living. To entice visitors into picturing themselves living in the house he created a tableaux by setting the dining table as though ready for a meal, and filled the house with potted plants, books and records, as though a family lived there. Boyd intended that the house would be "a gallery of modern Australian design, not of luxuries but of everyday things".<sup>109</sup> However, in one nod to the future, there was even a fake television installed in the sitting room with an image of a horse race on the

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<sup>107</sup> Other notable names in modern art and design were chosen by Boyd including Frances Burke, who designed all the textiles used in the house, Charles Blackman, whose painting hangs in the child's bedroom, and decorative ceramics were made by the Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery.

<sup>108</sup> Later known as BECO.

<sup>109</sup> Goad, McNamara, and Stephen, *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, 163.

screen (Figure 20), predating the arrival of television in Australia by seven years.

Wolfgang Sievers' photographs of the house, shot through floor-to-ceiling walls of glass designed to allow natural light in the home (Figure 21), show the simplicity and austerity of the House of the Tomorrow, with its uncluttered rooms decorated with minimal but well-placed furniture and decorative objects. The stark black-and-white photographs show the simple lines of Boyd's design and showcase the contours of the furnishings both inside and out.

### **Grant Featherston (1922-1995)**

Grant Featherston was born in Geelong in 1922. Self-taught, he designed in a range of areas including textiles and jewellery but is best known for his furniture. He designed his first chair, the Relaxation chair (Figure 22), in 1947.

The Relaxation chairs featured a timber frame with the seat and back formed by interlaced cotton webbing. The chairs were available with and without

arms. In appearance, the chairs were similar to those designed by Scandinavian designers, Bruno Mathsson's Eva Chair c.1941 (Figure 23), and Alvar Aalto's 1946 cantilevered webbed chair (Figure 24). Douglas Snelling in Sydney had designed a similar chair the year prior (Figure 25), however, Snelling's chair was a more utilitarian design, with the webbing wrapped around the sides of the seat of the chair and simple, straight legs. Featherston's design showed more sophistication. The webbed seat sat on an aesthetically pleasing, gently curved base and legs, demonstrating Featherston's interest in organic design. By revealing the construction of the chair and using minimal upholstery, the chairs "represented a complete break with the massive, sprung lounge suites of the pre-war period."<sup>110</sup>

The twenty-five year old Grant Featherston wrote an article titled "Sitting Pretty" in the April 1948 edition of *Home Beautiful* in which he publicly discussed his design philosophy for the first time. Citing Swedish furniture in particular, Featherston's beliefs were thoroughly modern. He wrote of furniture styles of the past, such as the "spreading Louis XV armchair... designed to receive the bouffant skirt of the day"<sup>111</sup> and said that: "Today, many changes have yet to be made before our furniture can truly be said to reflect our way of living."<sup>112</sup> His concern that furniture should reflect

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<sup>110</sup> Lane, *Featherston Chairs: National Gallery of Victoria 30 March-7 August 1988*, 15.

<sup>111</sup> Grant Featherston, "Sitting Pretty," *The Australian Home Beautiful*, April 1948, 31.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

contemporary circumstances and his belief in modernist principles are strongly stated in the article. He wrote:

Why try to reproduce... chairs designed for people in other lands, 200 years ago? We need furniture for today... the elephantine lounge suite, too heavy to lift and too large for average rooms, are indicative of our confused trends and tastes... Sweden [has] a very high design standard. She understands, as a nation, the needs of her people and of our times... Furniture is not sold by its glamorous appeal, but for its basic design and suitability. This, then, is modern design – the rational beauty of things made for use. It is inconceivable that there could be any superficial copying, any lack of attention to beauty of line; only the harmonious welding of material with function.<sup>113</sup>

Featherston was attempting to create modern classics – furniture designed specifically to suit the needs of people of the present time which would come to be as well-regarded in the future as antique chairs were in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>114</sup>

Featherston designed a *chaise longue* for the Relaxation range c.1949. (Figure 26), no doubt taking inspiration from Breuer's 1935 "long chair" or Isokson

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 31, 69.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 69.; On chairs, Featherston wrote: "Chairs may be thought of as performing different functions according to their upright or reclining character. The more closely they approach the horizontal, or reclining position, the more restful they become – like the *chaise longue*... The Relaxation chairs [Featherston's range] include many of the most interesting in shape and purpose. Less inclined than the last group, they may be designed with backs and seats angled to suit individual tastes, and the height of seat and back may also be varied. These chairs may have arms, or be the armless unit type... While dining or working it is more comfortable to be supported in an upright position, with arms entirely free for movement."

chaise (Figure 27).<sup>115</sup> Featherston had written: “Marcel Breuer discovered the most luxuriously comfortable position while lying in the bath, and on this modelled the famous of all modern *chaises longues*.”

Breuer’s chaise had a bent frame of laminated birch wood supporting a plywood seat and back and is one of the earliest examples of organic plywood furniture. In contrast, Featherston’s chaise was armless, and arguably, more comfortable. Featherston’s chaise allowed for greater arm movement for the sitter, who was also reclined further than the sitter in the Breuer chair, which had a steeper angle for the sitter’s back and legs. Featherston’s chaise was also upholstered in webbing, which would provide a softer surface than the moulded plywood.

Comfort for the sitter was of utmost importance to Featherston, as shown by his fascination with the *chaise longue*, as was practicality and flexibility. Dining chairs should have no arms to allow for movement when eating while chairs for relaxing should recline. Size was, importantly, at the forefront of considerations. Featherston understood that contemporary Australian abodes were different to those of Europe, and therefore that the furniture which had worked in the past was no longer suitable for post-war Australian homes.

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<sup>115</sup> Manufactured by the Isokon Furniture Company in London.



In 1952 Robin Boyd, along with the furniture retailer Bruce Anderson, of Anderson's Furniture, devised two tableaux as examples of good and bad design (Figure 28). The "bad taste" tableaux featured "the worst of 1930s design"<sup>116</sup> – a large, almost domineering dark-timber cabinet, busy patterned flooring and fussy ruffled curtains and lampshade, while the "good taste" display showed off the simple, clean lines of a Snelling Line cabinet, with a small Meadmore lamp sitting on it, a Featherston Contour chair and Frances Burke's Oak leaf cotton window treatment, encouraging shoppers to purchase such items. Featherston's inclusion cemented his reputation as a designer of good taste.

Good taste and good design were inextricable. Adhering to modern principles regarding simplicity of design, Featherston, like Ward and Lowen, was also concerned with truth to materials and respect for the natural properties of timbers.

Beauty in modern chairs is achieved by fastidious regard for economy of line and proportion... Woodwork is treated in many different ways, but never stained to imitate other timbers, or to obliterate the natural grain.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Lane, *Featherston Chairs: National Gallery of Victoria 30 March-7 August 1988*, 9.

<sup>117</sup> Featherston, "Sitting Pretty," 69.

As well as showing Featherston's understanding of modern furniture and its suitability for Australian homes, his article's appearance in the popular *Home Beautiful* appealed to that magazine's particular demographic, showing that he understood their needs and was a designer who could meet them. It was a shrewd choice in which to make his debut to the Australian people.

Two years later, Featherston would be commissioned to design the furniture for the House of Tomorrow, where he included new versions of the Relaxation chairs as well as the Relaxation chaise. A matching small webbed stool was used in the bedroom (Figure 29).

Colour was an important part of the modern aesthetic. In the catalogue for the House of Tomorrow Robin Boyd wrote: "The colour harmony helps set the atmosphere of each room. It is subdued in the sitting room, exhilarating in the living room, gay in the child's room, provocative in the bedroom."<sup>118</sup>

In his *Home Beautiful* article Featherston had noted that: "With the new shapes comes also a new interest in colour – turquoise, lime, olive, cyclamen, may be greyed if used as backgrounds, or bright and fresh if used as

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<sup>118</sup> Goad, McNamara, and Stephen, *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, 158.

accents.”<sup>119</sup> The webbing in Featherston’s Relaxation chairs was available in cyclamen, turquoise, chartreuse, tan, and French blue. These colours were echoed in The House of Tomorrow, which featured walls and floors in many different colours including yellow, blue and tan. Boyd said that the palette was about: “Attacking the idea that a house cannot be given any other treatment than cream or green.”<sup>120</sup>

While society’s attitudes toward women and the workplace had changed since the war, other changes were also happening within the family unit. Boyd noted in 1952 that children, especially in Australia, were growing up faster:

The infant... was playing with his woolly toys and saucepan lids on the grass... at an age when Europeans were still swaddled... And through the twentieth century, childhood gradually became freer and easier. There were fewer children in the family and more money and time to be spent on each of them. More attention was paid to their special likes and dislikes... The gradual elevation of the rights of the children had several effects on the house.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Featherston, "Sitting Pretty," 69.

<sup>120</sup> Goad, McNamara, and Stephen, *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, 162.; Boyd, and other modern Melbourne architects, like Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg, selected the furniture of designers such as Featherston and Fred Lowen because it suited the homes they designed. With the designers and architects both prescribing to the tenets of modern design, the simple lines of their furniture were well-suited to modern interiors. As well as providing the furniture for architect-designed houses, some designers went a step further. Lowen and Fler partnered with Robin Boyd in 1958 to build a house, the Fler house, in Blackburn, which became the first of many the company built. The house still exists today.

<sup>121</sup> Robin Boyd, *Australia's Home: Its Origins, Builders and Occupiers* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1987. First published 1952), 122.

These effects included the changing layout of houses, with the new modern open-plan design particularly well-suited to the changing family structure.

Judith O'Callaghan wrote:

Besides the technical and structural aspects, architects were increasingly influenced by new scientific research into human behaviour. Psychology was becoming popular, and it began to affect the layout of houses. It emphasised the importance of the early childhood years as the foundation of human development, undercut the already declining authority of the father and emphasised the rights of individual family members. One of the first things to happen was the replacement of the isolated kitchen by an open food-preparation area in Boyd's 1949 exhibition house.<sup>122</sup> (Figure 30).

Featherston, too, was aware of the increased interest in psychology and how houses and their furnishings were perceived by the people who lived in them, writing: "With heavy lounge suites, room space is diminished, and the psychological reaction is that of overcrowding."<sup>123</sup> In contrast, the lightweight furniture he, and the other designers discussed in this thesis, designed would be more psychologically pleasing for the home's inhabitants.

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<sup>122</sup> O'Callaghan, *The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties*, 97.; Children were also an important consideration for the Eameses, who designed children's chairs toys and furniture pieces including an iconic coat rack, the Hang-it-All in 1953, which featured a series of brightly coloured balls on which to hang clothing. Fred Ward had also designed toys in his Timber-pack range.

<sup>123</sup> Featherston, "Sitting Pretty," 69.

## A Simpler Solution

Featherston was preoccupied with the notion of simplicity – simplicity in design as well as in the execution of the design:

The idea that ‘there must be a simpler solution’ haunts me, has always driven me. All these bits and connections and finishes, tacks, buttons, screws and thread. Why can’t it be like nature? In my mind’s eye the ‘simple solution’ is as nature would have it: minimum of materials, maximum of effect.<sup>124</sup>

With his respect for natural materials, Featherston found inspiration in nature.<sup>125</sup> Organic design, championed by the Eameses in America some years earlier was now of interest to Featherston. Taking the holistic approach favoured by organic design, the furniture he designed for the House of Tomorrow worked harmoniously with the architecture of the house and was conceived to work in an outdoor setting, with pieces such as a Relaxation chaise and deck chair placed on the house’s deck (Figure 31). Featherston explained his design ideas and interest in nature:

My interest developed in particular structural forms: shells, warped planes, laminae – in short, thin sheet materials which could be bent,

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<sup>124</sup> Featherston quoted in Lane, *Featherston Chairs: National Gallery of Victoria 30 March-7 August 1988*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Grant Featherston quoted in *ibid.*, 12. “The significance of nature for the designer lies in integration – understanding and incorporating the underlying physics, economics, psychology and sociology in any design problem, that is, finding a biological basis for design. Nature provides the model at many different levels of complexity: organs, cells, molecules, atoms. This is organic design, but the finished appearance may or may not have a visual affinity with biological forms, plants or animals.”

folded or curved, as in origami. I often find myself playing with paper. Discrete physical laws are built into each material. These are of surprising subtlety, dictating the specific behaviour of each substance under load. This may be demonstrated by twisting a strip of uncreased paper. As the straight becomes curved, visual tensions are set up which have a quality easily broken by straining.<sup>126</sup>

This fascination with the ability of materials to be shaped in different ways, and another principle of organic design – being inspired by new manufacturing processes and new materials – were of particular interest to Featherston, who was far more experimental in his design practice than Ward or Meadmore.

By 1950 Featherston had moved on from the Relaxation range and begun to work on what would become his most famous range of chairs, the Contour range. In an article published in 1955, Gwen Atkinson described Featherston's creative process when coming up with the idea for the Contour chair:

All this time, Featherston had been dreaming of making a chair which would be a 'negative' of the human body. The obvious material for the shell of this chair was plywood, because it was light, flexible, inexpensive – and readily available. This has been done overseas by moulding, but the cost of dies and presses were prohibitive, and he felt sure there was some other method by which shells could be

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<sup>126</sup> Anne Mancini, *Art through Australian Eyes: Issues-Based Approach* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1994), 174.

formed. He wasted a good deal of time and material seeking a solution – but it was a tram ticket which provided him with the vital clue.

Travelling citywards one morning, he absently twisted and folded his tram ticket – and suddenly the answer lay in his hand, in the small, torn piece of paper. During the next few days he ruined a lot of plywood experimenting, but finally produced his first shell chair. He found that, by sawing pieces of the right size and shape from a flat sheet of plywood, the sheet could be bent into a form-fitting shape, and that by curving and joining with other pieces of shaped ply, the fragile material could be made incredibly strong.<sup>127</sup>

Featherston, when faced with the expensive production method of plywood moulding, found a simpler solution. Instead of using a single sheet of plywood he cut and joined several pieces (Figure 32), not only creating a strong chair but doing what the Eameses in America had been unable to do. Unable to find a cheap way of manufacturing single-shell moulded plywood, the Eameses had instead created the DCM, and later turned to plastic to create a single-shell chair.

While Featherston's chair was not made from a single piece of plywood, his method of joining the pieces together was not only inexpensive to manufacture, it had the *appearance* of being crafted out of a single piece of plywood, with all joinery hidden by the upholstery. The chair looked organic,

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<sup>127</sup> Gwen Atkinson, "Grant Featherston: President of the Society of the Designers for Industry," *The Australian Furnishing Trade Journal*, March 1955, 57.

contoured perfectly to fit the body. The seat sat on a timber cruciform-shaped base with tapered wooden legs. The R.152 (Figure 33) was a triumph of experimentation and innovation. Patented in May 1951 and released soon after, the chair was an immediate success, popular with both architects and the general public.<sup>128</sup>

The Contour range expanded to a total of twenty-five pieces of seating furniture and accompanying occasional and dining tables and cabinets by the time Featherston ceased designing it in 1955. With 'organic' Featherston's watchword, other chairs and settees in the range were "amoeba-like... drawing up and sprouting protuberances in all directions."<sup>129</sup>

The RS1616 settee c.1951 (Figure 34) stretched the original form sideways, and when compared to Fler's Narvik daybed (Figure 14) the differences are startling. Fred Lowen's long, straight lines contrast markedly against Featherston's sinuous curves. However, their shared belief in the beauty of natural timber grain is visible in the frame and legs of both ranges.

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<sup>128</sup> Featherston stressed the chair's selling points in a publicity brochure: "Designed with the concept of 'contour comfort', Featherston chairs with their firm moulded lines are built to fit the natural curves of the body. Constructed of laminated plywood... flexing with every change of position, these chairs make possible a new form of relaxation... Less bulky than usual chairs, they heighten the illusion of space in a room. With steel-like strength – yet very light, they are easily moved." Quoted in Lane, *Featherston Chairs: National Gallery of Victoria 30 March-7 August 1988*, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



Other chairs in the Contour range include; the R160 armchair c.1951 (Figure 35), the B220H or curl-up chair of 1953 (Figure 36), and the Television B210H chair of 1953 (Figure 37). With names such as “curl-up”, Featherston continued the tradition he had begun with the Relaxation range, giving his chairs names that would appeal to the public’s desire for comfort. The Television chair – released three years prior to television’s arrival in Australia – was forward-thinking, showing Featherston to be a designer looking to the future.

Featherston went on to design a number of different chairs until 1960, including the cane-metal chair in 1954 (Figure 38), consisting of a cane seat and back on a steel base. Similar in shape to the A305 dining chair, the cane-metal chair was waterproof, making it suitable for both indoor and outdoor use, demonstrating its flexibility and Featherston’s ability to use new materials.<sup>130</sup>

Featherston continued to use steel, this time to reinforce the legs of his 51 and 53 Easy chairs (1955) and the Town House suite (1956). The TY chair c.1957 (Figure 39) was Featherston’s first attempt at completely separating the seat and back. The simple curved seat and back sat on a steel frame and

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<sup>130</sup> The chair was originally designed for Roy Grounds’ house but was put into commercial production where it proved successful.

were a pronounced departure from the both the Relaxation and Contour ranges, once again illustrating Featherston's diversity. Other furniture in that vein followed, including the 1960s Scape range of lounge chairs (Figure 40) and dining tables and chairs.

Again, Featherston separated the seat and back, this time with more sophistication, mounting them on a steel frame with the seat cantilevered off the base. The curved shells of the seat are highly reminiscent of flower petals, again echoing Featherston's interest in nature and organic design, as well as sculptural forms, as the Scape chair can be appreciated from all angles. This is another appealing feature for open-plan homes where the furniture is often seen from behind as well as from the front.

In 1966 Featherston became a design partner to his interior-designer wife Mary (nee Currey), a partnership which spawned many successful designs including the Talking chair (Figure 41) commissioned for the Robin Boyd-designed Australian pavilion at Expo '67, held in Canada in 1967.

## Chapter Four: The Maturing of Modern Melbourne

As Melbourne prepared to host the 1956 Olympic Games the city attempted to metamorphose itself into a cultured metropolis. A building boom transformed the cityscape and skyline, and a hunger for recognition from abroad saw Melbourne shaking off the vestiges of parochialism and seeking acceptance from the international community. Katharine Brisbane described the atmosphere:

Self-assertion was in the air, uncertainty expressed in a yearning to mix on terms of equality with those older civilisations thousands of servicemen had glimpsed during the war and from which a daily increasing number of new Australians had come.<sup>131</sup>

As well as Olympic venues, such as the new Olympic swimming pool, more than thirty major city building projects were completed in Melbourne between 1955 and 1958, including the Sidney Myer Music Bowl and Melbourne's first skyscraper – ICI House (1956-58) (Figure 42).<sup>132</sup> The twenty-storey office tower was the tallest building in Australia when it was completed. At 84m high ICI House was more than double the previous city

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<sup>131</sup> Museum of Modern Art at Heide, *1956: Melbourne, Modernity and the XVI Olympiad* (Bulleen, Vic.: Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1996), 9.

<sup>132</sup> Now Orica House.

limit of 40.2m.<sup>133</sup> Designed by Osborn McCutcheon in the International style, the building's steel and glass construction and prominence over the skyline provided bold evidence of Melbourne modernism. Between 1950 and 1970 Melbourne became the fastest growing capital in Australia, the first time this had occurred since the 1880s.<sup>134</sup>

For the first time, an Olympic arts festival, rather than art competitions in conjunction with the event, was staged. Venues around Melbourne displayed Australian, and especially Victorian, achievements in the arts, including industrial design, as part of the "1956 Melbourne Olympic Arts Festival" in an attempt to impress upon foreign visitors the notion that Melbourne was not an uncultured city. Grant Featherston and Clement Meadmore were both represented in exhibitions as part of the festival. Government funding for the arts was also introduced for the first time. This enthusiasm for arts and culture did not end when the Olympic Games were over; instead, people like Eric Westbrook, the new director of the NGV, maintained the momentum,

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<sup>133</sup> Heritage Victoria Website, "Ici House," [http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/vhd/heritagevic#detail\\_places;391](http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/vhd/heritagevic#detail_places;391).; The building was permitted under the uniform building regulations because the site coverage was examined as a percentage of the total site area, which led to plot ratio determinations for city sites and the eventual redefinition of the central Melbourne skyline.

<sup>134</sup> Heide, *1956: Melbourne, Modernity and the XVI Olympiad*, 49.

initiating a drive to build a new gallery in St Kilda Road,<sup>135</sup> revamp the state's regional galleries, and hold dynamic exhibitions of modern art at the NGV.<sup>136</sup>

### **Clement Meadmore 1929-2005**

While Grant Featherston found inspiration from nature and took his cues from organic design to create curved furniture with sculptural forms, Clement Meadmore's unique steel and cord furniture displayed many of the same properties which would later make him an internationally-renowned sculptor.

Meadmore was born on February 9 1929 in Melbourne. He studied aeronautical engineering and then switched to the newly-formed industrial design course at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT)<sup>137</sup> from 1948-49.

The item of furniture for which Meadmore is best known is the corded chair of 1952 (Figure 43). Like Featherston's Relaxation chair, Meadmore's corded chair reveals its construction elements, in this case, a steel frame with wrapped cotton sash cord to form the seat and back. Like the furniture

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<sup>135</sup> Westbrook was successful and the gallery, designed by Roy Grounds, opened in 1968.

<sup>136</sup> Christopher Heathcote, *A Quest for Enlightenment: The Art of Roger Kemp* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2007), 87.

<sup>137</sup> This was the first formal course in industrial design in Australia, signifying the growing interest in this field.

designed by Ward, Lowen and Featherston, it moved away from the heavy, stuffy chairs of the past, and instead played with ideas of form, space and light. It made its public debut on the cover of the September 1952 edition of *Architecture and Arts*, photographed through the spaces between the cords of another chair, (Figure 44), again playing with these ideas. Meadmore wrote in the magazine:

Space should reveal itself to the wandering eye. Furniture should enhance a feeling of space by its non-obstructing presence unlike many bulky modern pieces (over-stuffed lounge suites, building materials etc.), which, due to lack of design, fill and obliterate volumes. Convex forms should be minimised and concave and flat surfaces exposed.<sup>138</sup>

According to Judith O'Callaghan, the corded chair falls into the category of 'non-obstructive' furniture, a term she believes was coined by Meadmore (at least, in Australia).<sup>139</sup> All the furniture designed by Meadmore can be categorised this way. He believed furniture should enhance a room's space, not obstruct it. "Small rooms should not be reduced to a box of shrinking space and large rooms are precious and should be emphasised."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> "Designer Clement Meadmore's Furniture," *Architecture and Arts* 1952, 13.

<sup>139</sup> O'Callaghan, *The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties*, 166-69.

<sup>140</sup> "Designer Clement Meadmore's Furniture," 12.

While his designs aesthetically are markedly different from those of the other designers examined in this thesis, like them, Meadmore adhered to modernist principles of simplicity of line, the use of industrial materials, and a lack of ornament or decoration. His furniture is defined by its simplicity and is immediately recognisable as entirely his own. The corded chair was ubiquitous in lifestyle and design magazines throughout the remaining years of the 1950s, especially in *Home Beautiful*, where it was photographed in countless private homes, used in advertisements, and illustrations of it featured in articles on home decorating. (Figure 45). The chair won a “good design” award from the Society of Interior Designers, Sydney in 1953. (Figure 46).

The corded chair came in two heights and was available in three colours: white, vermillion or lemon coloured cord. Along with the chair, ten other designs were featured in the five-page spread in *Architecture and Arts*, including a corded stool (Figure 47), a corded chair with timber arms (Figure 48), and a number of tables and lamps. Meadmore had “a design interest in the linear possibilities of steel rod and suspended planes in space, having varying textures and translucence, e.g., string, wood-slats, marble, translucent black glass, etc.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

In 1952 Meadmore established a design practice called Meadmore Originals. A trade catalogue from Meadmore Originals c.1953 features twelve designs, including the corded chairs and stools, a corded reclining chair (Figure 49), and a number of tables with marble and glass tops which demonstrate Meadmore's interest in those textures and surfaces he had described.

The glass top coffee table (Figure 50) is stunning in its simplicity. Again, the construction elements are visible. The table comprises a sheet of glass atop a black steel frame which is entirely visible from all angles. The frankness of revealing construction elements was a trait shared by the Eameses, who also believed in an "honest" use of materials.<sup>142</sup> When developing their organic armchair, the plastic armchair of 1948-50 (Figure 51), the Eameses did not attempt to hide the plastic's inherent qualities. Sol Fingerhut of Zenith Plastics, the company which collaborated with Herman Miller to manufacture the chairs, recalled a conversation with Charles Eames:

... the chair was translucent and the button<sup>143</sup>... would show through. And Charles' answer was 'it's honest'. Because it's... functional, it's there for a reason, it's there and it shows... [and] that's okay.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Eames Demetrios, *An Eames Primer* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 42.

<sup>143</sup> Button, or shock mount, which was glued to the underside of the shell to attach the legs to. The shock mounts of the DCM chair were also deliberately visible and formed part of the design.

<sup>144</sup> Demetrios, *An Eames Primer*, 117.



Meadmore shared this respect for truth to materials and design functionality as demonstrated not only by the materials chosen for his furniture, such as the ordinary window sash cord he used for his chairs, but also through the designs themselves, which celebrated these traits. Though aesthetically different to the timber furniture of Fred Ward, Meadmore's glass top coffee table, which celebrated its materials, is akin to Ward's celebration of native Australian timbers which he refused to stain or disguise, instead allowing the wood's characteristics to shine. Likewise, the Eameses celebration of the properties of their materials, while also producing a very different looking chair, shares this trait of truth to materials, a major concern of modernist designers. In three different ways, with three different outcomes, these designers reflected international modern design as well as concern for the post-war aesthetics and climate of the society in which they worked.

Meadmore won another "good design" award in 1953 for his Calyx range of lamps (Figure 52). Using his signature black steel for the bases, he added pre-fabricated aluminium shades which he painted in a variety of bright colours and baked in his own backyard before attaching them.<sup>145</sup> By now, the use of black steel and primary colours was a staple of Meadmore's furniture *oeuvre*.

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<sup>145</sup> Dean Keep, "Meadmore Furniture: Highly Strung," *Australian Modern* 2012, 27.

## Café Culture

In much the same way that eating outdoors in the home was frowned upon before the advent of 'outdoor living', eating outdoors in public was also avoided.<sup>146</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, with the regulation of nuisances (animals, smell and waste, noise, spitting), and the provision of street amenities (street trees, street lighting, public toilets, drinking fountains),<sup>147</sup> Melburnians embraced open-air dining. (Figure 53). American-style milk bars and European-style cafés also gained popularity by mid-century. There were several milk bars established in Melbourne post-war, and by 1952-53 the retail census revealed that confectionery and milk bars sold 73 per cent of Melbourne's confectionery, ice cream and soft drinks and accounted for 14 per cent of the total food sales in Melbourne.<sup>148</sup>

Italians and Greeks who had migrated to Melbourne as part of the diaspora introduced espresso to Melburnians, and by 1956, the city's attempts to show the world about to descend on it for the Olympic Games that Melbourne had become a cosmopolitan city were well under way.

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<sup>146</sup> According to Peter Timms, 'outdoor living' is a term few people would have understood or even used before World War Two. "...eating outdoors was thought uncivilised. Social historian Mark Thomson says that during the depression... the sorts of people who ate outside were people who'd lost their houses... the unemployed people." Timms, *Private Lives: Australians at Home since Federation*, 29.

<sup>147</sup> Website, "Urban Environment," School of Historical Studies, Department of History, The University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00012b.htm>.

<sup>148</sup> John Young, "Milk Bars," Website, School of Historical Studies, Department of History, The University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00981b.htm>.

The Legend Espresso and Milk Bar opened in 1956 at 280 Bourke Street, replacing the Anglo-American Café, run by Greek ex-patriots, the Nicolades family. (Figure 54). While the Anglo-American Café had featured a standard café menu of steak, chips, and whiting,<sup>149</sup> the Legend, with its imported Italian espresso machine and exotic fare such as croissants, gelato, and risotto, represented a new modernity, based on the multiculturalism and desire to be seen as a sophisticated city which emerged in Melbourne in the lead up to the Olympic Games. Ion Nicolades commissioned Meadmore to do a redesign of the café to tie in with its name and menu change. The result was stylish and wholly modern.

Meadmore introduced elements of Scandinavian modernism through the wood panelling he used along the bar (Figure 55), and an Italian influence is seen in the use of an Italian-style terrazzo floor, and mosaic tiles on the exterior. The signage indicating the Legend's dual purpose as both a milk bar and an espresso bar (Figure 54) was a sign of the changing times. Meadmore commissioned young artist Leonard French to paint a mural for the Legend, and he produced a vibrant semi-abstract seven-panel work on the tale of Sinbad the Sailor (Figure 55). The colourful theme continued in the bright primary colours Meadmore used in the tables, chair pads and stools (Figure 56), with the use of yellow and red particularly reminiscent of Meadmore's

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<sup>149</sup> Museum Victoria Website, "Café Culture," <http://museumvictoria.com.au/marvellous/postwar/cafe.asp>.

signature corded chair. Straight lines, another Meadmore signature, are seen in the chair backs, vertical wood panelling and in the lighting, which was a mix of irregularly hung long fluorescent tubes (Figure 55) and low-hanging black pendants, punctured to allow light to shine through (Figure 57).

Meadmore's designs for the Legend displayed nods to international modernism combined with a respect for local talent – French's mural became its signature feature – and demonstrated his understanding of contemporary post-war aesthetics.

Throughout the 1950s while Meadmore was designing furniture he was also developing his practice of steel sculpture and was part of the vibrant Melbourne modern art scene. He also wrote articles on furniture, lighting and interior design for *Architecture and Arts* from 1953, which served the dual purpose of self-promotion of his designs and validating his opinions of modern design principles. In 1956 he began collaborating with Max Hutchinson to manufacture and market his designs and they established Gallery A in Melbourne in 1959, which specialised in showing abstract art. Meadmore ran the gallery, curating shows and displaying his own early sculpture, as well as furniture designs. That year, Meadmore sold a line

through the gallery called "Gallery A Contract Furniture", fabricated for the commercial market rather than the domestic buyer<sup>150</sup> for the first time.

In 1958 Meadmore designed a small range of furniture for the manufacturer Michael Hirst which included a series of occasional tables with steel legs and linoleum tops available in black or red with a brass strip surrounding the top to cleverly conceal the joins of the legs. His most sought-after design for Hirst, and considered one of his most sophisticated designs, was the DC601A chair (Figure 58). Using plastic-coated steel for the first time, the chair was waterproof and could be used indoors and out. It was available in black or white, with a separate seat cushion for extra comfort.

Once again, the straight line was crucial to Meadmore's design. Instead of using flexible cord, however, Meadmore arranged a pattern of crisscrossing steel rods to form the seat and back. Gently curved horizontal lines of steel placed across the straight vertical lines of the back created softer lines in contrast.<sup>151</sup> The chair curved to the body for comfort, a principle of organic design.

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<sup>150</sup> Michael Bogle, "Clement Meadmore in Australia," *Australiana* August 2001, Vol. 23, No. 3, 83.

<sup>151</sup> The chair has been compared to the Diamond chair (1952) by Italian-born American-trained Harry Bertoia. The Diamond chair is also constructed of crisscrossing metal rods but is in fact markedly different to the DC601A chair. The evenly intersecting rods of Bertoia's chair contrast with the irregularly placed rods of Meadmore's chair, creating a different sensibility.

Ultimately, Meadmore's major successes, (financial and artistic), and reputation would not be built on his furniture designs. Increasingly more occupied with his sculpture practice, Meadmore moved to Sydney in 1960 and then to New York in 1963, where he would later find fame with his monumental steel sculptures.

He maintained an interest in furniture throughout his life. In 1974 he wrote a book, *The Modern Chair: Classic Designs by Thonet, Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames and Others*,<sup>152</sup> choosing chairs which met his "requirement of timelessness"<sup>153</sup> – that is, chairs which were still in production in 1974. The earliest chair chosen was Michael Thonet's Bentwood armchair (1870), the latest Claudio Salocchi's Appoggio (1971). The book included chairs undoubtedly defined as classics of modern design, such as Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair (1929) and Brno chair (1930), and several Eames chairs including the DCM, plastic dining and armchairs and the lounge chair and ottoman.

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It is clear, however, that Meadmore and Bertoia, also a sculptor, shared a similar design sensibility. Bertoia said: "If you look at these chairs, they are mainly made of air, like sculpture. Space passes right through them." Meadmore's similar concern with the play of space and light in his chairs is obvious. Harry Bertoia Official Website, "Furniture: Innovative Furniture by Harry Bertoia," <http://www.harrybertoi.org/furniture.html>

<sup>152</sup> Clement Meadmore, *The Modern Chair: Classic Designs by Thonet, Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames, and Others* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1997).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Meadmore included one of his own designs, the sling chair of 1963 (Figure 59). Tellingly, it was not a chair he had designed in Australia – the corded chair would have been an obvious choice in a book about classic designs. Instead, it was his final furniture design, a steel and leather chair he had designed after arriving in America.

Unlike Ward, Lowen and Featherston, Meadmore was never particularly financially successful as a furniture designer. Michael Bogle suggests it was the small-scale Australian market, rather than a lack of public acceptance or critical acclaim for his designs, which was responsible.<sup>154</sup> However, Meadmore appears to have been unusually bitter about his lack of financial success. Reticent on the subject of his furniture design, Meadmore downplayed its significance in an interview in 1984: “I never had much to do with what was happening in Melbourne; I was never accepted there. They never bought anything much.”<sup>155</sup> However, the ubiquitousness of Meadmore’s furniture – particularly the corded chair – in magazines from the 1950s suggests that this chair, at least, sold in large numbers.

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<sup>154</sup> Bogle, "Clement Meadmore in Australia," 81.

<sup>155</sup> Geoffrey De Groen, *Some Other Dream: The Artist, the Art World and the Expatriate : Conversations with Janet Alderson, Robert Hughes, Max Hutchinson, Robert Jacks, Bruce Latimer, Clement Meadmore, Jeffrey Smart, Stelarc, John Stringer* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, c.1984), 66.

Aside from a cursory mention of Meadmore's beginnings as a furniture designer on his official website<sup>156</sup> and in the monograph published by Eric Gibson,<sup>157</sup> Meadmore distanced himself from that part of his life, perhaps in an attempt to cement his reputation as a sculptor. This has contributed to the lack of published scholarship on Meadmore as a furniture designer, however his importance in the development and acceptance of modern design in Melbourne is undeniable.

### **Into the New Decade**

As the 1960s approached, Melburnians were increasingly more engaged with modern art, design, and architecture. On the back of ICI House, Robin Boyd designed Melbourne's second twenty-story building, this time a domestic domicile. Domain Park Flats (designed in 1959) was the tallest residential building in Melbourne when construction was completed in 1962. (Figure 60).

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<sup>156</sup> Clement Meadmore Official Website, "Biography," [http://www.meadmore.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=75](http://www.meadmore.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=75).

<sup>157</sup> Eric Gibson, *The Sculpture of Clement Meadmore* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, c.1994).



Built in South Yarra, opposite the Botanic Gardens, Domain Park Flats was the first air-conditioned high-rise housing block in Melbourne, marketed for its “luxury” and stunning views in a “prize position overlooking Melbourne from South Yarra”.<sup>158</sup> The notion that living in a flat could be a luxurious experience was new, but combined with the incredible vistas of the Botanic Gardens and Port Phillip Bay to the south, which were able to be seen from the high-rise building, and marketed to “those who find it desirable to be free of the responsibilities, without parting from the essential features of a graceful home and garden”,<sup>159</sup> they appealed to a certain area of the market who were willing to embrace modern concepts.

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<sup>158</sup> "Domain Park Units," *Architecture in Australia* March 1964, Vol. 53, No. 1, 150.

<sup>159</sup> The prospectus for Domain Park Flats, about 1960, quoted in Caroline Butler-Bowden and Charles Pickett, *Homes in the Sky: Apartment Living in Australia* (Carlton, Vic.; Sydney: Miegunyah Press in association with Historic Houses Trust, 2007), 99.

## Conclusion

The furniture by Ward, Lowen, Featherston and Meadmore forms part of the *milieu* of modern Melbourne. Each of the four designers explored ways of producing furniture which was attuned to modern design sensibilities as well as the atmosphere of post-war Melbourne.

The designers did not all share similar goals in terms of design and audience. Ward's Patterncraft and Timber-pack furniture was considerably different to Lowen's Narvik range. Aesthetically, Featherston's Contour range shares little in common with Meadmore's corded chairs. However, despite differing styles and influences, they all shared the common goal of 'good design'. Their furniture was part of the progressive movement, internationally and within Australia, away from the large, heavy furniture of the past toward light furniture suitable for the modern homes designed post-war.

Taking their cues from the modern design principles of simplicity, practicality, and the exploration and use of new materials and manufacturing processes, the four designers produced furniture suitable for this new market which was light, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing.

In particular, Scandinavian design, organic design, and the Americans Charles and Ray Eames proved to be major influences for the designers, who responded to their principles and practices in ways which were suitable for the Australian post-war public and which were not copies or homages, but instead displayed their own design characteristics.

In much the same way that the general public of the late 1940s and the 1950s responded to the design they saw in magazines such as *Home Beautiful*, changing their homes and ways of living accordingly, today's public responds in many of the same ways. Contemporary homemakers look to magazines such as *Real Living* or television renovating shows like *The Block* for design styling advice. While six decades spans the time between today and the period examined in this thesis, design principles of simplicity and practicality are still highly regarded. Our homes have changed irrevocably, with the concepts of open-plan living and outdoor living, formulated in the post-war period, still highly sought after.

Just as the 1950s housewife read *Home Beautiful* to see examples of other people's homes – stylish people – in order to both aspire to their example and understand the current trends, so too do today's design magazine readers. In many cases, the same furniture by Featherston or Lowen or Eames can be seen in the homes of people from both eras (Figure 61). Australians have

always looked to these magazines as arbiters of taste and this continues today. Highly-rating television show *The Block* featured many items of replica mid-century modern furniture in its interior design in this year's series. The winning lounge room design made use of a replica Featherston R160 chair, introducing the design to a new generation. (Figure 62).

While the furniture produced by the four designers during the period of 1946-60 is undoubtedly of its time, it has succeeded by virtue of its good design in becoming timeless – that word used by Meadmore to describe furniture which “through a combination of practical qualities and elegance... has transcended the confines of time and fashion”.<sup>160</sup> The modernist imperative to create furniture which transcends fickle changing fashions is evident in many of the designs discussed in this thesis, which have now achieved iconic status and become classics of Australian design.

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<sup>160</sup> Meadmore, *The Modern Chair: Classic Designs by Thonet, Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames, and Others* 7.

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Figure 37. Grant Featherston's Television B210H chair, 1953.

Figure 38. Grant Featherston's cane-metal chair, 1954 shown *in situ* at the Toorak home of architect Roy Grounds, who commissioned it. Photograph from *Featherston Chairs*, 33.

Terence Lane, *Featherston Chairs: National Gallery of Victoria 30 March-7 August 1988* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1988)

Figure 39. Grant Featherston's TY chair, c.1957.

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Figure 61. *Real Living* magazine January/February 2012, 78, featuring the Charles and Ray Eames Lounge chair and ottoman.

Figure 62. The winning lounge room on this year's series of the television show *The Block* featured a replica Grant Featherston R160 chair.

## Figures

The advertisement is framed in orange and features a central orange text box with white text. Surrounding the text box are various replica furniture items, each with a label and price. The items include:

- Replica Talis Galvanised Highback Chair \$129
- Replica Eames Hang-ill-all \$49
- Replica Bentwood Thonet Chair \$129
- Replica Dandelion Floor Lamp \$299
- Replica Eames Italian Leather Chair & Stool \$999
- Replica Le Corbusier Cow Hide Chaise Lounge \$1199
- Replica Tom Vac Chair \$79
- Replica Hans Wegner Wishbone Chair \$189
- Replica Eames Eiffel Side Chair \$49
- Replica Swan Italian Leather Chair \$499
- Replica Ferruccio Laviani Bourgie Lamp \$149
- Replica Ghost Arm Chair \$119
- Replica Viento Chair \$89
- Replica Bellini Plastic Chair \$79
- Replica Anna Castelli Comptonbill \$89, \$119, \$149
- Mirrored Lamp Table \$269
- Replica Le Corbusier Sofa 3 Seater Black Italian Leather \$1499
- Replica Eames LCW Chair Cowhide \$499
- Replica Varner Pantan Heart Chair Red Wool \$499
- Replica George Nelson Ball Multicoloured Clock \$49
- Replica Talix Powder Coated Barstool 45cm \$99
- Replica George Nelson Marshmallow Sofa Red Italian Leather \$1299
- Replica Eames Highback Office Mesh Chair \$379

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Our replica products are not manufactured or approved by, or affiliated with, the original designers, manufacturers or distributors and are not to be mistaken for the originals which are sold under license.

Figure 1. Advertisement from *Real Living* magazine, January/February 2013, 51, with replica furniture from mid-century modern designers including Charles and Ray Eames, George Nelson and Harry Bertoia.



Figure 2. Charles and Ray Eames' lounge chair and ottoman, 1956.



Figure 3. George Nelson's Sunburst clock, c.1964.



Figure 4. Dining Chair Metal (DCM) by Charles and Ray Eames, 1946.



Figure 5. Fred Ward's Patterncraft range launched on the cover of the *Australian Home Beautiful*, October 1947.

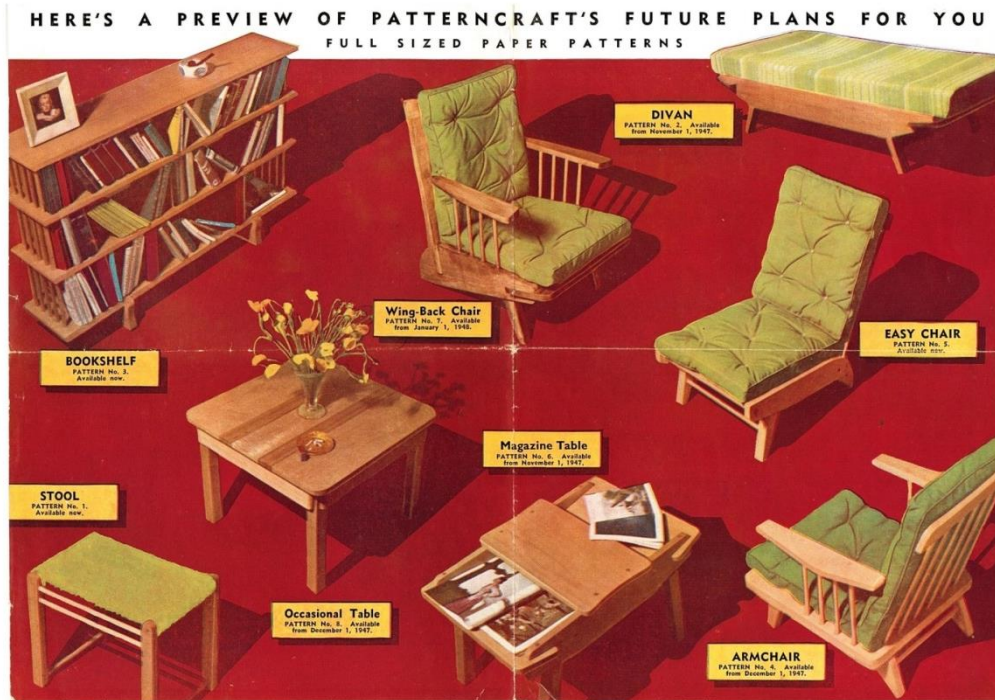


Figure 6. Patterncraft range in the *Australian Home Beautiful*, October 1947.

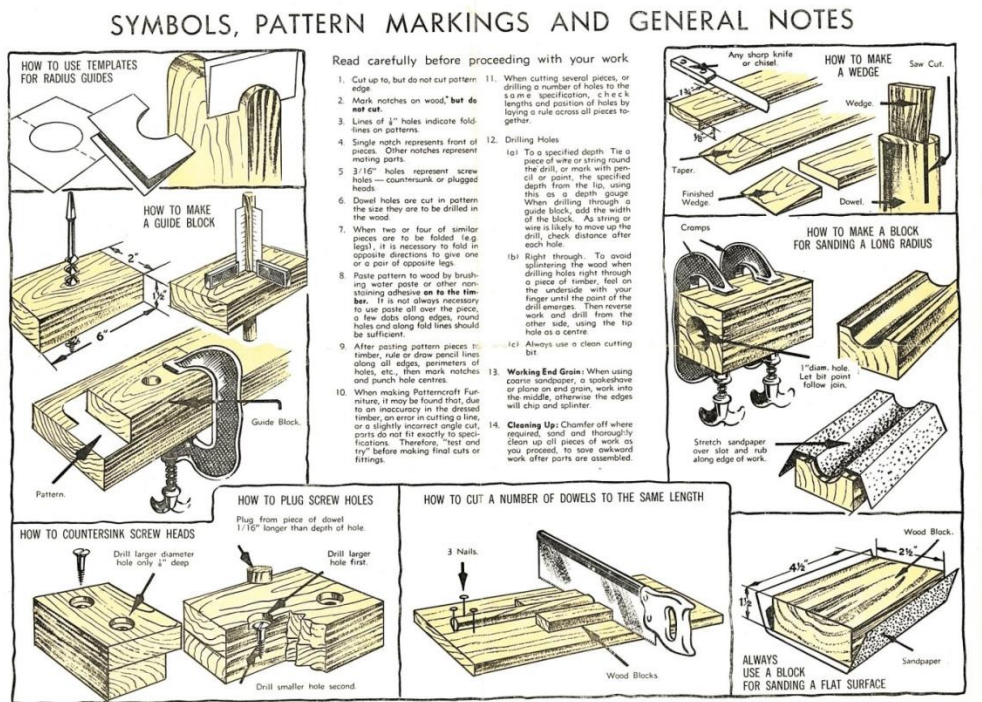


Figure 7. Instructions for preparing and assembling Patterncraft range of furniture in the *Australian Home Beautiful*, October 1947.

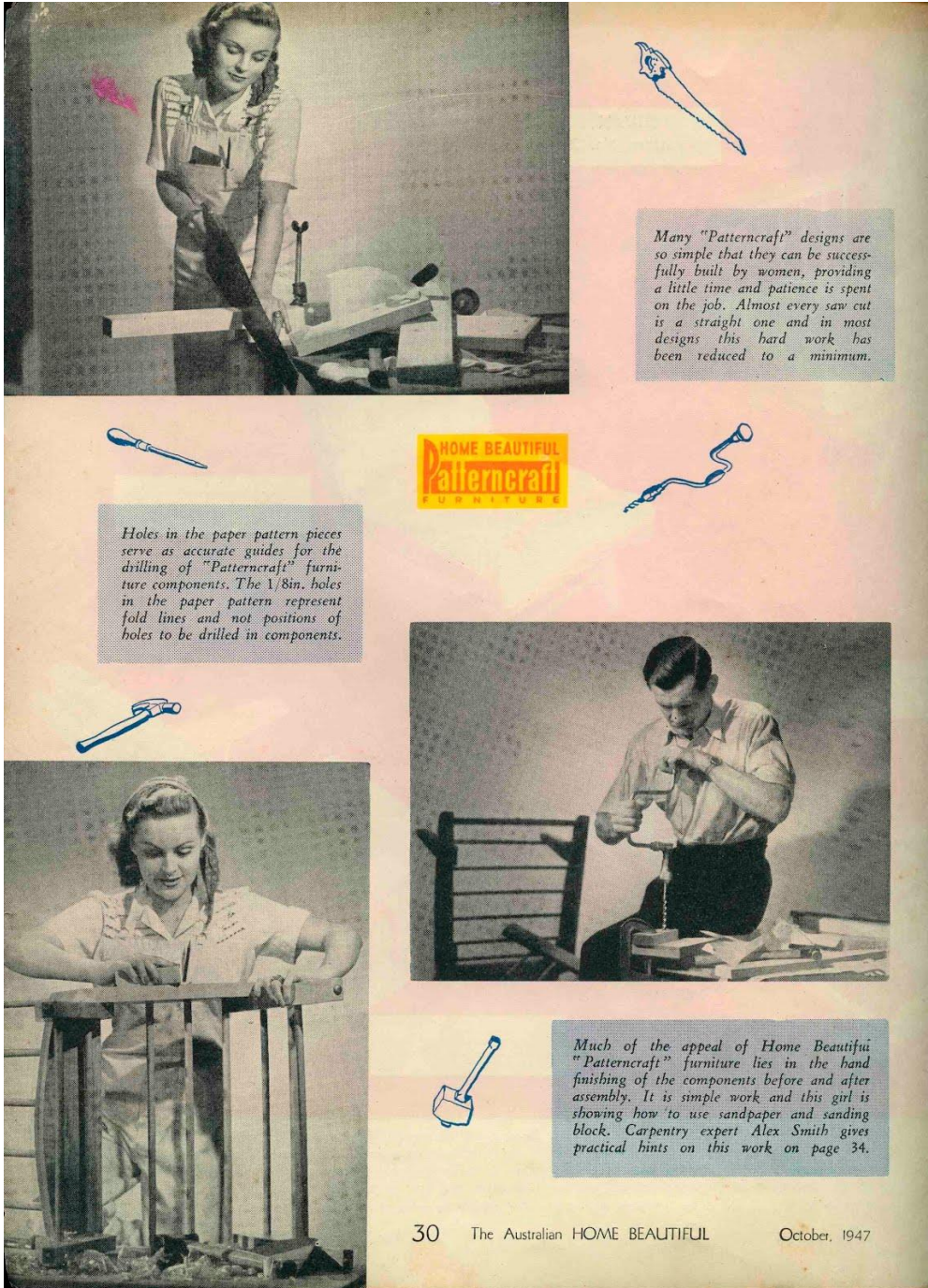


Figure 8. Photographs showing a man and a woman constructing Patterncraft furniture in the *Australian Home Beautiful*, October 1947, 30.

HOME BEAUTIFUL  
**Patterncraft**  
FURNITURE

## MAKE THIS FURNITURE FROM FULL-SIZED PAPER PATTERNS

Each pattern envelope contains an illustrated step-by-step instruction chart and complete list of timber and hardware required.

**PATTERN No. 26 COFFEE TABLE**  
Price 2/6  
PATTERNS MAY BE ORDERED ON THIS COUPON OR BY LETTER



You can build this Coffee Table, which is 22 ins. square and 20 ins. high. It will be useful in your living room or for children's meals. Full instructions are contained in the pattern envelope. Price 2/6.  
You will have hours of enjoyment making this article and the full-sized paper pattern vastly simplifies construction. Merely paste pattern on to timber, cut along pattern edge, drill holes where indicated, clean up, and assemble.

**HOME BEAUTIFUL Patterncraft FURNITURE** **ORDER FORM**

Post to The Australian Home Beautiful Patterncraft Dept., H.B., Box 2828AA, G.P.O., Melbourne.

PATTERN No. 26, COFFEE TABLE. State number required and enclose remittance for patterns ordered.

PLEASE SEND ME PATTERN(S) No. 26 ..... at 2/6 each

I enclose  Cheque  Money Order No. .... value .....  Postal Note

NAME .....

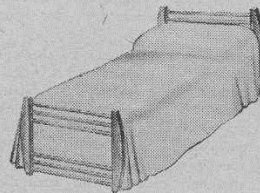
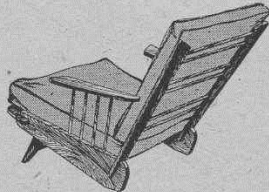
ADDRESS .....

Write clearly in Block Letters.

Patterns and Timber-packs (see below) may be purchased or ordered at Newspaper House, 247 Collins St., Melb., C.1.

## THE TIMBER PROBLEM SOLVED

Complete sets of machined, bandsawn, shaped and sanded ready-to-assemble parts are now available in selected K.D. Mountain Ash (toys are white pine) for the following Patterncraft designs.



No. 7 Wing Back Chair £2 3 6 (with dowels) Not drilled, not slotted.	No. 23A Adult Diningroom, Kitchen or Parch. Chair - £2 9 9 Dowel holes drilled.	No. 10 Bed Ends - - - £1 6 6 Drilled, dowels supplied.
No. 20 Hanging Book-shelf - - - - - 17 6	No. 23J Junior Chair - - £2 4 0 Dowel holes drilled.	No. 26 Coffee Table - - - £2 1 3 Drilled, 1/2 joints cut.
No. 13 Cargo Glider, Jeep and Tank - £1 9 6	No. 12 Lawn Chair - - £2 19 6	No. 17 Bath Hoidall - - - 8 3 Drilled, dowels and plastic nose supplied.
	No. 25 Barnyard Toys - £1 1 6	

Sets of these parts can be obtained from the makers, or will be delivered to any address — freight payable on delivery. Watch for new designs each month in these pages.

Phone, call or write, including remittance to:

### TIMBER-PACKS

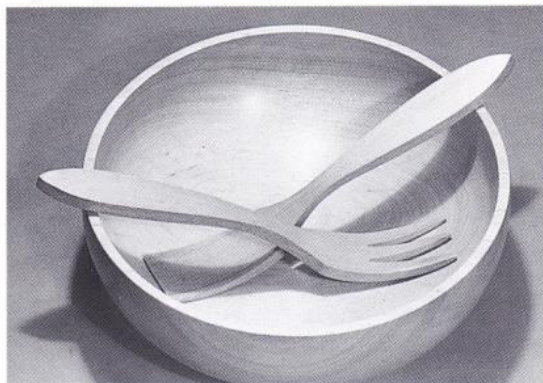
35-37 DERBY ST., COLLINGWOOD, N.5, VICTORIA. Telephone: JA4382

Figure 9. Timber-pack range launched in the *Australian Home Beautiful*, July 1948, 52.





*Fred with trays and a 'lazy susan' at  
bottom 1947*



*Salad bowl made from  
Queensland Maple 1946/47*

Figure 10. Images of early Fler products from Fred Lowen's autobiography, *The Dunera Boy*, 94. Top: Lowen with wooden trays and Lazy Susan. Bottom: Salad bowl and salad servers.



Figure 11. DC chair designed by Fred Ward and manufactured by Fler, 1948.

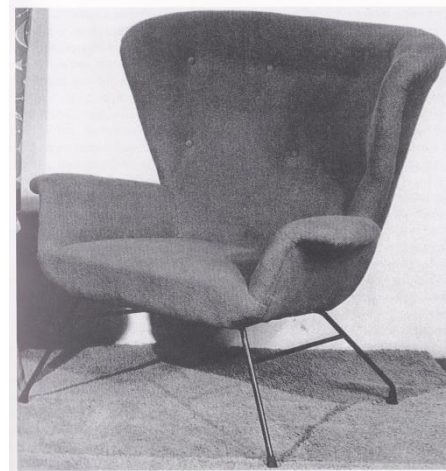


Figure 12. Fler aluminium shell chair by Fred Lowen, 1954.



Figure 13. Fler SC55 chair by Fred Lowen, 1955.



Figure 14. Fler SC58 chair by Fred Lowen, 1958.

**URNISHING  
AND  
ORATION  
NEWS**

## ELEGANCE AND VERSATILITY IN NEW DINING SETTINGS

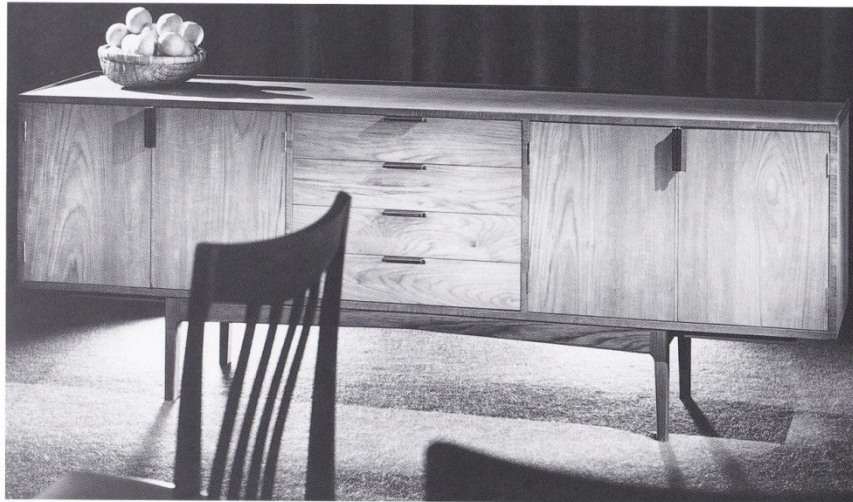
release in Victorian shops  
ext few weeks, this dining  
Fler achieves a fine eleg-  
ance through its simplicity of line.  
African-inspired, the suite is  
crafted from African maple.

The chair has slim, fluted legs and  
armrests to give a light effect  
without sacrificing strength. The  
upholstery is repeated along the solid  
backrest which encloses the  
laminated top based on  
a single panel.

The table is 4ft. by 3ft., or 5ft. by  
3ft. and seats six comfortably.  
A cupboard in the buffet is  
accessed by interior panels to  
provide extra storage space. All  
joints are dovetailed and the top  
is size-lined and divided for  
easy handling. The handles are sculptured  
and recessed into a mould.  
The chairs feature a wide, scoop  
seat. At 20in., they're 2in. wider  
than average, but they still fit  
under the table. The backs  
feature inserts which, the mak-  
ing is strong, light and more  
suited to upholstery. The seats  
are upholstered in Vynex, hide or  
leather.

Table (either size) 33 gns.;  
buffet 45 gns.; chairs (fully upholster-  
ed) 18 gns. each; chairs (fully upholster-  
ed) 18 gns. each; chairs (fully upholster-  
ed) 18 gns. each; chairs (fully upholster-  
ed) 18 gns. each.

Figure 15. The *Australian Home Beautiful*, March 1960, article on new Fler dining suite.



'Narvik' dining setting with large sideboard  
Photography Mark Strizic

Figure 16. Fler Narvik dining setting with large sideboard by Fred Lowen, photographed by Mark Strizic. From *The Dunera Boy*, 137.



Figure 17. Fler Narvik sofa by Fred Lowen, 1964. The sofa folds down into a daybed.

The exclusive Fler basic design, gives the necessary luxurious support for legs, back and head, providing the deep relaxing comfort for really enjoyable TV viewing, as long as you like to watch. Fler Chairs are light, easy-to-move, take up less space.

**FLER** *The Perfect Chair for TV Viewing . . . .*

**SC 55**  
Built-in comfort, concealed life-long strength, with an attractively different arm rest design. Deep foam Dunlopillo cushions, of course, and complete zipp-off covers take only 2¼ yards. Available in maple, mahogany and other popular finishes.

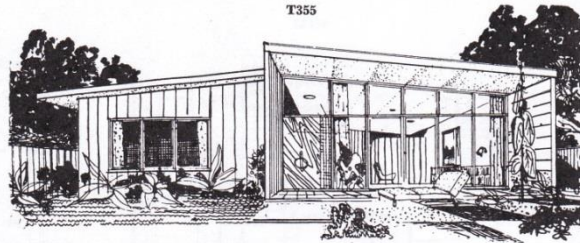
**SC 58**  
Finely sculptured lines emphasise the natural timber grain, giving a feeling of warmth, with deep comfort of Dunlopillo seat and back. This design has universal appeal. 2¼ yards of material for zipp-off covers. Available in maple, mahogany and other popular finishes.

Figure 18. Fler publicity brochure, c.1958, aimed at the television market, reproduced in *The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties*, 160-61.

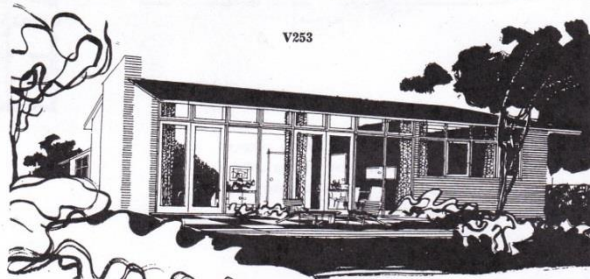
**SMALL HOMES** | **The Age**  
 Service  
 of the Royal Victorian  
 Institute of Architects

**FOUR MORE  
 SMALL HOMES**

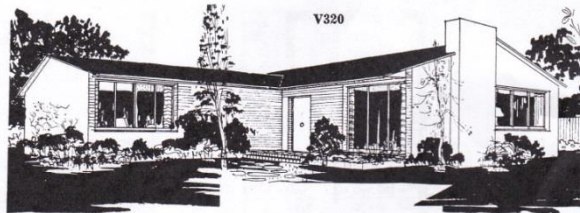
**T355.** This design has been successfully built by contractors in the suburbs of Melbourne and Geelong. The inclusion of three bedrooms and large living area in 10 squares has appeal. It will fit on a 46-foot block. Estimated cost £2900, minimum finish.



**V253.** L-shaped veneer, two bedrooms, but all livingroom windows face the rear, to perhaps a view. 10.7 squares, it will fit on a 50-foot block. Estimated cost £3200, minimum finish.



**V320.** Popular L-shape three-bedroom veneer house, simple to a point of baldness. Suitable for corner blocks. 11.6 squares, it will fit 60-foot block. Estimated to cost £3350, minimum finish.



**T2110.** A two-bedroom timber design under one long low gable. Two terraces, one off the entrance gallery, small off a separate dining room. 11.2 squares, it will run across a 70-foot block or down a 50-foot block. Minimum estimate £3000.

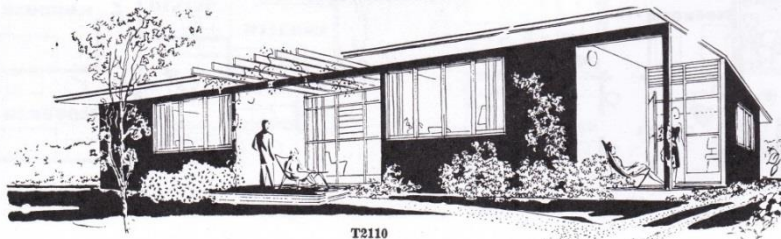


Figure 19. Some of the designs offered by the Small Homes Service in *Architecture and Arts* magazine, November 1955, 38.



Figure 20. The sitting room with a fake television in the House of Tomorrow, designed by architect Robin Boyd, part of The Modern Home Exhibition, October and November 1949. Furniture designed by Grant Featherston. Photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Powerhouse Museum Collection.



Figure 21. Front exterior of the House of Tomorrow, designed by architect Robin Boyd, part of The Modern Home Exhibition, October and November 1949. Photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Powerhouse Museum Collection.



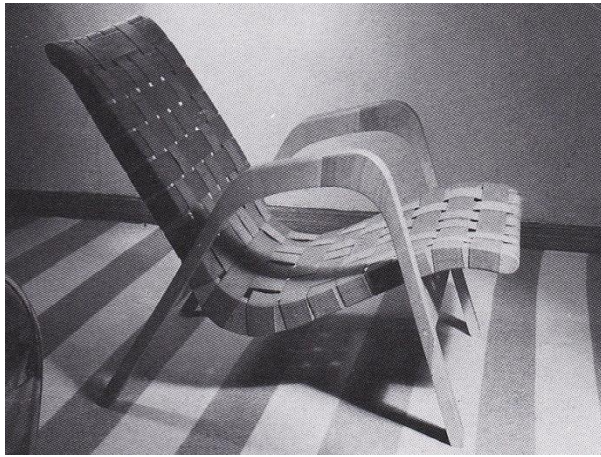


Figure 22. Relaxation chair by Grant Featherston, 1947.



Figure 23. Eva chair by Bruno Mathsson, c.1941.



Figure 24. High back cantilevered armchair by Alvar Aalto, 1938-39.



Figure 25. Snelling Line chair by Douglas Snelling, 1946. National Gallery of Victoria Collection.



Figure 26. Grant Featherston's Relaxation chaise, c.1949.



Figure 27. *Chaise longue* by Marcel Breuer, 1935. Known as the "long chair" or Isokson chaise, manufactured by the Isokon Furniture Company in London. Powerhouse Museum Collection.



Figure 28. Top: "Bad taste" tableaux. Bottom: "Good taste" tableaux by Robin Boyd and Bruce Anderson, 1952. From *Featherston Chairs*, 8.



Figure 29. Bedroom with Relaxation webbed stool in the House of Tomorrow, designed by Robin Boyd, part of The Modern Home Exhibition, October and November 1949. Furniture by Grant Featherston. Photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Powerhouse Museum Collection.



Figure 30. Open-plan kitchen and dining room in the House of Tomorrow, designed by Robin Boyd, part of The Modern Home Exhibition, October and November 1949. Furniture by Grant Featherston. Photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Powerhouse Museum Collection.



Figure 31. Deck in the House of Tomorrow, designed by Robin Boyd, part of The Modern Home Exhibition, October and November 1949. Photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Powerhouse Museum Collection.



Figure 32. The components of Grant Featherston's Contour chair, the *Australian Home Beautiful*, May 1952, 18.



Figure 33. Grant Featherston's R152 chair, 1951.



Figure 34. Grant Featherston's RS1616 settee, c.1951.



Figure 35. Grant Featherston's R160 armchair, c.1951.



Figure 36. Grant Featherston's B220H or curl-up chair, 1953.



Figure 37. Grant Featherston's Television B210H chair, 1953.



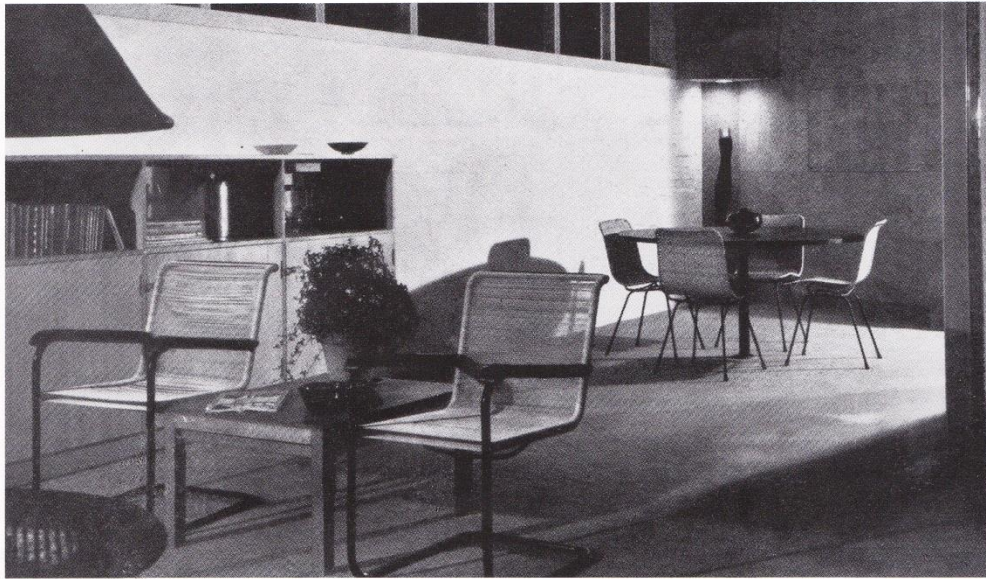


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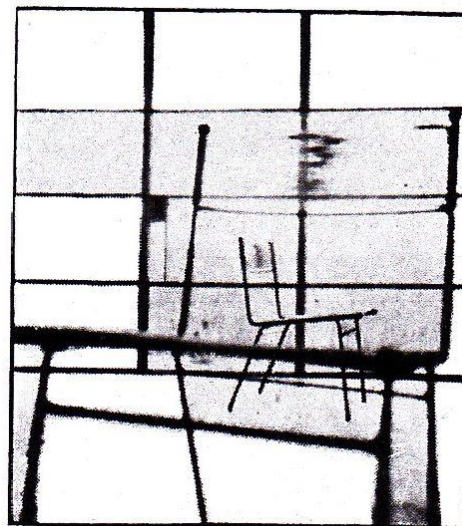
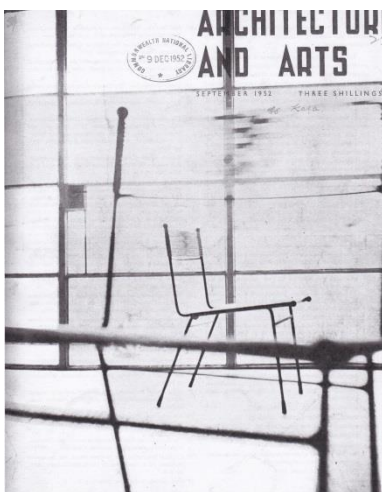


Figure 44. Clement Meadmore's corded chairs on the cover of *Architecture and Arts*, September 1952.

The exterior has  
is pine walls with  
nails in light tan  
zws. Cantilevered  
verlocks the surf  
Beach, N.S.W.

dining furniture  
it natural cord on  
frames, and the  
shed wood table  
pork iron legs to  
ing room opens to  
sea where meals  
enjoyed on hot  
days. The top of  
one bookshelves  
background can be  
serving buffet.



Overlooking the golden sand, Norfolk Island pine trees  
and rolling breakers of Palm Beach, N.S.W., there's a  
house designed by Architect Gordon King to fit its surround-  
ings perfectly. It is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dwyer.

Australian HOUSE and GARDEN ANNUAL, 1956 57

## Efficient addition . . .



*Do you need an extra table—  
or a desk? A few hours work  
can produce this beauty.*

A desk may not be the first piece of furniture you buy  
lacquer the whole desk. If you want polish, varnish or  
round the top. Particularly serviceable if

Figure 45. Top: Clement Meadmore's corded chairs in a private home.  
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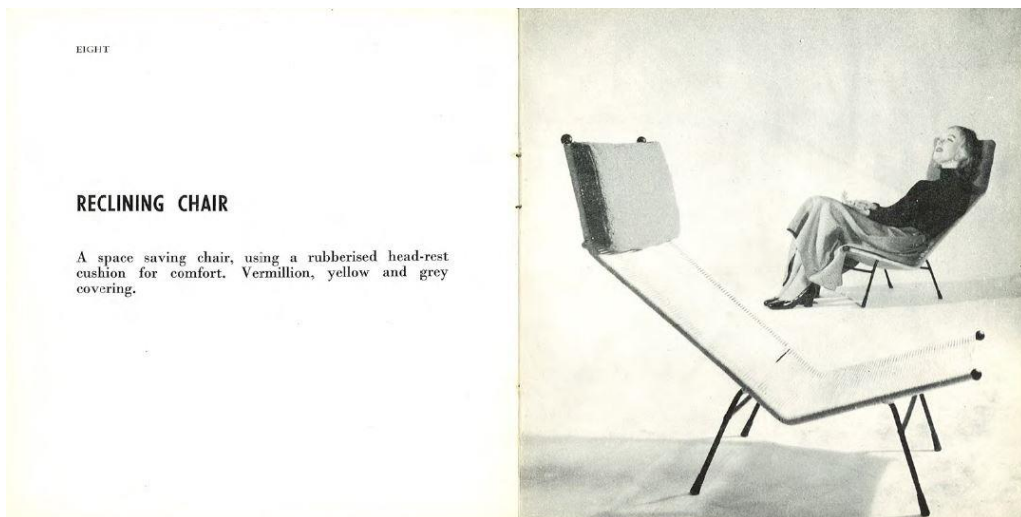


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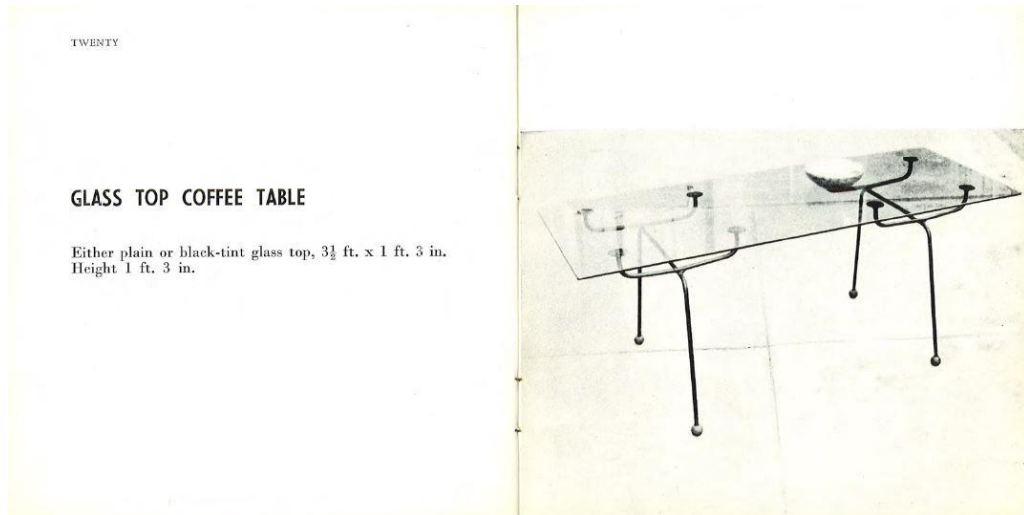


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