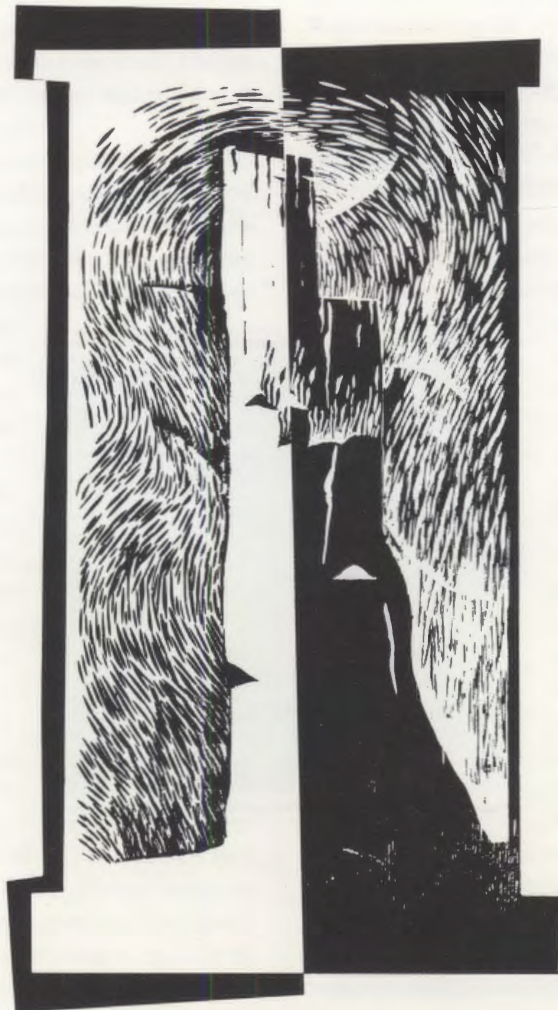


# THE HUON FACTOR



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Centre for the Arts Gallery  
University of Tasmania  
Hunter Street Hobart  
19 May - 9 June 1989



## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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T H E H U O N F A C T O R :  
S T A T E O F T H E A R T

¶ The title of this exhibition immediately brings many ideas to mind. One initially expects an exhibition revealing common ground in some form, whether generated by the creative use of a special, irreplaceable natural material or by a sense of place or regionalism. The title could easily have been conceived by the exhibition's organizers through a desire to identify the rough equivalent of a "Huon River School", a working community of artists and craftspeople in southern Tasmania linked by a sense of solidarity.

¶ The suggestiveness of the title is such that one would not have been surprised to see an exhibition comprised of diverse media, all exhibiting different aspects of the fertilization of a particular environment upon varying ways of working, whether in the traditional fine arts or craft disciplines. Such an exhibition might have demonstrated through simple juxtaposition whether the ceramics of a fine potter such as Peter Davis working in relative isolation in Cygnet have any distant sense of kinship to the superb paintings of Peter Stephenson being produced under equally difficult circumstances on a silent mountaintop above Kingston.

¶ The exhibition title also conjures up the fascination of the possibility of even further comparison and investigation of cross-fertilization. It is suggestive of the possibility of an exhibition of carefully chosen work by the most potent of southern Tasmania's artists and craftspeople placed in counterpoint to examples of the work of the region's nationally known writers like poet Andrew Sant and other major contributors within the cultural tradition such as recently-returned Hobart resident and classical music commentator John Stafford.

¶ Perhaps to one's initial surprise, the exhibition bears little resemblance to any of those expectations. The work is in the single medium of timber, although not necessarily in Tasmanian timber or natural timber at all, as with David Emery's bowl in lacquered fibreboard with stainless steel supports and a veneered edge. With the inclusion of work by sculptor Tony Bishop of Adelaide, Canberra designer/maker George Ingham, and the previously-mentioned Victorian David Emery, the show is not devoted exclusively to Tasmanian artists and craftspeople.

¶ Among the Tasmanian participants, only Kevin Perkins, Gay Hawkes, and Mark Phillips are native-born, while Peter Taylor is perhaps next in longevity in the region, having migrated to southern Tasmania from Sydney nearly forty years ago. Among the others, Peter Adams is a recent North Carolina transplant to the School of Art, John Smith is English-born and trained, while Tony Stuart and Peter Walker are Sydney-born

graduates of the Centre for the Art's "Design in Wood" programme. The exhibited work is equally diverse: it is clearly a case of "maker's choice", with that choice apparently dictated by a wide range of current interests and constraints of time.

¶ Yet it is only through the obvious necessity of laying aside those preconceptions about the exhibition upon viewing its contents that the true force of the title when applied to this work becomes apparent. That impact is the realization of the relative isolation of each of these works from each other in conception, design, and intent. This is not the work of people with unified goals and a stylistic cohesiveness in design.

¶ Furthermore, unlike such places as Santa Fe or Taos in New Mexico, New Hope in Pennsylvania, or Cetona/Chianciano in Tuscany, the rolling countryside and dramatic views characterizing Hobart and the Huon Valley have not generated a commercially tightly-knit art/ craft community of substantial dimension and social presence

supported by an affluent phalanx of enthusiastic and wealthy patrons or buyers. Despite the commendable efforts of individual makers and groups like the Designer/Makers Tasmania Cooperative in Hobart to provide a wide range of design and fabrication skills, the market is woefully small and unresponsive to initiatives ranging from exhibitions to individual contact with potential buyers or clients.

¶ Instead, for nearly every positive factor encouraging artists or designer/makers working in southern Tasmania, there is at least one negative which opposes and in some cases neutralizes the supportive effect of the former. It is these warring factors which this exhibition is about in its broadest sense: ostensibly about the positive aspects, but by necessity also about the negative, dragging, dogged



difficulties of creative short-term and long-term use of timber in our time – difficulties about which the work cannot help but speak in the exhibition. There is no black fatalism necessarily implied by those difficulties, but rather perhaps the reverse. The very fact that some good work continues to emerge under such conditions may reinforce our belief in the strength of a lean, wiry cultural tradition which never quite dies despite much encouragement to do so.

¶ Aside from the obvious delight of seeing new work in juxtaposition, the sobering lesson to be learned from the exhibition in all of its ramifications is about the complexity of the situation. An examination of those positive and negative elements constituting aspects of the "Huon Factor" as demonstrated by these works should reveal to us that, like the rest of our existence which is characterized by a daily knowledge of the realities of conflict in Palestine or Mozambique, there are things

desperately wrong all around us which demand a complexity of solution which seems to evade our minds and our grasp. The labyrinthine interlacings of the arts in general in Tasmania, of the past and future of the timber industry, and of the development of the economy in relation to local cultural production constitute a heavy "web" through which tantalizing possibilities may clearly be seen but which is repeatedly found to be impenetrable by the majority of artists and designers.

¶ In a spirit of optimism, we should begin with a tallying of some of the positive aspects of creative work with timber in southern Tasmania. What are the factors which first encouraged local designer/makers and attracted individual artists and craftspeople to this region, sustained their production over years of work, and continue to lure not only mainlanders but also a few skilled practitioners from abroad each year?

¶ One of the most obvious reasons must be the low cash overheads of establishing and running a workshop on a rural Tasmanian property and the possibility of living simply, if not austere, on an island whose society does not necessarily require stylish clothes or attendance at gallery openings as badges of cultural awareness. The makers whose work constitutes this exhibition have each created a working environment for themselves which, for the mature artists or craftspeople among them, has been achieved only through patient and often unreal, unending labour over the years. In the slow course of conversation while visiting the workshops of people as diverse in their practices as John Smith, Kevin Perkins, or Peter Taylor, one begins to understand the scope of the labour which slowly produced

John's hand-built geodesic domes in which he lives and works, which carved Kevin's steep mountainside paddocks and remarkable pole-construction workshop/house out of rough bushland, or which transformed Peter's ordinary-looking river-side house into a place filled with light, books, images, drawings, and massive sculptures in progress among deceptively simple workshop premises.

¶ Access to special natural materials in Tasmania must be another sustaining factor. The so-called "minor" Tasmanian timber species which constitute a minuscule part of the regular commercial timber harvest are of major interest to Tasmania's designer/makers in wood. Their work during the past decade in Tasmanian myrtle, sassafras, blackwood, Huon pine, King Billy pine, celery top pine, swamp gum, Tasmanian horizontal, and other similar species has turned those species into coveted and respected household terms for many Australians and overseas visitors. Supply of

these timbers to makers is achieved through both standard and alternative means in Tasmania. One of the most significant sources is the few small-scale millers like the Linnell and Skinner Mill outside Huonville who are willing to spend the necessary time to procure, saw or slice logs in the manner in which designer/makers want them sawn, rather than in whatever way their standard production processes demand. Another economically viable supply for Tasmanian designers living in difficult economic circumstances is through logs washed down-river from forest areas and pulled out by "spotters" who have learned the value of certain species and dimensions to their local makers.

¶ The presence of the "Design in Wood" programme at the Centre for the Arts in Hobart is another oblique but unmistakable source of sustenance for artists and craftspeople in wood in southern Tasmania. Whether through having been taught

furniture-making skills, design, or sculpture through the programme or through actually having been one of the programme's lecturers, former students and colleagues find the School serving as a continuing touchstone of contact with other makers and young assistants. It also functions for them as the source of an excellent reference library in the arts and as a contact point with other creative disciplines. Southern Tasmania without Hobart's substantial population and the presence of the School would present a far different working environment for those designer/makers who rely upon both for news of the outside creative world and for intellectual stimulation.

¶ Last and yet perhaps most obvious among the drawcards of Tasmania is its spectacular land

and countryside. Like the American Northwest, Tasmania provides a palpable sense of "elbow room", of quiet and serenity to be had for the asking rather than only at great cost. Yet unlike the vast distances and vistas of that American region, Tasmania's varied topography allows that sense of isolation to be carried on a tiny scale, absorbing far more small landholders into the seeming isolation of ridgelines and dense bush than in the crystalline air of the high Western sagebrush plains, where any neighbor to a land-holding less than several thousand acres appears to be living merely "across the back fence".

¶ Ultimately it is the possibility of apparent *freedom inherent in that isolation* which can be taken as potentially the most important pivotal factor – the true "Huon Factor" – bearing upon the work in this exhibition and the creative capacity of its makers. If understood rightly and guarded with great vigilance, the particular form of



isolation possible in Tasmania can allow artists and makers to make the decision to live on the veritable "shoestring" in order to have substantial time for their creative work rather than being forced to work merely to provide a livelihood or sustenance for themselves and their families.

¶ Unlike work and life in Sydney, Melbourne, or other Australian cities, that isolation can also be used to screen out inessential information and experiences, to concentrate thought and conceptual work, and to avoid forms of social interaction which fragment rather than consolidate the sources of one's creativity. It is also an isolation which allows maverick action, non-conforming methods, and "making do": this freedom from rule, stultifying order, and safe bureaucracy substitutes invention and barter methods for the reliance upon capital, social status, and professional qualifications common to areas of more dense population.

¶ How this isolation is dealt with on a day-to-day, year-to-year basis determines whether the "Huon factor" is a positive tool producing an intelligent freedom which intensifies and supports the creative process, or whether it is allowed to promote an insidiously slow stagnation and blindness. The critical choice lies here: Blainey's "tyranny of distance" certainly applies in every respect to Tasmania, and fighting that tyranny must be a conscious choice and constant struggle for the individual maker, as well as a larger-than-life analogous struggle for the state of Tasmania itself in respect to its timber industry and resources.

¶ In each case the risk is vast. Josephine Flood describes the Tasmanian Aborigines who crossed the recently emerged land-bridge across Bass Strait 23,000 years ago, saying

"...into this freezing toe on the foot of the world moved the Aborigines, perhaps impelled into empty space by an urge to explore. But these (people) stayed and weathered out the glacial cold in caves... The courage and skill of these Tasmanian Aborigines, braving the ice, snow, and freezing cold to hunt wallabies within sight of glaciers, is eloquent testimony to the indomitable spirit of early humans... Ten thousand years later their descendants were able to leave the caves as the ice receded and the climate grew warmer, only to find that the melting ice caps had drowned their link to the mainland.

They had survived 10,000 years of cold, and they were now to face a similar time of isolation. Tasmanian Aborigines of the nineteenth century were dubbed by anthropologists 'the world's most primitive people', but their most remarkable

achievement was that they survived. And not only did they survive but they also preserved and developed the rich cultural traditions those first migrants had carried across the land bridge. Engravings in Pleistocene style were still being made 20,000 years later, ritual cremations were carried out, songs, dances and ceremonies performed. The modern Tasmanian Aborigines have ancestors of whom they can be proud...

(J. Flood, *Archeology of the Dreamtime* (Sydney 1983) pp. 107 & 110).

¶ Present-day Tasmanian artists and craftspeople have a similar (if less graphic) struggle to face in their own work. Either the closed confines of the island must be used as a privileged microcosm in which a fresh version of a cultural tradition in timber and other media is forged, or a slow and unconscious process of marginalisation will begin to occur almost simultaneously. It is a particular danger to artists and makers

precisely because of the thin margin between being able to exist and keep creative work in process versus being forced by economic necessity to take jobs which stop or dilute that production.

¶ Those of us who visit Tasmania often for recreation, education, and visual stimulation can have only a minimal conception of the effect on local members of the creative or design disciplines of seldom being able to leave, however intense their commitment to the place. The fight for artists against marginalization is always present anywhere, but it would appear to be of a quite different kind for the non-Tasmanian-resident makers represented in this exhibition, as with Tony Bishop energetically trying to separate his own work time in central Adelaide from commitments with the School of Art,

George Ingham in Canberra knowing well what his responsibility for the Wood Workshop at the Canberra School of Art means in restrictions to his capacity as a designer/maker, or Gay Hawkes weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of raising family and pursuing her work as a maker in Melbourne rather than Tasmania.

¶ It is that question of *how* to turn Tasmania's relative isolation into a creative microcosm which lies at the basis of this exhibition. The diversity of the work, whether Tasmanian or mainland in origin, speaks in varying languages about the value of these timbers or timber products when worked with skill and imagination. Whether used with precise control and surface or as a free, expressive medium, the quality of both the timber and the skills in making are clearly apparent as a national resource.

¶ If the timber itself and the skills in making and working are the resource, *good*



*design* is the only critical ingredient which is capable of linking them and making them "blossom" into an economic and cultural boon to the State and the nation. Without a strong and imaginative sense of design in relation to balance, symmetry, integration with the characteristics of the material, linkage to a cultural tradition, and economy of means, superb Tasmanian timbers and highly developed fabrication skills and techniques will forever be crippled, whether used in one-off commissions to sculptors or in production line domestic furniture.

¶ How to engender good design skills in collaboration with technical capacity is one of the most difficult problems which faces institutions, arts schools, individual artists or craftspeople, and the design professions. Its inscrutability tends to breed a weary, "either-you-have-it-or-you-don't" approach among members of the design professions and art school lecturers alike. However, we must all believe that design skills can be taught, and an awareness of good design arises as a process of education rather than technique. Such an understanding of the importance of design as a conscious connection with cultural tradition rather than "quick-fix flash" comes through a deep and honest exposure to that tradition rather than an easy categorization of tradition as style.

¶ As a cultural microcosm, Tasmania faces at every moment a constant choice: it can choose in its professional and art schools to focus on cultural awareness, intentionally exposing all of its students to the widest selection of 2500 years of art, literature, philosophy, and the sciences, or it can continue the safe and far easier task of "training", which is not education. For example, as regards timber usage and design, students (whether youths or mature-age night school participants) can seldom study portions of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and not immediately understand something about the relationship between cadence and form which is immediately applicable to the use of grain and figure in timber objects. Tasmania's location and ecosystem already make it different from other places in Australia; it can choose to be different in its pursuit of excellence as an innovative way of approaching its economic marginalization.

¶ A painstaking, slow intensification in design awareness and design education must be supported at every level if it is to have any effect or benefit within the area of timber design and usage in Tasmania. Again, there are clear choices to be made. Tasmania is already noted among other States because of its "one-per-cent-for-art" programme within the construction of new government buildings as administered by the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board and other agencies. However, there has also been a general \$10,000 limit upon the amount to be spent in any project, although that maximum limit has recently been raised to \$20,000.

¶ This is a perfect example of the constant "positive/negative" cancelling process which seems to plague efforts toward demonstration of a vibrant, contemporary cultural heritage in the State. While the one-per-cent programme is laudable and

forward-thinking, the extremely low and arbitrary limit ensures that artists and craftspeople are faced again and again in Tasmania with accepting commissions for public buildings which they essentially subsidize from their own pockets in order to achieve an appropriate scale and complexity for the commissioned work.

¶ Art or craft prices, particularly in the medium of timber, are not inscrutable and arbitrarily generated; they may easily be understood as labour- and time-based, and comparable to yearly annual salaries in professional fields. For example, a public servant, scientist, or architect in mid-career with specialized training would expect to receive an annual salary of at least \$40,000 – \$50,000, and possibly considerably more in private industry or business. Any artist or craftsman commissioned for a work for a government building should be assumed to be equivalent in salary level in his field, if selected for a commission on a state or national basis; that artist may also be mature and at the height of his career, and therefore would be equivalent to a doctor, lawyer, or other professional in his earning capacity shortly before retirement.

¶ The fair valuation of art/craft commission prices may always be understood by taking the proposed commission amount, subtracting materials' and manufacturing costs, and comparing the remaining funds for labour/time to monthly salary levels in the professions. For example, for a \$20,000 commission for a public building in Tasmania, whether as a board room furniture commission or a timber sculpture, if materials/ manufacturing costs were \$12,000, the remaining \$8000 would cover time/labour costs for roughly two months at an equivalent salary level of \$40,000 – \$50,000/annum. Most public buildings contain large public spaces, demanding an appropriate scale of work, and the public's expectation is rightly for work which, with design time included, is the product of more than eight weeks of someone's thought, creativity, and skill as well as an appropriately permanent medium.

¶ These detailed comments are necessary to point out that even within Tasmania, the value of the State's skilled and creative timber artists and craftspeople is seriously marginalized by the single existing mechanism for getting their work into public view. If proper utilization of Tasmanian timber and timber skills is important to the future of the state, Tasmania's legislators should be pressured to enact a true "half-per-cent" policy which guarantees an expenditure of that amount of every public building budget on integrated art/craft commissions.

¶ Such a policy could also be tied to approval processes for major private development projects in the State. For a modest \$15 million dollar office building in Hobart, the compulsory addition of a .5% component for an art/craft programme, comprising \$75,000 in commission costs, could easily be factored into long-term rental charges for the building if *all* such buildings were being built with similar component charges. Over a 20-year minimum life of the building, and with an assumption of a minimum of 10 business tenants within the building, the additional "real" cost of the average lease per tenant to include that art/craft commissioning programme within

the original building cost is approximately \$31.00/month.

¶ Within office space rentals averaging \$15,000 – \$20,000/per month per tenant, an extra \$31.00 is virtually unnoticeable. With proper advisory and approval processes in place for the commissioning process, and with guarantees that architects would include such commissioned artists/craftspeople within the early design phases for the building, the impact of such a program upon the art/craft community in Tasmania would be dramatic, particularly for the profile of timber usage and demonstration of creative skills in timber.

¶ Other initiatives are currently under consideration which may begin to deal with the direct linkage between the long-term environmental questions of the timber industry in Tasmania, possible redundancy among primary industry workers such as loggers and fellers, supply of minor-species joinery timbers, and increased utilization of specialized timber working skills. Hobart's Centre for the Arts is currently in the process of establishing the pilot programme leading to a Centre of Applied Research in Furniture Design.

¶ Linking a new two-year postgraduate programme to be located within facilities at the existing Centre for the Arts together with special "outreach" training courses in timber skills in locations such as Huonville, the new Centre for Applied Research will attempt to attack simultaneously the problems of raising the level of commercial furniture design and manufacture in the State, increasing the availability of workers or craftspeople with specialized timber joinery and cabinet-making skills, and providing alternate training and job skills for areas of the industry which will become less viable due to environmental/ecosystem awareness of forest industry practices.

¶ The fact that the new Centre will have funding both from the Commonwealth and the State is extremely important, as is the fact that the concept of the new programme has been generated by the existing Centre for the Arts. It represents an opportunity to achieve a unique, dynamic programme based upon long-term humanistic and cultural awareness, upon the importance of design for industry and private production, and upon an emphasis on proper development of each individual's potential and creative capacity, rather than only upon the perceived, regimented needs of industrial growth.

¶ Again, it is the presence of the "Huon factor" which must be considered: if the slightly maverick, fresh ways of a non-traditional State and its designer/makers are intelligently considered in initiating this programme, it will be the very freedom and

individuality of timber use and skills in Tasmania which will guide the new Centre's development and focus its possible functions. This new postgraduate programme deserves wide discussion and debate during this formative period, debate which is supportive and constructive, however incisive it must be in its struggle to identify the order of priorities in such a programme.

¶ What should those priorities be, given the complexity of needs which cry out for attention on all sides? The first priority must be to focus upon meeting the needs and requirements for challenge and further development of the participating postgraduate students. It is part of the process of focussing on the "bird in hand" rather than the many in the bush: in a pilot programme beginning with two students and thereafter expecting to involve approximately six participants each term, the particular strengths and weaknesses of each individual must be rigorously evaluated,

with a consequent assessment of what his/her skills can offer to the design or fabrication-based industries or professions, and what in turn collaboration with those industries can bring to that student in an expansion and challenging of capacity.

¶ In short, the complexity of the situation and small numbers of students and collaborating industries would make a rigid syllabus or curriculum for what happens at the Centre counter-productive. Equally dangerous would be a programme lacking a strong, honed base of principles and directions, through which successive groups of students and advisors would make ineffective forays into unrelated areas of the timber industry and design disciplines, each failing to build upon or support any other element of the total effort.

¶ Instead, the difficult task which faces the principal organizers of the new Centre for Applied Research is to serve constantly as a fulcrum, a balancing point, adroitly and creatively assessing needs and opportunities among individuals and industries, and successfully matching particular talents with those needs – all within the vision of a clear, short-term and long-term "master plan" for experimental development of that unique Tasmanian cultural microcosm. For them not to lose heart with such a daunting and difficult brief, they must have the aid and benefit of constructive dialogue with all who care about working in timber in this place.

¶ The evidence of this exhibition is that there are many who *do* care and have a stake in the outcome of such endeavours, both within Tasmania and on the mainland. The works in the exhibition speak to each other, often in differing languages and with some uncomfortableness, but the dialogue is there. The formation of the programme





at the new Centre should be an equivalent "spur" for a verbal dialogue which can be equally rich and lively, precisely because it would be carried on among people who have chosen isolation and individualism in preference to a secure mainstream.

¶ The questions posed by the ideas behind the new Centre are vast, and the answers to be considered come from all directions. For example, what about equivalent efforts elsewhere in the world (i.e. how have the Swedes achieved their design-aware society; what about Italy's shopfront/cottage industry collaborations; what are the origins of the current massive resurgence of art in public places in Paris; how is the new Gammel Dok Centre for Architecture and Craft functioning in Copenhagen; etc.)? A creative, shrewd use of the "airfare budget" which should be built into the new Centre's programme as a permanent feature could ensure that even the process of talking about what can be done in Tasmania is vibrant and dynamic through bringing in those Australians or foreigners in all fields who have the energy and experience to demonstrate both conceptual and actual alternatives.

¶ In short, this simple exhibition of modest work carries with it the evidence of much more which is disturbing or even depressing in its implications, and yet which offers much which may be of promise, hope, and even exhilaration. Any national resource of materials and skill must have those implications in our time; it is for all of us to decide how much we want to see and how far we wish to look in our response.

Pamille Berg

*Partner, Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp Architects*

*Canberra*

Peter Adams is an American furniture designer/maker now based in Hobart, where he is a Design Lecturer at the University of Tasmania. He has exhibited widely in USA and Australia and is represented in USA collections and publications.

Statement: *Mine*: A rich source of supply (noun) positive  
 To get from the earth (verb) neutral  
 That which belongs to me (pronoun) negative

The Tower is a tribute to the exquisite furniture qualities of Tasmanian timbers, especially those minor species whose future as a sustainable resource is in doubt.

The Tower is also a subtle reminder that behind every act of gratuitous consumption is an anthropocentric habit that is slowly/rapidly destroying the earth's fragile ecological balance.

Is there any moral difference between a Brazilian rancher cutting down virgin rainforest to graze cattle, or a logger in Tasmania supplying me with virgin rainforest timber to build furniture? Does the end justify the means?

A hundred years ago slavery became no longer acceptable.

There was a paradigm shift in our consciousness towards each other as human beings. It is my hope that the next major shift will find humans no longer having domination over the rest of the beings that inhabit this world, be they wolves, whales or myrtle trees. That we learn to co-exist. That we live to understand that the world is not an inexhaustable supply of resources to be mined for our needs only. That when we do consume we do so with wisdom and gratitude towards all beings great and small.

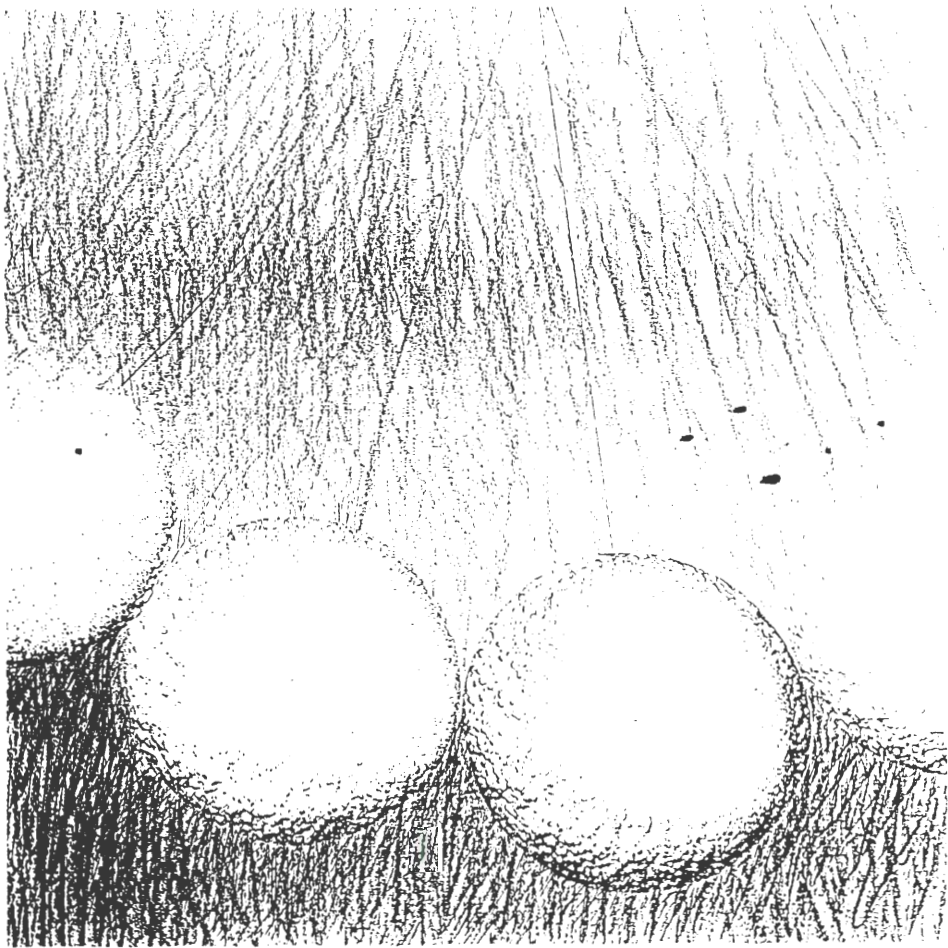


*Tribute Tower #One: Mine*  
 3600 x 1200 x 1200mm  
 Huon Pine, Belfast Black Granite

Tony Bishop is a sculptor and Senior Lecturer/Graduate Studies Co-ordinator at the South Australian School of Art. He is responsible for the designing of marquetry panels for the new Parliament House, Canberra and has undertaken many other public commissions. These include a sound sculpture at Kangaroo Bay, Tasmania as part of an Australian Bicentennial commission.

Statement: Initially, its the look of things later, when scale becomes incomprehensible. its the look of things. Van Gogh's *Irises* was bought for \$US49million more than a year ago, it was described by its new owner as the most important painting in the world.

*Bond . . . Bonded Bondage*  
*Bondsman*  
2500 x 300 x 1200mm  
Huon Pine and stainless  
steel wire



Based in Kyneton, Victoria, David Emery is a self taught furniture maker working primarily on commissioned projects. He has recently completed furniture for the Speaker's Suite in the new Parliament House, Canberra.

Statement: My work has never been in the nature of a political statement – basically I am simply trying to make things that others will enjoy using. However, it follows from this that the pleasure to be gained through the use of this bowl, or any other work, should be greater than that lost through my having used the materials that have gone into it. It therefore saddens me to see vast areas of native forest cleared for the production of mundane products, when I know that a tiny fraction of that timber would supply the needs of hundreds such as myself, with virtually no impact on the forest, and when I know that the re-growth will not have the diversity to enable the production of things such as this bowl.

Beyond saying that, I can only use timber to the degree that my conscience will allow.



**Bowl**  
110 x 700mm dia  
Lacquered MDFB, Eucalypt burl  
veneer and chrome plated brass

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Romaldo Giurgola is an Italian born architect and educator now based in Canberra, with practices in New York and Philadelphia. Internationally acclaimed, Romaldo has received many awards with the most recent being an Honorary Officer in the Order of Australia, 1989, in recognition for his design of the new Parliament House, Canberra.

Statement: The so-called "Parliamentary Chair" was designed by Romaldo Giurgola as an integral part of the furnishings for Australia's Parliament House.

The Chair was designed in three versions ranging from low-backed dining chair to a medium- or high-backed version for use in formal dining areas or ceremonial spaces in the building. The Chair's basic design language is one of an interplay of curved surfaces and flat planes with softened elements at points of user contact. This interplay of soft and pristine planes relates to detailing throughout the Parliament building.

*Parliamentary Chair*  
1160 x 570 x 594mm  
Sassafras frame with silk  
upholstery  
Fabricator: Kevin Perkins



G A Y H A W K E S

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Gay Hawkes is a Tasmanian furniture maker currently working from Melbourne. Since graduating from the University of Tasmania, she has had many successful exhibitions throughout Australia, as well as being represented through shows and collections overseas. Gay has recently been invited to work and exhibit in Norway.

Statement: This cupboard is a portrait of my mother.



*Phyllis*  
1500 x 560 x 530mm  
Celery Top Pine

George Ingham is a English born and trained designer/ maker, with professional design experience in Finland. He currently holds the position of Senior Lecturer and Head of the Wood Workshop at the Canberra School of Art. George has exhibited widely and is represented in collections in Australia and overseas.

Statement: Novelty and the desire to be different appear to be the goals of most artists.

Technical skills, design development and aesthetic sensibility can only be achieved with practice and experience.

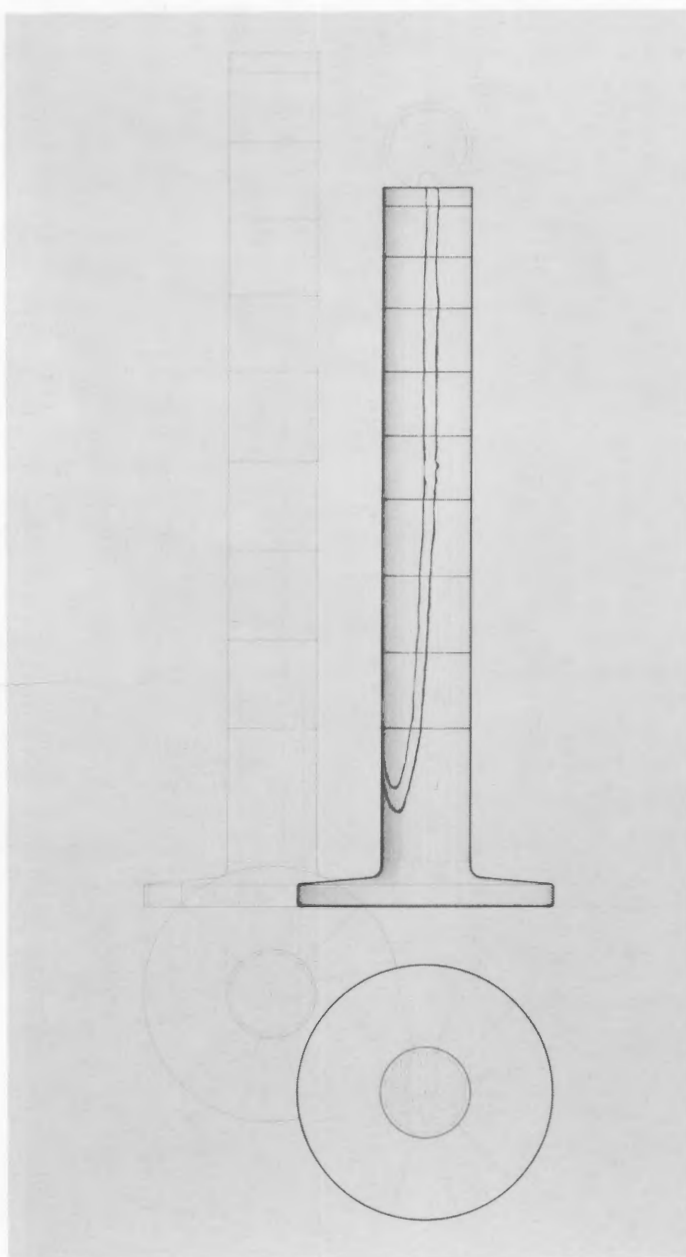
After over thirty years of involvement with Art and Design, I feel that I am just beginning to appreciate my role as artist/craftsman and teacher.

The original design for this proposed piece was for a group of three cylinders of differing heights, symbolizing a trio of tree stumps on a cleared forest floor. With this project as

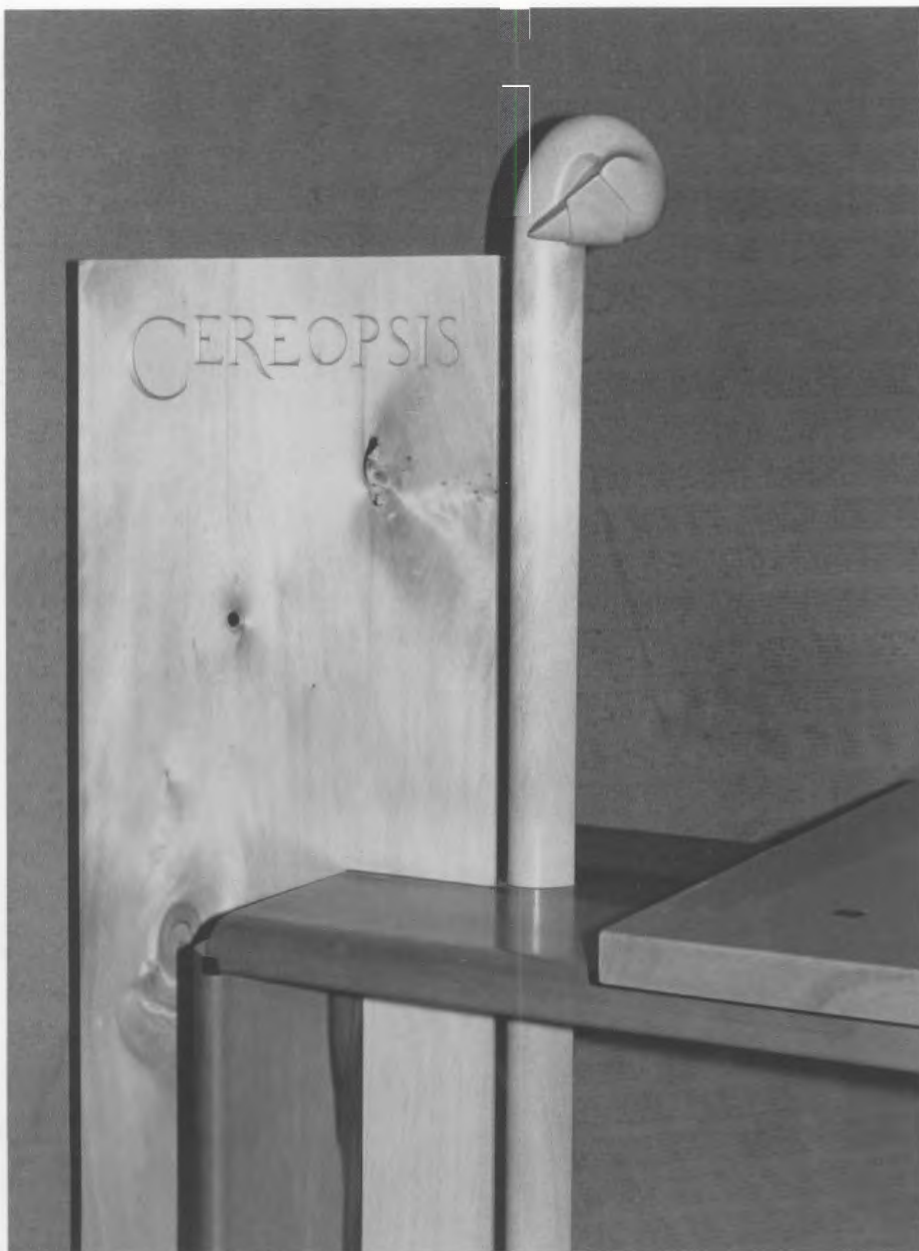
it is with Australia's forests, time was not on my side, the three columns soon became one, I feel that although the aesthetic statement will not be as I intended the symbolism will be strengthened.

I trust that the viewer will experience a glimpse of the isolation that will inevitably be ours if we stop caring about our world.

*Dressed Column*  
1420 x 530mm dia  
Celery Top Pine, MDF board,  
leather, epoxy resin inlay



Kevin Perkins is a furniture designer/maker and Design Lecturer at the University of Tasmania. Working from his workshop in the Huon Valley, Kevin has undertaken a number of exhibitions and important design commissions. The most recent of these includes the furniture and joinery for the Prime Minister Suite in the new Parliament House, Canberra and the Cabinet table for the Tasmanian State Government. He is also represented in public and private collections.



**Barren Bench**  
1000 x 2300 x 520mm  
Huon Pine, Sassafras, Ebony  
and silver



Mark Phillips is a Tasmanian born and educated furniture designer/maker operating from his workshop near Margate. Working mostly on commissioned projects, he has won awards in Tasmania and Sydney, and has recently completed a Churchill Fellowship study tour in the USA.

Statement: I have worked exclusively with Tasmanian Minor Species since commencing business 8 years ago.

The demand for this exotic timber is growing as more furniture being made from the minor species is seen and its potentialities are realised. This is particularly the case when used creatively by furniture makers.

The use of exotic minor species and veneering go hand in hand. The re-vitalisation of veneering in Tasmania is sound, both economically and environmentally.

The potential for a 'value added' component in the form of furniture is high when looking at a raw material like

timber. The nature of the business makes it labour intensive – hence sound for future employment.

It is vital that this resource be managed with great sensitivity and that short term political and monetary gain does not override the 'hard' decisions which need to be made to ensure the continued survival of such a valuable resource.

**'Pillar' Utility Cupboards**

1650 x 650 x 650mm

Red Heart Leatherwood,

Rosewood finished

accessories, black lacquer,

"Birds Eye" Huon Pine

*This pair of cupboards can be displayed 'back to back' to form a 'Pillar' or separated to form identical but separated units.*



John Smith is an English born and trained designer/maker now based in Hobart, where he is a Senior Lecturer/Course Co-ordinator of the Design in Wood Programme at the University of Tasmania. John has exhibited throughout Australia and has won design awards both here and overseas. He has undertaken major commissions in furniture and sculpture including the Leader of the Opposition Suite for the new Parliament House, Canberra.

Statement: The stimulus for my work oscillates continuously between natural and man-made elements. Many pieces swing predominantly into urban geometry, but the pull the other way, whether through the use of colour, texture, detailing or choice of material, increasingly occurs.

In particular, the variety of Tasmanian rainforest timbers offer a humanising harmony to other, more stident elements; 'Pendulus' attempts a cohesive balance of these contrasts.

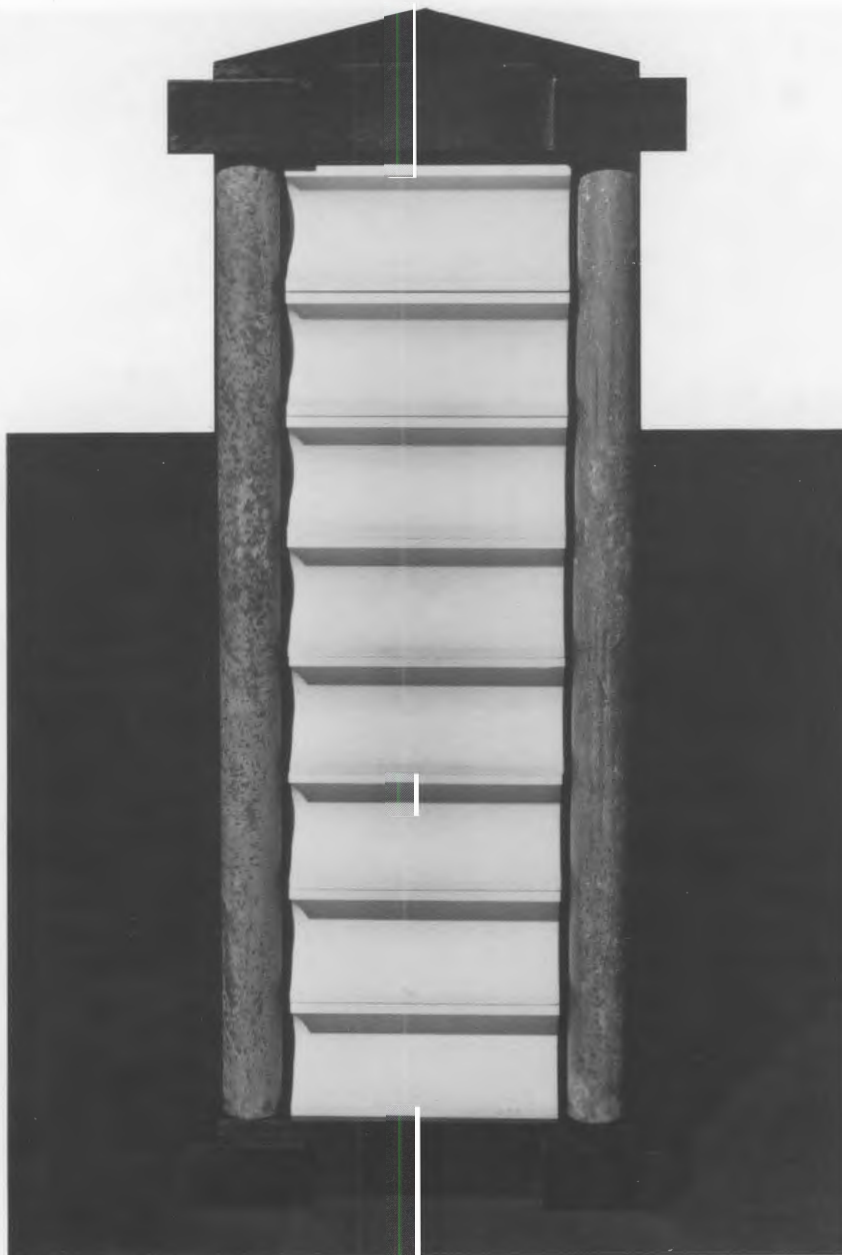


**Pendulus**  
2250 x 600 x 350mm  
Wane edged Leatherwood,  
laminated Blackwood,  
Checkerplate Aluminium,  
Patinated Copper, Painted Steel,  
Halogen lights.

Tony Stuart is a furniture designer/ maker currently operating from the Designer Makers Tasmania Co-op workshops. Since graduating from the Design in Wood programme at the University of Tasmania, he has exhibited in Hobart, Canberra, Sydney and Los Angeles. Tony has recently returned from Italy where he has been examining design trends.

Statement: As a designer-maker my motivation is one of personal aesthetics and an interest in exploring design boundaries extending beyond traditional categories. For me the drive is to create pieces which are not just functional domestic appliances, but beautiful objects which possess an individual 'presence', commanding attention. With this piece I have again chosen a vertical stack of drawers as a format to which I can apply my formal architecturally based ideas. The availability of exotic timbers is important to me to make up an acceptable palette of materials with which to work.

*Chest of Drawers No4*  
1400 x 600 x 600mm (approx)  
Huon Pine, oxidised copper, Silky  
Oak, MDF



Based in the Huon Valley, Peter Taylor works as a sculptor and occasional Design Lecturer at the University of Tasmania. A major portion of his work is derived from commissions, the most recent being the Senate Coat of Arms for the new Parliament House, Canberra. Peter has exhibited widely and is represented in public and private collections throughout Australia and overseas.

Statement: The most recent work in a series using the image of ring-barking and bandaging.



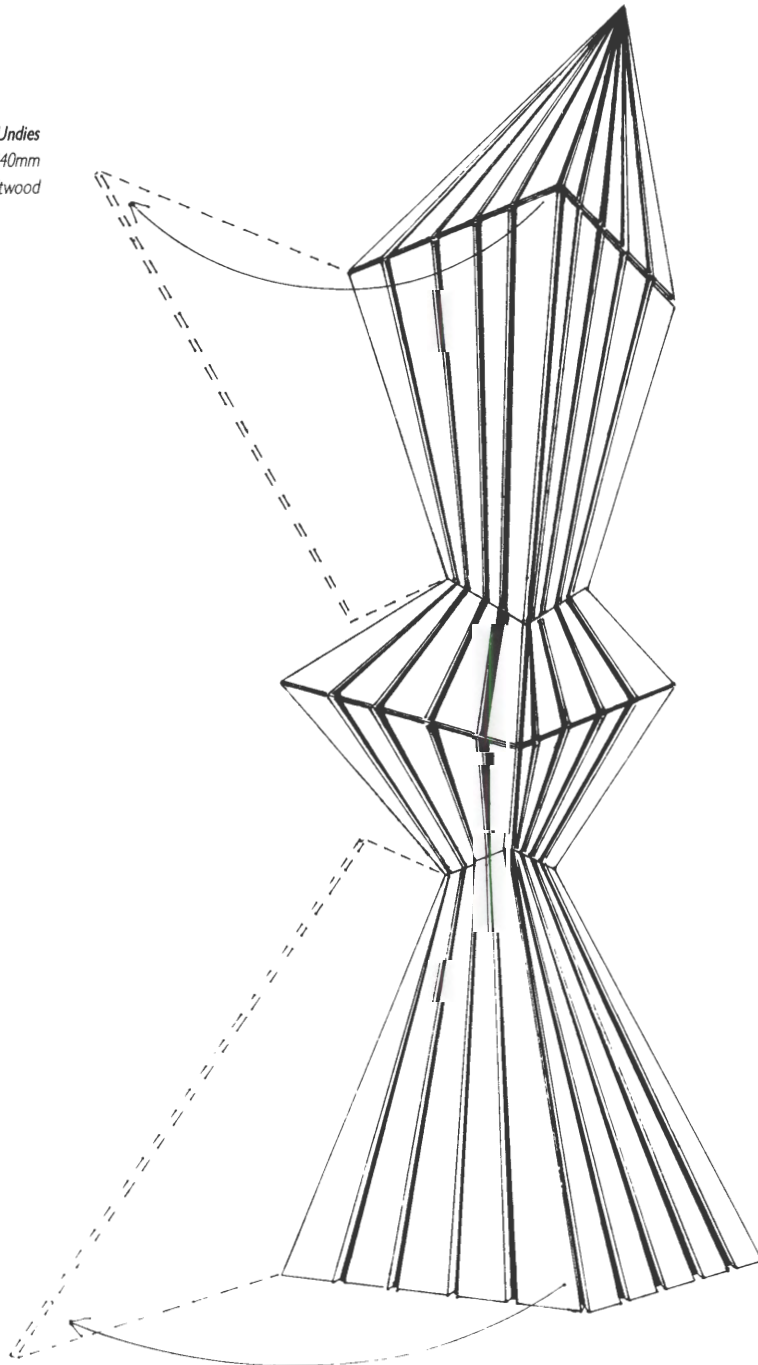
*Assault on the Sacred Grove*  
2250 x 600mm dia (approx)  
Polychrome timber, metal

Peter Walker, a graduate of the Design in Wood programme at the University of Tasmania, is a member of the Designer Makers Tasmania Co-operative. He has exhibited in Tasmania and interstate as well as undertaking commission work. Peter is currently designing furniture for production with a major NSW manufacturer.

Statement: The rationale to my design/making is that of furniture as sculpture, or sculpture as furniture. As furniture occupies space in our personal environment, it needs to offer more than merely function. The same can be said of Tasmanian timbers, with qualities demanding more than the wastage of woodchipping and anonymous-object production.

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*Socks, Shoes and Undies*  
1700 x 440 x 440mm  
Celery Top Pine, Craftwood



¶ The Tasmanian swamp gum or mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is the tallest flowering plant on the surface of our earth. A floating water weed, inappropriately named *Wolffia*, is the smallest in the same class. It can be found in many Tasmanian wetlands, some close to stands of swamp gum. The tallest flowering plant in the world is undoubtedly a major species. It has particular major importance as a source of fibre for paper, packaging, veneer, display and structural support. Tasmanian oak, derived from this and other eucalypts, forms the basis of a timber industry that has transformed the landscape of Tasmania in the last two decades. This fibre has fed the induced tastes of domestic and Japanese vernacular cultures.

¶ Shiny advertising supplements, packaging and newsprint account for the greater proportion of the felled trees of Tasmania in recent decades, and the bulk of their volume has been derived from thirty-odd species of *Eucalyptus*. Contemporaneously with this increasingly wasteful use of a magnificent resource there has been a quiet development of a wood-using culture devoted to aesthetic ends within an holistic value framework. The people working in this culture have cut and salvaged those species denoted as minor by the prevailing silviculture. Most of these trees are minor in stature compared to the tallest of the eucalypts, although, on a global scale, the 50 m of King Billy pine (*Athrotaxis selaginoides*) or myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*) would be considered to be impressive. However, the appellation minor relates to their use volume, not their similarity to *Wolffia*.

¶ There are fifty-six minor tree species native to Tasmania. Some of these trees are extremely rare. The coast honeysuckle (*Banksia integrifolia*) is now confined to one small Bass Strait island. The austral mulberry (*Hedycarya angustifolia*) and the blueberry ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) are relatively uncommon species on the larger Bass Strait islands and do not extend to the Tasmanian mainland. The saw banksia (*Banksia serrata*) is only found in Tasmania in the small area of white sandy soils around Sisters Beach. These four species are all widespread on the mainland of Australia. Their absence from the south of Tasmania may relate to environmental limitations, such as lack of summer heat, but most probably relates to their dispersal history during the climatic fluctuations of the last few million years, during which Tasmania has more often been a peninsula than an island. Its peninsula phases correspond with colder and drier climates than those experienced in the brief interglacial interlude we enjoy at present.

¶ Nineteen of the fifty-six species are Tasmanian endemics, having no natural distribution outside the island. Most of these endemics are rainforest species. Most of the remaining endemics are understorey species in wet eucalypt forest. One, the South Esk pine (*Callitris oblonga*), is a rare component of riverine scrub and forest in the driest parts of Tasmania. Its dense bluish foliage makes it popular as an ornamental. Like the Oyster Bay pine (*Callitris rhomboidea*), another dry country tree, the south esk pine is eliminated by two fires in close succession. These east coast

pine species are incapable of resprouting after fire, but release large amounts of seed from their cones after fire passes. Thus, if a second fire burns their regeneration before seed has been formed they have no means by which they can maintain possession of a site. Thus, they cling to cliffs, rock outcrops and riversides where fire does not readily run, and are usually found in open, dry country where fuel does not accumulate.

¶ Much of their distribution is on private land where grazing inhibits regeneration. They are ill-adapted to clearfelling and regeneration burning as the seed falls before the fires are lit.

¶ The South Esk and Oyster Bay pines are only two of a group of trees that can displace eucalypts in dry environments in the absence of fire. Many of the dry forest trees of Tasmania can regenerate at the single tree scale of disturbance. They certainly include the two pines, the drooping she oak (*Casuarina stricta*), the black she oak (*Casuarina littoralis*), currajong (*Asterotrichion discolor*), pinkwood (*Beyeria viscosa*), native currant (*Coprosma quadrifida*), native hop (*Dodonaea viscosa*), native cherry (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*), cheesewood (*Pittosporum bicolor*), dogwood (*Pomaderris apetala*), blanket leaf (*Bedfordia salicina*), native olive (*Notelaea ligustrina*) and musk (*Olearia argophylla*).

¶ Dry lightning is rare in Tasmania. Thus, fires would have been infrequent events in eastern Tasmania before the arrival of people from the north in the last forty thousand years. In the few places in eastern Tasmania where fire has been a recent rare event, the various species named above dominate, often replacing eucalypts through their superior ability to survive drought conditions. In dry dolerite gullies around Hobart where fire has been excluded since 1967, the drooping she oak has formed dense low forests. Most of the eucalypts that survived the fire on these sites, or regenerated postfire, died during the drought that ended in 1983. Other situations in which eucalypts have been unable to survive in competition with these dry forest species include deep gullies, coastal cliffs, river cliffs, the rock faces adjacent to waterfalls and rocky riverbeds. Nevertheless, all the above species are capable of survival as understorey trees to eucalypts in the context of an appropriate fire regime.

¶ While some species, such as native olive and blanket leaf, will survive most disturbance and fire regimes, they are unlikely to form trees under most prevailing silvicultural systems. Their growth rates are an order of magnitude smaller than those of the dominant eucalypts. Even if rotations of 80-90 years are actually put into effect the eucalypts will be barely large enough to mill. Any silvicultural system that sets these small dry country trees back to ground level or seedling regeneration at the time of cutting and eucalypt regeneration will not result in the production of a minor species wood resource. Systems that involve selective or small patch cutting and that do not involve the use of hot fire have some potential to ensure a continuous flow of wood from dry country minor species without necessarily effecting eucalypt wood

production. Happily, there is an increasing use of such systems in the dry forests of Tasmania as foresters move from blanket silvicultural prescriptions to techniques suited to particular vegetation and site conditions. However, such techniques have been largely developed to ensure the survival of advanced growth in multi-aged eucalypt forests, with the survival of advanced growth of minor species, if any, being an unplanned byproduct.

¶ Our knowledge of the life cycle and community ecology of most dry country minor tree species is insufficient to be able to suggest management regimes for all but a few. Such research work is becoming more important as this potentially significant resource dwindles through clearing, wildfire and regeneration burning. There is a strong possibility that the group of gap phase regenerating species names above are the surviving elements of a dry country rainforest that occupied eastern Tasmania before people introduced fire to the landscape, thus expediting the dominance of eucalypts and other large disturbance requirers.

¶ Eucalypts are not the only Tasmanian tree species that require catastrophic disturbance for the creation of regeneration opportunities. The ti-tree (*Leptospermum*), paperbark (*Melaleuca*), wattle (*Acacia*) species and lancewood (*Phebalium squameum*) fall into this class through most of their ranges. They are typically found in single-aged stands that date from a particular fire or other major disturbance.

¶ The wattle species are often almost as fast-growing as eucalypts, especially silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*) in mountain forests. This species forms a small shrub in dry forests. Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) is another fast-growing wattle with marked genetic variation between wet and dry forests. In the swamp forests of the far northwest, and in the rainforests of the west coast, it is a rapid-growing tall tree, whereas in the Midlands it forms a medium-sized shrub. The wattles are shortlived trees. Most survive less than a century. They compensate for their short, often diseased, lifespan by an enormous investment in reproductive activity.

¶ The foliage of wattles is hidden by flowers, which turn into pods containing large black seeds. These seeds have thick, hard coats which prevent germination unless broken by mechanical disturbance or weakened by the heat of fires. It is therefore common to see profuse wattle regeneration after a fire in long-cleared land. The seed of wattles may remain viable for centuries, enabling them to rapidly occupy any disturbed site on which they have set seed.

¶ Although silver wattle is used for pulpwood, blackwood is the most major of the minor wattle species. It is unusually long-lived for a wattle, often exceeding the century mark. Its foliage, like that of the mainland mulga (*Acacia aneura*) is highly palatable to many mammals. Seedlings are heavily browsed unless protected by unpalatable species. In the blackwood swamps of the north west the seedlings are protected within clumps of cutting grass (*Gahnia grandis*).

¶ The blackwood is the subject of a management plan. Small patch rotational clearfelling is thought likely to result in the perpetuation of a blackwood resource. The blackwood swamp forests occupy some of the best potential dairying land in Australia. Thus, whenever milk prices are high covetous eyes are cast in their direction. Attempts to grow blackwood in plantations have often foundered because of grazing problems.



¶ The swamps of the north west and King Island not only contain much blackwood. They also contain large tracts of impressive forest dominated by ti-trees and paperbark. Ti-tree forest is also moderately extensive in western Tasmania, where it often has an understorey dominated by rainforest species. The upper Picton Valley is largely occupied by shining ti-tree (*Leptospermum nitidum*) forest, and similar forests have replaced rainforest in the burned areas downwind of the west coast mining settlements.

¶ The ti-tree and paperbark cannot survive as a species on a particular site by storing seed in the soil. However, many species resprout from the base, and all have their seed protected from the heat of the fire front by woody or fleshy capsules. Thus, a rain of

seed follows any catastrophe that kills their foliage.

¶ Many of the ti-trees and paperbarks are adapted to periodically waterlogged conditions. Thus, species that are otherwise displaced by closed forest in an undisturbed environment can persist in boggy situations where competition is kept low by slow growth rates. It is therefore common to find ti-trees and paperbarks in regions from which eucalypts have been excluded by their lack of competitive ability and inability to survive on severely waterlogged sites.

¶ The management appropriate to maintain a ti-tree and paperbark minor wood resource is likely to be somewhat more delicate than the slash and burn silviculture that is applied to most wet eucalypt forests in Tasmania. Drainage patterns are easily transformed by the passage of heavy machinery, and most of the sites on which these species are found are nicely poised between the aquatic and the terrestrial.

¶ Eucalypts, wattles, paperbarks and ti-trees are often found with understories consisting of rainforest trees. These rainforest trees are ecologically heterogeneous, as befits the distribution of the formation rainforest from the treeline to sealevel on poor soils and good soils, on well-drained ground and poorly-drained ground, on exposed sites and sheltered sites.

¶ The mixed forests of disturbance requirers and rainforest trees are the product of a fire regime with a frequency high enough to maintain the disturbance requirers while being low enough to allow the persistence of the rainforest species. The ecological tension between these two groups has provided one of the great internationally recognized botanical stories. However, the simple image of rainforest trees flinching from disturbance that this story promotes is an accentuation of the complicated truth. The tree species that constitute most of the biomass of our

rainforests are not usually eliminated from a site by one fire. Up to ten fires in close succession may be necessary to eliminate myrtle, sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*), leatherwood (*Eucryphia lucida*), dwarf leatherwood (*E. milliganii*) and horizontal (*Anodopetalum biglandulosum*). Native plum (*Cenarrhens nitida*), white waratah (*Agastachys odorata*) and waratah (*Telopea truncata*) are found in both rainforest and frequently burned sclerophyllous communities.

¶ Conversely, eucalypts, pencil pines (*Athrotaxis cupressoides*) and deciduous beech (*Nothofagus gunnii*) coexist and regenerate on the open ice-scraped plateaus of central Tasmania, where shortage of soil prevents shortage of light. The pencil pine and deciduous beech are two of a group of

rainforest species that are readily eliminated from a site by even one fire. Other species in this class are king billy pine, Cheshunt pine (*Diselma archeri*), Huon pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*) and celery-top pine (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*). All except the last species have no adaptations for long distance dispersal, and are therefore susceptible to elimination from large areas through the agency of widespread conflagration. One third of the area of King Billy pine forest that was present at white settlement has been lost to the species as a result of our pyrrhic propensities.

¶ It is an interesting ecological paradox that the rainforest species that are most susceptible to elimination as a result of the disturbance of fire are also the species most dependent on disturbance for their regeneration. The pines and deciduous beech do not successfully establish in the dense shade of the lowland rainforest floor. Even the gap created by the fall of a tree does not usually last long enough for these

slow-growing species to become successfully established. Environmental conditions being suitable, all of these species will invade into adjacent treeless communities, and all readily take advantage of the large spaces created by landslip, windthrow, flood and very local fire. They are most extensive in their distributions where the fire frequency is negligible and other disturbances are frequent, or where fire is absent, growth rates are slow and the environment is patchy.

¶ The ecology of Huon pine, the most valuable of the rainforest minor species, is beginning to be understood. Recent discoveries of the species in rainforests close to the treeline of the Frenchmans Cap massif have clarified some of the mysteries of the fossil pollen record in which Huon pine was recorded at high altitude near Ooze Lake in the Southern Ranges. High altitude stands provide a source of seed for the recolonization of downstream sites where the species may be occasionally eliminated

by fire. The absence of Huon pine from the Arthur River system may relate more to its absence from the headwaters of the river than to any events downstream. The Huon pine is a highly successful vegetative regenerator, a feature that may allow persistence in closed riverflat communities. The other attribute of Huon pine that allows its persistence on sites suited for faster-growing trees is its remarkable longevity. Disturbances do not have to be frequent to allow a species that can live for more than two millenia to persist in the landscape.

¶ Huon pine grows very slowly. A one millimetre per annum diameter increment is not atypical. The density of the rings makes a beautiful wood with a utility exponentiated by its decay-preventative properties. The combination of its commercial

attractiveness and slow growth rates has ensured that the species has been cut at a rate well above replacement. Large supplies of its wood have been obtained as a byproduct of the drowning of much of western Tasmania by the Hydro Electric Commission. Little Huon pine habitat remains to be drowned in areas in which drowning could be allowed, and most of the surviving stands of Huon pine are relatively safe within the Western Tasmania World Heritage Area. Some further supplies of wood are likely to be obtained in the medium term from forests on a plateau near the mouth of the King River. The problem of a sustainable supply is yet to be addressed. If fast growth rates can be induced under cultivation, which seems likely, will the resulting wood have the same properties as the slow grown wild product? Are the forests currently being cut for Huon pine managed in such a way that the supply will not last long into the next century and that the money wasted in the





recent past on uneconomic Monterey pine plantations could have been much better spent establishing uneconomic Huon pine plantations.

¶ The cutting of King Billy pine has now ceased. The mining of this species, which has a longevity almost as great as Huon pine, was accompanied by gross physical soil disturbance and fire, both of which have prevented much regeneration. Whole ranges have had King Billy totally removed to sawmill and atmospheric carbon. The ecology of King Billy pine, like that of Huon pine, lends itself to sensitive selective cutting in which gap sizes could be designed to optimize regeneration opportunity without fire and soil disturbance. However, as a wood resource the species has gone. Future generations may be able to harvest some of the cut country once more, but only if the people between us and them assiduously exclude fire from our rainforest estate. The long term survival of the King Billy pine forests that have been reserved from logging is also very much contingent on this fire protection. Where fire runs through forests with Huon pine, there are usually survivors, protected by patterns of stream and backswamp. In contrast, fire has run unimpeded through large stands of King Billy pine, leaving survivors only where it stops. The same fate has befallen the large stands of pencil pine, that, before 1960, covered much of the western Central Plateau.

¶ Despite its beauty, myrtle no longer is a fashionable timber. Most of the myrtle that forms an understorey to some of the tallest of our eucalypt forests is either chipped or left to die in the regeneration burn. Slash and burn eucalypt silviculture does not promise myrtle a future. Even if some trees survive the fire, or some seedlings establish after the burn, there will be no myrtle sawlogs at eighty years. In most coupes few or no myrtles can be found alive after the regeneration burn.

¶ Celery top pine, sassafras and leatherwood are also frequently found in the understorey of mixed forest. Black heart sassafras and celerytop pine houses will not be obtained from the second rotation, and the leatherwood sown with the eucalypts to placate the apiarists will not form a substitute after a brief eighty years.

¶ The future of these species will depend on the future of the pure rainforest. A

sustainable flow of craftwood from our forests will require the retention of areas devoted to this purpose after the scavenging era has gone. Myrtle presents some severe problems as a silvicultural subject. It is highly susceptible to lethal infestation by a fungus called *Chalara*. Dieback is induced by root damage and exposure, both high probability occurrences with any form of logging. Thus, patch logging has been recommended to the Forestry Commission by its research officers. Such a form of logging presents a great temptation to resow eucalypts rather than myrtle, especially in a society fixated with chemical feedstock.

¶ Reservation, whether for nature conservation or wood production, must be large enough and variable enough to ensure a sustainable future, whether for species and communities or types of wood. Our understanding of rainforest is not yet deep enough to know whether some of the communities we discriminate are stages in a long term succession or in dynamic equilibrium with their present environment. It therefore behoves us to be conservative, by reserving as much as possible. This tendency towards conservatism must be reinforced by the recent history of destruction of rainforest by fire and the prospects of substantial climatic change in both directions during the next millenium.

¶ The species designated as 'minor' by the wood-based industries are consistently minor in only one respect – their usage. They include fast-growing and slow-growing, long-lived and short-lived, beautiful wood and nondescript wood, and a variety of ecological life histories that is only beginning to be explored. They equally deserve a future with our eucalypts, both for themselves and the pleasure that flows from the products of their individual demise.

Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick  
*Department of Geography & Environmental Studies*  
*University of Tasmania*



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