

# MID- CENTURY MODERN

AUSTRALIAN FURNITURE DESIGN

## Exhibition wall texts

Innovative furniture design took hold in Australia following the Second World War. A new generation of industrial designers seized upon the developments in materials and manufacturing processes that emerged from the experience of war and, turning their backs on the overstuffed and ornate styles that characterised previous decades, produced new and sometimes radical forms of furniture that revolutionised the contemporary interior. Aware of international trends, but eager to make their own unique mark, local designers adopted the pared-back language of modernism to create stylish sculptural furniture that was functional and flexible, and ideally suited to the modernist architecture of the period.

*Mid-Century Modern: Australian Furniture Design* celebrates furniture designed and manufactured in Australia from 1946, just after the end of the Second World War, until the early 1970s, including pieces designed for mass production as well as examples of unique, handmade furniture that blended traditional craftsmanship with modern style. The exhibition also charts the dramatic changes that took place within the field of local furniture production across these decades. From a modest industry in 1948, when an order of 500 chairs from the Myer Emporium in Melbourne represented a challenging task for the young co-founders of design company Fler, it was transformed into a flourishing field that saw Grant Featherston's *Delma chair*, designed in 1963 for Aristoc Industries, produced in quantities reaching hundreds of thousands and, in the early 1970s, Tessa export its products to Asia and the United Kingdom.

# **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

## **Buchanan House, Beaumaris, Victoria**

1960

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2002

H2003.100/307

## **Douglas Snelling** designer

born England 1916, lived in New Zealand 1924–37,  
Australia 1940–77, United States 1977–85,  
died Australia 1985

## **Functional Products Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1947–86

## **Snelling Line armchair**

1946

Australian hardwood, cotton, metal

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Terence Lane, 1981

D137-1981

The Snelling Line was the earliest collection of modern furniture mass-produced in Australia after the Second World War, with the first chairs made around 1946. In 1947 Douglas Snelling and several others formed Functional Products Pty Ltd, and despite shortages of materials and skilled staff, and regular electrical failures, the Snelling Line went into production and became so popular that demand often outstripped supply. Snelling's distinctive chairs consisted of elegantly formed frames in Australian timbers (Silver Ash and Queensland Maple) upholstered with webbing – initially a synthetic that had been used in the production of parachutes, and later Saran webbing – in striking modern colours.

## **Douglas Snelling** designer

born England 1916, lived in New Zealand 1924–37,  
Australia 1940–77, United States 1977–85, died  
Australia 1985

## **Functional Products Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1947–86

## **Snelling Line rocking chair**

c. 1946 designed, c. 1955 manufactured

Australian hardwood, fabric, (other materials)

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gift of Jane and Rob Hylton, 2007

20075F4A

# Grant Featherston designer and maker

Australia 1922–95

## Relaxation chair

1947

hardwood, plywood, cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1984

D23-1984

Grant Featherston's first chair designs were the 1947 Relaxation series, which included a lounge chair, an armchair and a chaise. In all but one version of these designs, Featherston eschewed traditional padded upholstery in favour of cotton webbing, available in cyclamen, turquoise, chartreuse, tan and French blue, which was woven in various patterns. Reflecting the influence of European precedents such as Alvar Aalto and Bruno Mathsson, who had designed webbed chairs in the 1930s, Featherston's design also marked a shift away from the bulky furniture styles of prewar decades.

**Fred Ward** designer

Australia 1900–90

**Edward (Jack) John Shattock** maker

Australia 1913–2004

## **Patterncraft chair and ottoman**

c. 1947 designed, c. 1953 made

Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta*)

Private collection, Melbourne

Motivated by the belief that good design had the capacity to improve people's lives, Fred Ward launched Patterncraft in 1947, a range of mail-order paper patterns for low-cost timber furniture and toys that could be made at home without woodworking experience or skill. The patterns were printed at Tam and Anne Purves's Collingwood factory, which also produced dressmaking patterns, and 'sold like hot cakes', with Ward receiving 'a royalty of two shillings and sixpence on each'. A returned serviceman, Jack Shattock made these pieces, as well as a Patterncraft couch, to furnish his family home in Beaumaris around 1953.

## For Kids

DIY (Do It Yourself) is often the cheapest way to make furniture. Most Australians did not have much money after the Second World War, so DIY was a good idea. People could buy the paper pattern and copy it onto wood, then cut dowel rods to size and add them as well. Notice how the pieces slot together so there was no need to use many nails or screws.

What would you need to add to make this soft and comfortable to sit on?

**Fred Ward** designer

Australia 1900–90

**Australian Home Beautiful, Sydney**

publisher

est. 1925

**Home Beautiful Blueprint Furniture –  
Dining chair, data sheet 1**

1952

colour offset lithograph

RMIT Design Archives, Melbourne

**Fred Ward** designer and maker  
Australia 1900–90

## **Blueprint chair**

c. 1950

Australian hardwood, leather, cotton cord

Private collection, Canberra

Developing out of the Patterncraft range, Timber-Pack 'sets of machined, band sawn, shaped and sanded ready-to-assemble parts' for the various Patterncraft designs were produced from mid 1948, and in 1952 Fred Ward launched the Blueprint range of more upmarket furniture designs, which required a greater level of woodworking skill and could be made from detailed instruction and data sheets. This chair, which featured on the cover of the June 1953 issue of *Australian Home Beautiful*, was made without any glued joints.

**Fred Ward** designer  
Australia 1900–90

**Home Beautiful Blueprint Furniture –  
Dining chair, detail sheet 1**  
1952  
colour offset lithograph

RMIT Design Archives, Melbourne

**Fred Ward** designer

Australia 1900–90

**The Fler Company, Richmond,**

**Melbourne** manufacturer

est. 1946

**DC1 chair**

1948

Queensland maple (*Flindersia brayleyana*), Coachwood  
(*Ceratopetalum apetalum*)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Fred Lowen AM, 1994

D46-1994

Fred Ward designed the *DC1 chair* for The Fler Company – founded by Fred Lowen and Ernest Rodeck in 1946 – to allow them to manufacture it using their available machinery. Legs, seats and spindles were turned on their lathes, while other components were produced using the bandsaw and metal milling machine. Lowen turned the first legs and spindles by hand before contracting the remainder out to a specialist wood-turner with a high-speed automatic machine. Pricing the chair at £2/10 if produced in quantities, Fler received an order for 500 chairs from the Myer Emporium, a boon for the fledgling company.

# Wolfgang Sievers

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

## House of Tomorrow, Royal Exhibition Buildings, designed by Robin Boyd

1949

gelatin silver photographs

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/263-268

Part of the 1949 *Modern Home Exhibition* in Melbourne, the *House of Tomorrow* offered a vision of what modern living could be. Designed by Robin Boyd and built inside the Royal Exhibition Building, the house – with a flat roof and walls of glass – was completely furnished with designs by Grant Featherston, and featured contemporary textiles by Frances Burke and light fittings by Brown Evans & Co (later BECO). The lounge room featured a pair of Featherston's webbed *Relaxation* chairs, as well as a vast imagined version of a television.

## **Lester Bunbury** designer

Australia 1916–2000

## **Werner Rieder, Hawthorn**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1940s

## **Gentleman's wardrobe**

late 1940s

wood, Ebony (*Diospyros sp.*) and Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus sp.*) veneers, glass, patinated brass

Peggy and Victor Stone collection, Melbourne

Like many industrial designers of the mid twentieth century, Lester Bunbury's career traversed various areas, from interior and exhibition design to the design of furniture. His furniture output ranged from custom-made pieces to the mass-produced – including his 1953 dining suite, awarded first prize by the Guild of Furniture Manufacturers. Commissioned by Victor Stone in the era before built-in wardrobes were a common feature of the Australian house, this unique wardrobe combines hanging space and drawers within a stylish facade of veneered timber and black glass. Stone later commissioned Bunbury to design the interior of his Collins Street dental surgery, which featured black glass sinks.

## **Roger McLay** designer Australia 1922–2000

### **Kone chair**

1948

plywood, steel, rubber, brass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1998

1998.1

Roger McLay was prompted to make the *Kone chair* with aircraft-grade plywood, used in the production of the de Havilland Mosquito plane in Sydney during the Second World War, because unlike many other raw materials it was available in large quantities in the postwar years. Knowing that international furniture designers were using plywood, especially Charles and Ray Eames in America, might also have played a part, although rather than moulding the plywood to create organic forms as they did, McLay simply bent a pre-cut plywood sheet and joined it with glue and brass screws before attaching it to a painted steel base.

**Roger McLay** designer  
Australia 1922–2000

**Trimmed Kone chair**  
1948  
plywood, steel, rubber, brass

Collection of Lisa Gorman and Dean Angelucci, Melbourne

## **Annan Fabrics, Mosman, Sydney**

manufacturer

1941–54

## **Alexandra Mackenzie** designer

Australia 1912–98

## **Anne Outlaw** designer

born England 1891, arrived Australia 1923, died  
England 1991

## **Ginger plant, curtain**

1941–54

screenprinted cotton

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Gift of Dr Ian Parkin, 1984

A10270

Founded in Mosman, Sydney, in 1941 by Alexandra Mackenzie and Anne Outlaw, Annan Fabrics produced a range of hand-printed textiles that found a ready market among mid-century homemakers seeking 'furnishing fabrics specially designed in character with their rooms and in colours of their own selection'. Often printed in multiple colours, even during the years of wartime restrictions, Annan Fabrics featured distinctively Australian subjects based on Indigenous designs, and native flora and fauna, as well as abstract patterns, and classical and mythological themes.

## Schulim Krimper

born Austro-Hungarian Empire 1893, lived in Germany 1920s–1938, arrived Australia 1939, died 1971

### Shallow chest on stand

c. 1948

Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*), Silver Ash (*Flindersia bourjotiana*), myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), copper, brass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1948

1043-D4

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Schulim Krimper fled Nazi Europe and eventually settled in Melbourne. Favouring Australian timbers, but also using many imported woods, Krimper became known as the city's premier supplier of custom-made furniture for those with a preference and budget for the unique. Krimper's passion for his material and his mastery of technique were quickly recognised. This chest was acquired for the National Gallery of Victoria's collection less than ten years after Krimper's arrival.

## Godfrey Miller

born New Zealand 1893, arrived Australia 1918, lived in England 1929–31, 1933–39, died Australia 1964

### Still life with musical instruments

c. 1958

pen and ink and oil on canvas

Felton Bequest, 1963

1263-5

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Sheet of studies**

c. 1950

pen and black and brown ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P83-1989

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Ideas for furniture A**

c. 1960

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.1-1989

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Ideas for furniture B**

c. 1960

pen and ink and crayon

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.2-1989

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Ideas for furniture C (Armchairs)**

c. 1960

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.3-1989

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Ideas for furniture D**

c. 1960

pen and ink and crayon

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.4-1989

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Ideas for furniture E**

c. 1960

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.5-1989

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Ideas for furniture F**

c. 1960

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.6-1989

## **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

### **Ideas for furniture G**

c. 1960

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.7-1989

# **Grant Featherston**

Australia 1922–95

## **Ideas for furniture H**

c. 1960

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P76.8-1989

Grant Featherston's *Contour chair* is one of the icons of mid twentieth-century Australian design. The idea of forming the shell of a chair from two sheets of bent plywood came to Featherston in 1950 while playing with a tram ticket, and in 1951 he patented the method that formed the basis of an extensive range of seating designed for 'contour comfort' and built to support the curves of the body. In 1951 the *R152 Contour chair* was the first model to be launched, and over the next four years various lounge and dining chairs, as well as a rocking chair, stools and a chaise longue, followed. Featherston's elegant, organic designs struck a chord with those seeking an alternative to the bulky furniture styles of the past with which to furnish their modern homes, and soon, as architect Neil Clerehan wrote, 'No contemporary house was regarded as complete ... without a pair of Featherston chairs before its bagged brick fireplace'.

Featherston Contract Furniture (later Featherston Contract Interiors) opened in Melbourne in 1956, offering a complete interior design service as well as a showroom dedicated to the display of modern furniture, both local and international. The following year, Featherston began collaborating with Aristoc Industries, designing a series of steel-framed chairs that were successfully mass-produced. With a career spanning three decades, bookended by the *Relaxation chair* of 1947 and the *Obo chair* of 1974, Grant Featherston stands as one of the major figures within the field of Australian furniture design.

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Emerson Bros Pty Ltd, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1930s–50s

## **R152 Contour chair**

1950 designed, 1951 manufactured

hardwood, plywood, linen, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, 1955

1532-D4

Grant Featherston patented the method for bending sheets of plywood to form the curved shell of his Contour range of chairs in May 1951, and later that year launched the *R152 Contour chair*. Soon followed by other Contour models, this chair was an immediate success, being perfectly suited to the new architecture of the period in terms of its elegant and lightweight sculptural form.

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Unknown** draughtsman

## **Production drawing: R152 cover template**

1951

coloured pencil on drafting film

Featherston Archive, Melbourne

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Unknown** draughtsman

**Production drawing: R152 ply shell  
template**

1951

coloured pencil on drafting film

Featherston Archive, Melbourne

## **For Kids**

One day when travelling by tram, the designer twisted his ticket and made a shape. This gave him the idea to twist sheets of plywood to make shapes that would be good for light chairs. The chairs were then padded and upholstered to make them more comfortable. Perfect!

Have you ever had a good idea and put it into practice?  
What was it?

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Emerson Bros Pty Ltd, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1930s–50s

**Contour chaise longue Z300**

1950 designed, 1953 manufactured

hardwood, rubber, horsehair and felt, upholstery  
(replacement)

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased, 1987

87.33

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Kennett Bros & Rayner, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1950s

**Pair of D350 Contour dining chairs**

1951

Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta*), plywood, cotton,  
(other materials)

Collection of Cameron and Alison Lyon, Melbourne

## **Brian Wood**

Australia, born 1947

## **Rear guard**

1979

plywood

Collection of Ken Neale, Sydney

This chair is an interesting case study in the complexities of the identification and attribution of twentieth century furniture design, a field where more often than not, little original documentation survives. The chair was initially attributed to Steven Kalmar on the basis of its close relationship to other upholstered Kalmar chairs from the early 1950s that are illustrated in contemporary magazines. It has since come to light that this chair was in fact designed by Brian Wood in 1979 who had no knowledge of Kalmar's work and instead, took his inspiration from the sinuous lines of early twentieth-century car design.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Three-legged plywood chair**

c. 1955

steel, plywood, rubber

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

In the 1920s plywood emerged as a popular material for avant-garde designers. By the 1930s and 1940s furniture designers, including Alvar Aalto in Finland and Charles and Ray Eames in the United States, had used it to create pieces that were both practical and beautiful. Clement Meadmore used plywood to make this chair, which was described in *Architecture and Arts* as being 'moulded to a body contour that ensures comfort for all ... [giving] the strange sensation of supporting the body firmly yet, due to the slots ... [allowing] a freeness of body movement that has to be experienced to be believed'.

## Schulim Krimper

born Austro-Hungarian Empire 1893, lived in Germany  
1920s–1938, arrived Australia 1939, died 1971

### Dinner wagon

c. 1953

Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta*), thermosetting laminate  
(replacement), brass, (steel)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Heather Green and Jock Smibert in memory of Dick and Peg Smibert  
through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2010

2010.22

A solo exhibition of Krimper's work at Georges Gallery, Melbourne, in 1951 – an unprecedented display of 'furniture as art' – represented a significant turning point, after which clients came to him. Dick and Peg Smibert commissioned Krimper to make numerous items of furniture for their family house, ranging from a dining suite and sideboard to various chairs and this dinner wagon. With playfully coloured trays (originally yellow rather than blue) and wheels that recall the furniture designs of the Dutch architect/designer Gerrit Rietveld, the wagon is also thoroughly functional, with a standing-height handle and small holes in the corners of the trays for easy cleaning.

**Grant Featherston** designer and maker  
Australia 1922–95

## **Study for Cord chair**

1950

blue ballpoint pen and pencil

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P74-1989

**Grant Featherston** designer and maker  
Australia 1922–95

## **Cord chair**

1950

Meranti (*Shorea sp.*), cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1989

D4-1989

Featherston designed the *Cord chair* during a period of experimentation with materials and form, combining an elegant carved timber frame with artfully woven Venetian-blind cotton cord. While the design expanded on the exposed construction of the 1947 *Relaxation chair*, it was never put into production, as Featherston regarded it as too labour- and material-intensive, and not sufficiently streamlined for mass production.

Modern furniture is what it is, strange shapes and all ... because designers have ... seized on design opportunities *which never previously existed*. They have taken the plywoods with their wonderful new glues and their docility under moulding and laminating, the metal rods, solid or hollow, which pour in continuous strip from great extrusion presses, the cords, the metal strips and the new synthetics, and have woven these into a pattern of design which some find repellent, others irresistible.

*Australian Home Beautiful*, September 1954

## **Fred Lowen** designer

born Germany 1919, arrived Australia 1940, died 2005

## **The Fler Company, Richmond, Melbourne** manufacturer

est. 1946

## **Form line dining chair**

c. 1955

hardwood, vinyl, metal, (other materials)

McCraith House, RMIT University

Gerald and Ellen McCraith commissioned architects David Chancellor and William Patrick to design a beach house overlooking Port Phillip Bay at Dromana. When it was completed in 1955, *Larrekeyeah* was furnished with classic modern furniture of the time, including a Fler *Form line dining suite* and Fler armchairs.

With an open-plan kitchen, dining and living areas, and a spectacular view of the bay through floor-to-ceiling windows, the modestly scaled house needed functional furniture that was both physically and visually light which could be moved around and not obscure the view.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Meadmore Originals, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1950s–60s

## **Corded armchair**

1952

steel, hardwood, rubber, cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of William Le Lievre, 1993

D2-1993

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Meadmore Originals, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1950s–60s

## **Glass top coffee table**

c. 1952

glass, enamel paint on steel, rubber

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

The thirteen designs published in the Meadmore Originals catalogue in 1953 for items including chairs, and dining and occasional tables, such as this example, were made using simple materials such as steel rod, cotton cord, leather, glass and timber, which were all readily available in the early 1950s. Consisting of a sheet of glass resting on rubber suction caps attached to welded steel legs, this coffee table could not be simpler in its design or more restrained in its mid-century style.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Canvas sling chair**

c. 1955

canvas (replacement), enamel paint on steel, wood,  
rubber

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

## **Helen Maudsley**

born Australia 1927

### **The lady in the belt**

1956

gouache over pencil

Gift of the artist, 2013

2013.1046

## **Helen Maudsley**

born Australia 1927

### **Artistic lady**

1956

gouache over pencil

Gift of the artist, 2013

2013.1047

## **Helen Maudsley**

born Australia 1927

### **The listening lady**

1956

gouache

Gift of the artist, 2013

2013.1044

## **Helen Maudsley**

born Australia 1927

### **The listening man**

1956

gouache over pencil

Gift of the artist, 2013

2013.1045

## **Grant Featherston designer**

Australia 1922–95

## **E & F Industries Pty Ltd, Sunshine,**

## **Melbourne manufacturer**

est. 1951

## **Cane-metal chair**

1954

steel, cane

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1987

D86.1-1987

Contemporary architects responded to new mid-century furniture designs, featuring them in photographic coverage of their work as well as using them to furnish their own homes. The *Cane-metal chair* was designed for the dining area of Roy and Betty Grounds' 1954 house in Hill Street, Toorak. Soon put into commercial production, it was marketed as a 'chair for outdoor indoor living' and was offered in bright colours, as well as in black and natural cane. The Grounds/Featherston collaboration continued in 1968 when Roy Grounds, architect of the new National Gallery of Victoria building on St Kilda Road, engaged Grant and Mary Featherston to fit out the interior.

## **Grant Featherston designer**

Australia 1922–95

### **E2 Elastic Suspension chair**

1954

hardwood, plywood, rubber, wool, (other materials)

Collection of Cameron and Alison Lyon, Melbourne

## **Grant Featherston designer**

Australia 1922–95

### **R160 Contour armchair**

c. 1951

hardwood, plywood, cotton, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift from the Estate of Mr George Seger, 1987

D74-1987

'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, they are upholstered with latex rubber seat and resilient curled hair back. Flexing with every change of position, these chairs make possible a new form of relaxation. Their clean cut, sculptured lines fit into any room – modern or conventional [and] with steel-like strength, yet very light, they are easily moved and may be readily grouped round fire or window.'

Featherston publicity brochure, c.1954

## **Grant Featherston designer**

Australia 1922–95

## **Emerson Bros Pty Ltd, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1930s–50s

## **Prototype for Eleanor E1 Elastic Suspension Contour armchair**

1954

Kauri (*Agathis atropurpurea*), plywood, vinyl,  
(other materials)

Collection of Mark Darbyshire and Chris Thewlis, Melbourne

The *Eleanor E1 Elastic Suspension chair* and the nearby *E2* saw Featherston combine the Contour plywood shell with lumbar and seat cushions for additional comfort. Covered in its original vinyl upholstery, this prototype reflects the mid-century fashion for plastic-coated fabrics, including the trademarked Nylex and Vynex brands. Used in the mid 1950s to upholster furniture in public environments, including the Chevron Hotel on St Kilda Road and the Edinburgh Room at Caulfield Racecourse, these fabrics offered durability, practicality and a range of colours, patterns and textures, all at a modest cost.

Clement Meadmore enrolled in the new industrial design course at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University) in the late 1940s, and in 1952 he established Meadmore Originals, a company that produced a range of modern furniture and lighting of his design. Steel rod, which was painted black, formed the basis of most of his designs, and the first examples were reportedly welded by the local blacksmith. Meadmore's *Corded chair* of 1952, with its steel frame, and seat and backrest of woven cotton cord – a model of restrained mid-century style and ingenuity – quickly became a feature of many modern interiors, and in 1953 received a Good Design Award from the Sydney-based Society of Interior Designers. Meadmore was also responsible for the design of a number of commercial interiors in Melbourne during the 1950s, including the Legend Espresso and Milk Bar and the Teahouse, both in Bourke Street, which reflected his distinctive and very contemporary style.

Sculpture was a component of Meadmore's studies, and following a trip to Europe in 1953, where he saw an outdoor exhibition of modern sculpture, he bought his own welding equipment, maintaining a parallel practice in this field throughout the 1950s. In 1963 Meadmore left Australia for the United States and established an international career as an abstract sculptor. His final furniture design was the leather *Sling chair* of 1963, and although he then virtually abandoned industrial design, Meadmore's ongoing interest was reflected in the publication of two books in the mid 1970s on the subject of furniture.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Meadmore Originals, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1950s –60s

## **Dining suite**

1952

steel, hardwood, rubber, cotton (replacement)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of James and Joan Earle, 1986

D138.a-e-1986

In late 1952 Clement Meadmore established Meadmore Originals, which offered 'a steadily increasing range of contemporary furniture ... representing the best in Australian design and satisfying the need for furniture up to present overseas standards and at a reasonable price'. Using simple materials including steel rods bent and welded into shape, and cotton cord used in the manufacture of Venetian blinds, his *Corded chair* received a Good Design Award in 1953 from the Sydney-based Society of Interior Designers and, combined with the modestly scaled matching table, became a familiar feature within the modern home.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Calyx pendant lamp**

c. 1955

enamelled tin, iron, rubber, (other materials)

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

## **For Kids**

Metres of cord, wrapped around a light steel frame, have been used to make these chairs. They are light, comfortable and don't take up much space. In the 1950s it was very important that furniture suited the smaller home for the modern family. Furniture like this was just right for the time.

Can you guess how much cord was used for one chair?

# **Clement Meadmore**

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Untitled**

1956

bronze and soft steel

TarraWarra Museum of Art

Gift of Eva Besen AO and Marc Besen AO

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2011

2011.016

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Meadmore Originals, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1950s–60s

## **Reclining chair**

c. 1953

steel, cotton, rubber

Collection of Conor Lyon, Melbourne

The steel rod and variously coloured cotton cord used in the Meadmore Originals *Corded chair* was also used in other designs, including stools of various heights, armchairs with timber rests and this *Reclining chair*, which originally came with a padded headrest. While the cord provided comfort, reportedly 'due to the individual supporting action of each [strand]', it was not impervious to the rigours of everyday use, wearing and marking easily. Although this example has clearly been well used, it is a rare specimen of the *Reclining chair* in original condition.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Calyx standard lamp**

c. 1953

steel, tin, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1987

D93-1987

## **Clement Meadmore designer**

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Light for the Legend Espresso and Milk Bar**

c. 1956

enamelled tin, iron, rubber, (other materials)

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

During the 1950s Clement Meadmore undertook a number of interior commissions that reflected his distinctive modern style. The Legend Espresso and Milk Bar in Bourke Street, Melbourne, was remodelled in the lead-up to the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, anticipating an influx of interstate and international visitors for the event. Serving a young and progressive clientele, the Legend combined asymmetrically arranged fluorescent tube lighting with a 'crazy-paving' floor, brightly coloured tabletops and seating, and a mural depicting the legend of Sinbad the Sailor painted by Leonard French. Meadmore also designed steel-rod chairs and these elegant perforated black lampshades for the Legend.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

### **Stool**

c. 1955

enamel paint on steel

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

Combining a painted tractor seat with steel-rod legs, this simple stool, with its references to the Australian rural vernacular, is closely related to a chair design of around 1953 by the American Benjamin Baldwin. One of Clement Meadmore's commercial interior commissions in Melbourne during the 1950s was for the Embers nightclub, a sophisticated jazz club, which was furnished with tractor-seat stools such as this and, ironically, later destroyed by fire.

## **Clement Meadmore designer**

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Light for the Teahouse cafe**

c. 1957

painted tin

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

The owner of the Legend Espresso and Milk Bar, Ion Nicolades, was a friend of Clement Meadmore's from the local jazz scene, and following the success of this venture he commissioned Meadmore to design the Teahouse, also located on Bourke Street. Appealing to a different market, the Teahouse was modelled on a traditional tearoom and was more restrained in its design, despite its striking combination of orange plywood chairs (by Meadmore) and a dense, randomly hung field of these conical green lampshades overhead.

# **Design for Living: Form-Fitting Furniture is Last Word**

Cinesound Review

1953

2 minutes

Courtesy of T3 Media

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Emerson Bros Pty Ltd, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1930s–50s

**Television B210H Contour chair**

1953

hardwood, plywood, cotton (replacement),  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1973

D218-1973

Featherston's 'television' chairs pre-empted the arrival of television in Australia by three years, anticipating the excitement that event would bring and responding to the expanded market for furniture specifically designed for the new phenomenon of 'televieing'.

In December 1956, *Australian Home Beautiful* advised its readers that 'the TV family requires furniture and an interior layout adapted to their new mode of life. They no longer sit in a conversational circle, but within a 60-degree arc from the screen centre. The demand is for furniture which allows a family to relax for the maximum viewing hours'.

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Emerson Bros Pty Ltd, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1930s–50s

**Television B210H Contour chair**

1953

hardwood, plywood, cotton (replacement),  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased from Admission Funds, 1985

D40-1985

The sculptural forms of some *Contour* chairs reveal the influence of prize-winning designs by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen that were displayed in the groundbreaking 1941 exhibition *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The shaped apertures at the junction of the back and seat of chairs as in this example – the counterpart to the solid *Television B210 Contour chair* – sought to enhance the visual lightness of the chairs, as well as to provide increased comfort.

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Emerson Bros Pty Ltd, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1930s–50s

**Television BS211H Contour settee**

1953

hardwood, plywood, cotton (replacement),  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1973

D219-1973

**Frismag Electrical Engineers Pty Ltd,**  
**Melbourne** designer and manufacturer  
active in Australia 1950s–60s

**RiteLite standard lamp (Model 1057)**  
early 1950s

anodised spun aluminium, enamel paint on steel,  
chrome-plated cast aluminium, Bakelite, (other materials)

Private collection, Hobart

Margaret Lord was an influential voice on the subject of interior decoration in Australia during the mid twentieth century. In her 1944 book *Interior Decoration: A Guide to Furnishing the Australian Home*, Lord offered the following advice: 'A good lighting system alone can change the character of any room that is used at night. A scheme of decoration, perfect in every other way, will often appear dull and uninteresting because the method of lighting used is unimaginative and hard ... An effective lighting system can hold a faulty scheme of decoration together as no one other feature can'.

**Grant Featherston** designer  
Australia 1922–95

**Emerson Bros Pty Ltd, Melbourne**  
manufacturer  
1930s–50s

**B220H Curl-up Contour chair**  
1953

hardwood, plywood, cotton (replacement),  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1973

D220-1973

## **Kenneth Hood**

Australia 1928–2002

### **Cornish harbour**

1956

oil on composition board

Purchased, 1956

3293-4

## **For Kids**

The 1950s was an exciting time. Television had just been invented, and people wanted comfortable chairs to sit in while watching it. Curved shapes suit the shape of the rounded human body, so these chairs are very comfortable. Two chairs and a sofa could be arranged in front of the television so that everyone could see it.

What is your favourite chair for watching television at home?

This interior recreation is based on the lounge of *The Age Dream Home*, a five-room house designed by Neil Clerehan in 1955 and built in Union Road, Surrey Hills. The house was first prize in the Dream Home Quiz, broadcast on 3AW and associated radio stations every Saturday night. Hosted by quiz master Norman Banks, its questions were based on the news of the previous week as reported in *The Age* newspaper. Director of the Small Homes Service, which was established by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in the late 1940s and offered architect-designed house plans for a modest fee, Clerehan wrote that the Dream Home did not represent an architectural revolution, but consolidated many of the ideas that younger architects had been practising for several years. These included open-plan living and walls of glass, which thousands flocked to inspect, in addition to numerous up-to-date features such as a sewing centre, central heating and a kitchen that eliminated the need to stoop and reach. Third prize in the quiz was the Dream Home furniture, valued at £500. Supplied by Andersons, one of Melbourne's major furniture retailers, it was uniformly modern, and the lounge room, as documented in a photograph by Wolfgang Sievers displayed nearby, represented a virtual who's who of contemporary Melbourne furniture designers. Alongside Featherston and Meadmore was a Doubé *Lounge sleeper* and a shelving unit designed by Bruce Anderson (with radiogram by Meadmore), as well as lights by RiteLite, Brown Evans & Co. and Meadmore.

**Guy Boyd Pottery, East Bentleigh,  
Melbourne** manufacturer  
active 1952–1964

**Ramekins**  
c. 1957  
earthenware

Private collection, Melbourne

**Allan Lowe**  
Australia 1907–2001

**Lidded jar**  
1949–50  
earthenware

Purchased with the assistance of  
the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, 1979

D128.a-b-1979

**Gerard Doubé**  
Australia 1918–2001

**Lounge sleeper**  
1953

Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), steel, vinyl, cotton,  
(other materials)

Collection of Alison Bicknell, Melbourne

Able to be transformed into a double bed or two single beds using a unique hinge designed by Gerard Doubé, the *Lounge sleeper* went into production in 1953 and quickly found a market among home-owners looking for functional, flexible furniture. Priced at £45, the *Lounge sleeper* was affordable, too. The design soon attracted imitators, and in 1956 Doubé was awarded a court injunction to prevent the manufacture of unlicensed copies.

**Grant Featherston** designer  
Australia 1922–95

**B230 and B230H Contour chairs**

c. 1953

Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta*), plywood, cotton,  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1986

D1.a-b-1986

**Frismag Electrical Engineers Pty Ltd,  
Melbourne** designer and manufacturer  
active in Australia 1950s–60s

**RiteLite standard lamp (Model 1077)**

early 1950s

enamelled aluminium, steel, plastic, (other materials)

Collection of Conor Lyon, Melbourne

**Grant Featherston** designer  
Australia 1922–95

**Coffee table**

c. 1955  
hardwood

Collection of Cameron and Alison Lyon, Melbourne

**Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

**Calyx standard lamp**

c. 1953  
steel, tin, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of William Le Lievre, 1993

D4-1993

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Meadmore Originals, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1950s–60s

## **Reclining chair**

c. 1953

steel, cotton (replacement), rubber

Private collection, Hobart

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

**Age Dream Home, Union Road,  
Balwyn, 1955 (demolished).**

**Designed by the RVIA Small Homes  
Service in conjunction with The Age  
newspaper**

1955

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2000

H2000.195/329

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Residence designed by the RVIA Small Homes Service in conjunction with *The Age* newspaper**

1955

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2000

H2000.195/330

This pair of photographs depicts two views of *The Age* Dream Home in Union Road, Surrey Hills, which was designed by Neil Clerehan in 1955.

## **John Latham**

active in Australia 1950s

### **ICIANZ Club, Deer Park**

1957

gelatin silver photograph

Featherston Archive, Melbourne

Designed by Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, the ICIANZ Club provided a recreation space, including a library, billiard room, dining facilities, sporting fields and tennis courts, for ICI employees in Deer Park, to the west of Melbourne. Betty Grounds was responsible for specifying the furniture and fittings, and for this room selected a range of chairs designed by Grant Featherston – with metal legs rather than the timber used in domestic settings – and a RiteLite tripod lamp.

## **Unknown**

active in Australia 1950s

## **Executive office, Hume House, 185 William Street, Melbourne (Bates, Smart and McCutcheon) 1957**

1957  
gelatin silver photograph

Featherston Archive, Melbourne

This photograph, depicting an executive office in Hume House on William Street, Melbourne, and the adjacent image of an unknown office refurbishment document some commercial interior fit-outs that Grant Featherston undertook through Featherston Contract Interiors.

## **Unknown**

active in Australia 1950s

## **Unknown office refurbishment**

c. 1956-57  
gelatin silver photograph

Featherston Archive, Melbourne

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **The Irving Marcus shop, Melbourne**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

Featherston Archive, Melbourne

In 1956 Grant Featherston opened Featherston Contract Furniture (later Featherston Contract Interiors), arguably Australia's first modern furniture showroom, stocking international designs as well as his own. Featherston also designed interior schemes, including the exclusive Irving Marcus boutique in central Melbourne. The chair designed for Irving Marcus was later used in the mayoral suite of the Brighton Municipal Offices and in the boardroom of the National Gallery of Victoria on St Kilda Road.

## **Max Dupain**

Australia 1911–92

### **View from north-east, Rose Seidler House**

1988

gelatin silver photograph

Historic Houses Trust of NSW

HHT2006/3

## **Max Dupain**

Australia 1911–92

### **Night-time view of the living area, Rose Seidler House**

1988

gelatin silver photograph

Historic Houses Trust of NSW

HHT2006/1

Harry Seidler designed the Rose Seidler House in Wahroonga, in Sydney's Upper North Shore, for his parents. Completed in 1950, the house was furnished with international designs, including Eames dining chairs; *Grasshopper* chairs by Eero Saarinen in the lounge; and the so-called *Butterfly chair*, designed by Ferrari-Hardoy in 1938 and mass-produced by Knoll International in the 1940s, on the deck. Seidler shipped this furniture from New York after being warned by his brother that there was scant good modern furniture being produced in Australia.

Modern furniture and modern architecture made a logical combination. Modestly scaled houses that were less formal, open plan and engaged directly with the outside world through walls of glass needed furniture that was light – both physically and visually – flexible and multipurpose. For those wanting to create their own contemporary interior, advice and inspiration could be found in popular magazines such as *Australian Home Beautiful* and *Australian House and Garden*. In addition to providing up-to-date information about international trends in design and decoration, publications such as these actively promoted the work of local architects, designers and manufacturers. Sometimes evangelical in tone, they also promoted the benefits of modern living to their readers, including the many efficiencies that the clean lines and pared-back style of modern design offered to the suburban housewife – especially easy cleaning and low maintenance.

Colour was a notable feature of the mid-century house – both inside and out – and ranged from pastel tones, which featured in the multicoloured juxtapositions of early 1950s kitchens, to bold primary colours. Furniture by Featherston, Snelling, Meadmore, Fler and their contemporaries, accompanied by soft furnishings and upholstery made of contemporary printed textiles by designers such as Frances Burke and Bee Taplin in Melbourne and Annan Fabrics in Sydney, as well as lighting by Beco, Kempthorne and RiteLite, and the ubiquitous *monstera deliciosa* plant, created the ultimate fashionable mid-century interior.

## **Unknown**

active in Australia 1950s

### **Dining room, Kelly House, Bellevue Hill**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

The Estate of Douglas B Snelling, Architect

Douglas Snelling was accepted as a member of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in 1953, and in 1956 he was honoured with the House of the Year award for his design of the Kelly House in Bellevue Hill, Sydney (since demolished). Contemporary Australian furniture was incorporated into the interior: this view of the dining room shows Featherston dining chairs, and the adjacent view of the lounge shows built-in furniture designed by Snelling, as well as a pair of upholstered *Kone* chairs.

## **Unknown**

active in Australia 1950s

### **Lounge room, Kelly House, Bellevue Hill**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

The Estate of Douglas B Snelling, Architect

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **McCarthy House, Mackennel Street, East Ivanhoe**

1960

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2002

H2003.100/275

The McCarthy House was designed by Peter McIntyre and completed in 1957, before an extension the following year.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **No title (*The Buchan group*) album 1950s–60s**

1955–60

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented through the NGV Foundation by The Buchan Group, Fellow, 2001

2001.358

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Interior of Bruck Fabrics showroom, Trevola House, 118 Flinders Lane, showing staff at their desks**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/338

Designed by Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, the Flinders Lane showroom of Bruck Fabrics featured a photographic mural by Wolfgang Sievers.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Interior of Bruck Fabrics showroom, Trevola House, 118 Flinders Lane, showing offices and staff work areas**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/337

Designed by Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, The Flinders Lane showroom of Bruck Fabrics featured a photographic mural by Wolfgang Sievers.

## **Gordon Andrews designer**

Australia 1914–2001, lived in England 1951–55

### **Rondo chair**

1956 designed, 1956– c. 1960 manufactured  
aluminium, plywood, fibreglass, cotton and linen

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased, 1986

86.2057

‘[The chairs] had an aesthetic quality. They were also comfortable ... And they were minimal ... I used to do them myself. Have ... parts of it ... sub-contracted out and then I’d assemble them ... So I came to a point where I was doing more assembly than designing ... and I had to quit.’

Gordon Andrews, 1993

Andrews’s recollection highlights the tension that existed for many mid-century furniture designers whose aim of mass production was often thwarted by the limitations of technology and manufacturing, as well as by the relatively small scale of the Australian market.

## **Gordon Andrews** designer

Australia 1914–2001, lived in England 1951–55

### **Gazelle chair**

c. 1950 designed, 1957 manufactured  
plywood, aluminium, wool

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Purchased, 1989

89/499

Gordon Andrews was a multitalented designer whose work included furniture, commercial interiors and exhibition and graphic design, but his best-known work remains the designs for Australia's first decimal currency banknotes. His elegant *Gazelle chair* swivelled on its aluminium legs and provided the ultimate in stylish office seating in the late 1950s. Andrews recalled that interior designer Marion Hall Best sold *Gazelle* chairs 'half a dozen at a time', and they were a key feature of his own design for the interior of the Olivetti showroom in Sydney in 1956.

## **Marion Hall Best** designer

Australia 1905–88

## **Webbing and Belting Company, Delhi**

manufacturer

active in India 1970s

## **Textile sample**

c. 1970

cotton

Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, Historic Houses Trust of NSW  
Gift of Mardi McElvenny

L93/8-20

This sample of the same textile used to upholster the adjacent *Gazelle chair* is characteristic of the Indian furnishing cottons that were used and popularised by Marion Hall Best during the 1960s and 1970s. This design was known as the 'Kmit check', after the Ukrainian-born Sydney painter Michael Kmit, whose sumptuously coloured paintings provided inspiration to Best.

## **Gordon Andrews designer**

Australia 1914–2001, lived in England 1951–55

### **Gazelle chair**

c. 1950 designed, 1957 manufactured  
plywood, aluminium, cotton

Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection,  
Historic Houses Trust of NSW

L94/2

Marion Hall Best was one of the leading interior designers of the mid twentieth century. In addition to importing contemporary international furniture, textiles and decorative ceramics and glass, which she stocked in her Sydney shop and used in her bold interior schemes, was an active supporter of local Australian design. This *Gazelle chair* belonged to Best and is upholstered in a cotton fabric of her own design, which she had manufactured in India. Having retained its original and well-worn upholstery, the chair is symbolic of the longstanding professional relationship between Best and Gordon Andrews.

## Clement Meadmore designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

### Dining table

1955

hardwood, painted steel

Private collection, Melbourne

This simple yet elegantly functional dining table relates to Clement Meadmore's 1955 design for a *Three-legged plywood chair* in its use of three, rather than four, legs. While this is an unusual feature for a chair – although Meadmore incorporated it into at least one other seating design – the reduced number of legs meant that more people were able to sit comfortably around the table, thus providing a practical solution for the modestly sized mid-century house.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Meadmore Originals, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1950s–60s

## **Corded chair**

1952

steel, rubber, cotton (replacement)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of William Le Lievre, 1993

D3-1993

During the 1950s many international designers produced corded furniture, which was accessible through architectural and design journals of the time and must have provided inspiration for Clement Meadmore. A complex arrangement regarding ownership of Meadmore's design for the *Corded chair*, and his failure to receive the expected payment of £1 royalty on each chair produced, lead him to sue unsuccessfully for breach of contract. As his brother recalled, '[The] judgement [was] that the chair was not original but had been copied from an American magazine ... the defendant later bragged he'd made a fortune from the Meadmore chair'.

## **Frances Burke Fabrics, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1942– c. 1967

## **Frances Burke** designer

Australia 1907–94

## **Totem**

c. 1950

screenprinted cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Dr Frances Burke, 1989

CT66-1989

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Marshall Gibson residence, Coronet Grove, Beaumaris**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/301

Designed by Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths and  
Simpson architects in 1956.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **The Bridge House, Blackfriars Close, Toorak, designed by Robin Boyd**

1955

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/269

Designed by Robin Boyd and completed 1953–54.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Myer residence, Davey's Bay Road, Mt Eliza**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/272

Designed by Robin Boyd for Kenneth and Prue Myer in  
1956.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **McIntyre residence, 2 Hodgson Street, Kew**

1956

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/228

Peter and Dione McIntyre designed this house as their  
own residence and it was completed in 1954.

# **Max Dupain**

Australia 1911–92

## **Reception, Matson Line booking office**

1955–56

gelatin silver photograph

The Estate of Douglas B Snelling, Architect

In the mid 1950s, Douglas Snelling was commissioned to design the interior of the booking office for the Matson Line cruise company, combining an undulating slatted timber ceiling, which echoed shapes of the ocean, with upholstered versions of his own lounge chair design.

***Australian Home Beautiful* magazines**  
1950s– 60s

Private collection, Melbourne and Collection of Conor Lyon, Melbourne

**Balm, Dulux, Hadrian & Synflat  
and Mural-Tone brochures and  
sample packs**  
1940–65

Dulux Australia Archives, Melbourne

***Berger, Dulux, Spred and Taubmans*  
brochures and colour decks**  
1950s

Collection of Nicola Stairmand, Melbourne

**Modern Lighting (trade catalogue)**  
1960s

Lawrence & Hanson Electrical Group  
Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection,  
Historic Houses Trust of NSW TC 749.63 LAW

**RiteLite, Fashions for living  
(trade catalogue)**  
1959

Collection of Conor Lyon, Melbourne

**The Kempthorne System of  
'Living Light' (trade catalogue)**  
1958

Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection,  
Historic Houses Trust of NSW TC 749.63 KEM

**RiteLite, The modern angle on light  
(trade catalogue)**  
pre 1954

Private collection, Hobart

***Australian Home Beautiful* magazines**  
1950s– 60s

Private collection, Melbourne and Collection of Conor Lyon, Melbourne

## **Douglas Snelling** designer

born England 1916, lived in New Zealand 1924–37,  
Australia 1940–77, United States 1977–85, died  
Australia 1985

## **Functional Products Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1947–86

## **Snelling Line Module cabinet D**

1954–55

Queensland Maple (*Flindersia brayleyana*), Silver Ash  
(*Flindersia bourjotiana*), glass, paint, laqueur

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Mr Brian Prouten, 1995

1995.624

## **Douglas Snelling** designer

born England 1916, lived in New Zealand 1924–37,  
Australia 1940–77, United States 1977–85, died  
Australia 1985

## **Functional Products Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1947–86

## **Snelling Line Module cabinet K**

1954–55

Queensland Maple (*Flindersia brayleyana*), Silver Ash  
(*Flindersia bourjotiana*), lacquer

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Mr Brian Prouten, 1995

1995.623

'The basic rule ... is that pieces must be practical as well as comfortable. Simplicity is important because of space economy ... And labour-saving is another important factor. Dusting of highly carved pieces and constant polishing ... is frowned upon by the modern housewife ... Unit furniture ... which can be added to later, allows a room to grow as finance permits ... In the contemporary home where there's no room for bulky pieces, unit furniture makes full use of every available inch for storage, with many of its pieces doing double duty.'

*Australian House and Garden*, 1954

**Frismag Electrical Engineers Pty Ltd,**  
**Melbourne** designer and manufacturer  
active in Australia 1950s–60s

**RiteLite table lamp (Model 157)**

early 1950s

anodised spun aluminium, enamel paint on steel, plastic,  
(other materials)

Private collection, Hobart

**Martin Boyd Pottery**

**Neutral Bay, Sydney** manufacturer

active 1946–1963

**Ramekins**

c. 1955 earthenware

Private collection, Melbourne

**Douglas Snelling** designer

born England 1916, lived in New Zealand 1924–37,  
Australia 1940–77, United States 1977–85, died  
Australia 1985

**Functional Products Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1947–86

**Coffee table**

1955

Queensland Maple (*Flindersia brayleyana*)

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Gift of Irene Rolfe, 1983

A9251

## **Douglas Snelling** designer

born England 1916, lived in New Zealand 1924–37,  
Australia 1940–77, United States 1977–85, died  
Australia 1985

## **Functional Products Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1947–86

## **Snelling Line chair**

1946

Australian hardwood, cotton (replacement), metal

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Mrs Gillian Rush, 1987

D77-1987

There are often links to be found between international furniture designs and their Australian contemporaries, and the similarities of Snelling's chairs to those of the American architect and designer Ralph Rapson, produced by Knoll from 1945, suggest that Snelling must have seen them. While some advertising referred to Snelling's experiences of modern design in California, the primary selling point for the Snelling Line was the claim that it was 'truly Australian' and 'particularly suited to Australian living conditions'. It was also flexible, functional and good value – in 1952, Andersons in Melbourne sold the armchair for £9/19/6, and a two-door cabinet for £19/15/3.

## **For Kids**

Can you spot the parachute strapping? Strong straps used for parachutes during the Second World War (1939–45) were just right for weaving and making into chairs. Strapping is strong, and comfortable to sit on when woven. It could be wrapped around and tacked to a wooden frame. It was cheap and there was lots of it left over when the war ended.

Can you think of any object that was made for one purpose but used for another?

## **Grace Crowley**

Australia 1890–1979

### **Abstract painting**

1952

oil on composition board

Bequest of the artist, 1981

A4-1981

## **Fred Lowen** designer

born Germany 1919, arrived Australia 1940, died 2005

## **The Fler Company, Richmond,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

est. 1946

## **Aluminium shell chair**

1954

aluminium, wool (replacement), steel, wood, rubber,  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Fred Lowen, 2004

2004.585

With its seat-shell cast in aluminium, this chair is unusual for mid-century Australian furniture. Today it is also very rare because the use of aluminium meant that it was costly to make and, selling for £35 in 1955, only a limited quantity was produced. This example was purchased at auction and reupholstered under Fred Lowen's supervision by The Fler Company's long-time staff upholsterer, Sigi Danielzik.

## **Robert Klippel** designer

Australia 1920–2001, lived in United States 1958–63

### **Boomerang table**

c. 1955 designed, late 1980s made  
painted wood, glass

Collection of Andrew Klippel, Sydney

Before establishing a career as one of Australia's most significant abstract sculptors, Robert Klippel ventured into furniture design, conceiving a range of furniture in the early 1950s using timber, steel rod and glass, all of which could be packed flat. None of it was put into production, however, a consequence of Klippel's ultimate desire to be an artist rather than a designer and his reluctance to get involved with technical problems. Based on one of Klippel's designs from the 1950s, this table was made under his supervision several decades later.

## **Dawn Sime**

Australia 1932–2001

### **Solar components**

1957

oil on composition board

Purchased, 1959  
348-5

## For Kids

Today, many people buy flat-pack furniture. They take it home and put all the pieces together. In 1955 the boomerang table was designed as a flat pack. The designer, Robert Klippel, was also an artist. The idea for this table design comes from the Australian boomerang and looks a bit like a sculpture.

Which other pieces of furniture look like sculptures?

## Steven Kalmar designer

born Hungary 1909, arrived Australia 1939, died 1989

## Screen

c. 1955

coachwood

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Purchased, 1985

85/131

**Bruce Hyett** designer

Australia 1923–2013

**Wycombe Industries Pty Ltd,**  
**Geelong, Victoria** manufacturer

est. 1950

**Lounge chair**

1959

aluminium, cotton, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Accessioned, 1992

D21-1992

Bruce Hyett studied furniture design in England as part of a postwar training scheme, and was one of a number of industrial designers who responded to the demand for modern furniture in the mid twentieth century, establishing Wycombe Industries in Geelong in 1950. Commended for its outstanding design and craftsmanship by the Victorian Furniture Industries Confederation, this *Lounge chair* was described as indestructable. It combines a sand-cast aluminium base with no-sag springs, and the back and arms are formed from a single piece of rubber padding.

## **Falkiner Fabrics, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1955– c. 1969

## **Bee Taplin designer**

born Australia 1911, lived in England 1928– c. 1950,  
died France 2010

## **Turtle soup, fabric length**

c. 1955

cotton union cloth

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by the artist, 1987

CT26-1987

A large loss at the lower right corner of this textile  
has been in-filled with digitally printed replica fabric  
for display.

**Don Brown** designer

active in Australia 1945–50s

**Brown Evans & Co, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1946 – late 1950s

**BECO lamp**

mid 1950s

spun metal, brass, paint

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of James and Joan Earle, 1995

1995.622

## **Unknown** designer and manufacturer

### **Armchair**

1950s

steel, hardwood, plastic cord

Private collection, Melbourne

The field of Australian furniture design and manufacture in the mid twentieth century was extraordinarily large and diverse. For each of the well-known figures whose designs are actively sought after by collectors today there were many others, as a survey of the interior magazines of the day will reveal, whose names have largely been lost to history and whose designs are now difficult, if not impossible, to identify. This group of unattributed chairs represents a small selection of the variations on the steel-framed corded chair manufactured during the period.

**Unknown** designer and manufacturer

**Armchair**

1950s

enamel paint on steel, rubberised plastic cord

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

**Unknown** designer and manufacturer

**Armchair**

1950s

enamel paint on steel, cotton cord

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

## Unknown designer and manufacturer

### Recliner

1950s

enamel paint on steel, rubberised plastic cord, rubber

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

The designer of this recliner is unknown; however, careful analysis of its dimensions and the angles in the steel frame suggest it may be by Clement Meadmore, who produced a similar reclining chair around 1953. This chair was originally painted black, and the plastic cord was probably added during restoration. It could be argued that the built-in headrest is a logical design progression, providing a more functional solution to the detachable cushioned headrest featured in Meadmore's 1953 recliner. This is another example of the complex questions surrounding originality and attribution of furniture designs in the mid twentieth century.

**Grant Featherston** designer  
Australia 1922–95

**Designs for Cone dining chair**  
1955  
carbon tracing and pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1989

P75.1-2-1989

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Michael Hirst** designer

born England 1917, arrived Australia 1922, died 2002

## **Michael Hirst Pty Ltd, East Hawthorn, Melbourne** manufacturer

1955–65

## **Michael Hirst DC 601A** chair

1957

plastic coated steel, vinyl, rubber, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Terence Lane, 1981

D138-1981

Michael Hirst and Clement Meadmore probably met through the Melbourne jazz scene, and in 1957 they worked together to design and manufacture this chair, which was promoted as being 'in the mood of the moment ... styled for dining-room, lounge, terrace or outdoors ... [with] good stability combined with restful relaxing flexibility'. Hirst subsequently designed and manufactured a series of variations on this stylish chair, two of which are displayed nearby, modifying the shape of the seat and backrest, as well as the form of the legs.

## **Michael Hirst** designer

born England 1917, arrived Australia 1922, died 2002

## **Michael Hirst Pty Ltd, East Hawthorn,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1955–65

## **H-Flex chair**

c. 1960

steel, plastic coating (replacement), rubber, vinyl,  
(other materials)

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

## **Michael Hirst** designer

born England 1917, arrived Australia 1922, died 2002

## **Michael Hirst Pty Ltd, East Hawthorn,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1955–65

## **Outdoor table**

1958

steel, plastic coating (replacement), rubber

Michael Hirst Archive, Melbourne

Michael Hirst designed and manufactured a range of stylish steel furniture that, coated in plastic, was perfect for both indoor and outdoor use. This circular table, combining a perforated top and elegantly tapered legs, was available for £16/15/- in white, black or a combination of both. The table caught the attention of *Australian Home Beautiful* writer Peter Hunt, who in 1961 described it as 'logic, combined with [an] excellent selection of materials ... a really well-designed piece of outdoor furniture'.

## **Michael Hirst** designer

born England 1917, arrived Australia 1922, died 2002

## **Michael Hirst Furniture, Hawthorn,**

**Melbourne** manufacturer

1966–82

## **H-Flex chair (Skid base)**

1969

steel, plastic coating (replacement), vinyl,  
(other materials)

Michael Hirst Archive, Melbourne

## **Don Brown** designer

active in Australia 1945–50s

## **Brown Evans & Co, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1946 – late 1950s

## **BECO lamp**

mid 1950s

spun metal, brass, paint

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of James and Joan Earle, 1995

1995.622

## **For Kids**

Indoor or outdoor, these chairs can go anywhere because they are made of metal and coated with plastic. The first design had four separate legs, which was great for indoors but sank into the ground outdoors! With some problem solving, the designer came up with the idea of a skid base, which worked much better.

Which other furniture on display could go outdoors?

# Grant Featherston designer

Australia 1922–95

## Cone dining suite

1955

hardwood, thermosetting laminate, plywood, cotton,  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased from Admission Funds, 1988

D13.a-g-1988

New designs including the *Cone dining suite* were launched at an exhibition at the Savoy Plaza Hotel, Melbourne, in 1955. Featherston wrote: 'In presenting this exhibition of *Forms for Chairs* ... I mean to stress the relationship between experimental design and the finished product. These forms have much in common with abstract sculpture and were produced for the pleasure of exploring ideas ... The rounded human body demands sympathetic chair forms, for complete physical and mental wellbeing. The physical, satisfied by the functional curve, and the psychological, by the sense of rightness where harmony exists between related forms'.

## **Don Brown** designer

active in Australia 1945–50s

## **Brown Evans & Co, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1946– late 1950s

## **BECO lamp**

mid 1950s

spun metal, brass, paint

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of James and Joan Earle, 1995

1995.622

## **Len Crawford**

Australia 1920–96

## **Cadenza**

1957

oil and pen and ink on composition board

Purchased, 1958

27-5

## **David Boyd**

Australia 1924–2011, lived in Europe 1950–55,  
1962–75

## **Hermia Boyd**

Australia 1931–2000, lived in Europe 1950–55,  
1962–75

## **Coffee service (coffee pot, jug, bowl, three cups and saucers)**

1955

stoneware

Proposed acquisition

## **Frances Burke Fabrics, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1942– c. 1967

**Frances Burke** designer

Australia 1907–94

### **Oak leaf**

c. 1955

screenprinted cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Dr Frances Burke, 1989

CT63-1989

## **Frances Burke Fabrics, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1942– c. 1967

**Frances Burke** designer

Australia 1907–94

### **Canna leaf**

1950s

screenprinted cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Dr Frances Burke, 1989

CT163-1989

## **Falkiner Fabrics, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1955– c. 1969

## **Bee Taplin designer**

born Australia 1911, lived in England 1928– c. 1950,  
died France 2010

## **Aboriginal, fabric length**

c. 1955

screenprinted cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by the artist, 1987

CT24 A-1987

During the 1950s and 1960s, Bee Taplin became a leading force in interior and textile design in Melbourne, opening a series of interior-decoration and textile design and production businesses, including Bee Taplin Furnishings, and promoting Australian furnishing fabric designers locally and internationally. Introducing Thai silk, Japanese grass wallpaper, printed wools and Indian textiles to the local design community, Taplin also became involved in printing textiles and wallpapers designed by herself or commissioned from artists, including Barry Kay and Kenneth Rowell.

**Annan Fabrics, Mosman, Sydney**

manufacturer

1941–54

**Alexandra Mackenzie** designer

Australia 1912–98

**Anne Outlaw** designer

born England 1891, arrived Australia 1923, died  
England 1991

**Emu, textile sample**

1945–55

screenprinted linen

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Gift of Gloria and Arthur Bishop, 2000

2000/54/2

**Annan Fabrics, Mosman, Sydney**

manufacturer

1941–54

**Alexandra Mackenzie** designer

Australia 1912–98

**Anne Outlaw** designer

born England 1891, arrived Australia 1923, died  
England 1991

**Emu track, café curtain**

c. 1950

screenprinted cotton

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Gift of Mrs Dorothy Nicholas, 1986

86/1826

## **Frances Burke Fabrics, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1942– c. 1967

## **Frances Burke** designer

Australia 1907–94

## **Staccato**

c. 1962

screenprinted cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Dr Frances Burke, 1989

CT57-1989

## **Frances Burke Fabrics, Melbourne**

manufacturer

1942– c. 1967

## **Frances Burke** designer

Australia 1907–94

## **Craze**

1960

screenprinted cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Dr Frances Burke, 1989

CT73-1989

## **Frances Burke Fabrics, Melbourne** manufacturer

1942– c. 1967

## **Frances Burke** designer

Australia 1907–94

## **Waved stripe, fabric length**

1950

screenprinted cotton

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Gift of Frances Burke under the Australian Government  
Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme, 1985

5/2251

Frances Burke was a significant figure in the development of printed textile design and manufacture in Australia. She began screenprinting textiles in the late 1930s, and from 1948 until 1967 ran a shop in central Melbourne, from which she sold her textiles and other modern furnishings and furniture. Collaborating closely with contemporary architects and interior and furniture designers, she actively promoted local design. Burke's textiles of the 1950s typically incorporated abstract forms based on native flora, fauna, marine life and Aboriginal motifs, and they featured prominently in magazine coverage of contemporary domestic interiors, a natural counterpart to furniture by Grant Featherston, Clement Meadmore and others.

## **Michael Hirst** designer

born England 1917, arrived Australia 1922, died 2002

## **Michael Hirst Pty Ltd, East Hawthorn,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1955–65

## **Outdoor table**

1963

steel, plastic coating (replacement), rubber

Michael Hirst Archive, Melbourne

**Roger McLay** designer  
Australia 1922–2000

## **Kone chair with cover**

1948

plywood, steel, rubber, brass, chenille

Collection of Lisa Gorman and Dean Angelucci, Melbourne

First put into production in 1948, the *Kone chair* was stocked and sold by major department stores and furniture retailers into the 1950s. Not everyone appreciated the spare, restrained aesthetic of the chair, however, and upholstered versions were also produced, along with removable covers in wool and ‘poodle cut’ chenille. This cover was made by Jeldi Manufacturing, who had been producing chenille in Australia since the 1930s, and whose name and by-line ‘the better chenille’ became synonymous with the familiar bedspreads of the era.

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Aristoc Industries Pty Ltd, Glen Waverly, Melbourne** manufacturer  
1946–68

## **Prototype for Wire chair**

1963

painted steel

Collection of Mary Featherston, Melbourne

One of the simplest chairs by Grant Featherston, in terms of its use of materials, the *Wire chair* did not go into production until several decades after its design. Along with a number of models from the Contour range, it continues to be made under licence today.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

## **Coffee table**

1958–59

steel, glass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria from  
the Bequest of Violet Dulieu, Founder Benefactor, 1997

1997.187.a-b

## **Schulim Krimper**

born Austro-Hungarian Empire 1893, lived in Germany  
1920s–1938, arrived Australia 1939, died 1971

## **Chest of drawers**

c. 1957

Jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1971

D83-1974

## **Fred Lowen designer**

born Germany 1919, arrived Australia 1940, died 2005

## **The Fler Company, Richmond,**

## **Melbourne manufacturer**

est. 1946

## **UTW lounge chair**

1959

Pine (*Pinus sp.*), steel, cotton, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Mr and Mrs Robert Bruce, 1992

D20-1992

## **Fred Lowen** designer

born Germany 1919, arrived Australia 1940, died 2005

## **The Fler Company, Richmond,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

est. 1946

## **SC55 chair**

1955

wood, fabric, foam, metal

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Purchased, 1992

92/1946-1

The *SC55 chair* was heralded as a 'miracle comfort chair' that combined 'the strength of steel with the beauty of timber; the miracle comfort of no-sag springs and pure *Texfoam* Rubber'. Buyers could choose from more than 600 practical zip-off covers, and the chair was an immediate commercial success, prompting The Fler Company to install conveyor belts in its factory so that the chair could be made in batches of 125 in an assembly line. The popularity of the *SC55 chair* extended further when manufacturing firms in Sydney, Brisbane and New Zealand began producing it under licence.

## **Michael Hirst** designer

born England 1917, arrived Australia 1922, died 2002

## **Michael Hirst Pty Ltd, East Hawthorn,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1955–65

## **Coffee table**

1959

steel, glass tiles, brass, plywood, (other materials)

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

In the mid 1950s, Michael Hirst and Clement Meadmore collaborated on the design of the *Meadmore Principle coffee table*, a rectangular table with legs made of fine steel rods that were nickel and then brass plated. Some of these tabletops were decorated with Italian glass mosaic tiles, which Hirst painstakingly arranged and applied. Hirst later designed a series of variations on the table, including a large square marble-topped coffee table; nesting tables in teak, marble or with linoleum tops in black or red; and occasional mosaic-topped tables such as this example.

## **George Korody** designer

born Hungary 1890, arrived Australia 1940, died 1957

## **Artes Studios Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1945–86

## **Sideboard**

c. 1950

coachwood, coachwood veneer, vitrolite glass

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Gift of Margaret Swift and Colin and June Enderby, 2011

2011/77/1

Artes Studios, established in 1945 in Sydney by Elsie Segaert, provided an additional source of contemporary furniture for the modern home. In 1947, with the opening of premises in Castlereagh Street, Segaert formed a business partnership with George Korody. He designed all of the furniture, from functional, flexible pieces – typically made using coachwood, cane and distinctive black vitrolite glass – to custom-made items. Korody also designed textiles, soft furnishings and decorative metalware. Following Korody's death, Dick van Leer, who had been the manager and part-owner since the early 1950s, took over and Artes became a major retailer of imported furniture.

## **George Korody** designer

born Hungary 1890, arrived Australia 1940, died 1957

## **Artes Studios Pty Ltd, Sydney**

manufacturer

1945–86

## **Repose armchair**

1953

coachwood, rattan, (other materials)

Collection of Ken Neale, Sydney

## **Ralph Balson**

born England 1890, arrived Australia 1913, died 1964

## **Constructive painting**

c. 1950

oil on composition board

Purchased, 1969

96-6

## **Schulim Krimper**

born Austro-Hungarian Empire 1893, lived in Germany  
1920s–1938, arrived Australia 1939, died 1971

## **The Lina Bryans writing table**

1955

Black Bean (*Castanospermum australe*), glass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1973

D202-1973

## **Clement Meadmore designer**

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

### **Calyx table lamp**

c. 1953

steel, tin, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Geoffrey Burke, 1988

D31-1988

During the 1950s, when Clement Meadmore was designing furniture and lighting, he was also establishing his career as a sculptor. It is tempting to see the bent steel bases of the Calyx range of lamps, which can be tilted to vary the angle of the lamp from its upright position, as one of the outcomes of his dual creative pursuits. An indication of Meadmore's ingenuity, the steel bases of these lamps were also used, cut in half, in a later dining table design to connect the legs with the table top.

## **Schulim Krimper**

born Austro-Hungarian Empire 1893, lived in Germany  
1920s–1938, arrived Australia 1939, died 1971

### **Screen**

c. 1961

Teak (*Tectona grandis*), brass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Judy Arndt and Shirley Klebaner  
in memory of Ralph and Erna Winton, 2008

2008.124

## Schulim Krimper

born Austro-Hungarian Empire 1893, lived in Germany  
1920s–1938, arrived Australia 1939, died 1971

### Bookcase

1951

Black Bean (*Castanospermum australe*), Eucalyptus  
(*Eucalyptus sp.*), plywood, glass, copper, brass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 2006

2006.218.a-j

Krimper was a master craftsman whose European training had instilled in him a combination of great skill, respect for his materials and a desire for perfection. While he said that 'we must make furniture for our own time', he also believed that it must be made to a standard that ensured it would 'last for hundreds of years'. Krimper's high standards in all things meant that he would sometimes refuse to undertake a commission if he judged a prospective client and their taste as unsatisfactory.

## **For Kids**

A cabinet maker is someone who makes furniture by hand. It can take many years to learn how to do this, and needs lots of skill. This constructed and carved furniture is made of wood. It shows the grain or patterns in the wood and the carved geometric shapes, such as circles and triangles that were very fashionable in the 1960s. Schulim Krimper believed that furniture should last for 100 years.

Do you have any handmade furniture at home?

By the 1960s some of the limitations of production techniques and materials that had previously been a source of frustration had been overcome, and there were new opportunities for Australian designers and manufacturers. Fashion in furniture was also changing, and the earlier focus on organic forms, plywood, metal and modestly scaled, multipurpose pieces was superseded by a growing preference for upholstered timber furniture. Fler's 1961 Narvik range, and the furniture produced by companies such as Parker and Danish Deluxe, exemplified this trend, which echoed changing styles in architecture and decor. For the more adventurous, the ultra-hip in contemporary furniture of the late 1960s and 1970s used materials such as fibreglass and various plastics, and was available in vivid colours.

Some of the figures who were so prominent in the field of furniture design during the 1950s had moved on, or were developing other careers. Douglas Snelling, for example, increasingly focused on his architectural practice, and in 1963 Clement Meadmore moved to the United States, almost completely abandoning industrial design in favour of an international career as a sculptor. Fler's designer, Fred Lowen, continued to produce new ranges of furniture until his retirement in the 1980s, establishing the new company Twen, later known as Tessa, in 1968. Similarly, Grant Featherston, working in partnership with Mary Featherston from 1965, maintained an active role as a designer of innovative furniture that reflected the spirit of the times.

## **Clement Meadmore** designer

born Australia 1929, lived in United States 1963–2005,  
died United States 2005

### **Pair of Sling chairs**

1963

steel, leather

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

Clement Meadmore moved from Melbourne to Sydney in 1960, and in 1963 left Australia for New York, where he lived for the rest of his life. The *Sling chair* was his last furniture design and reflects the influence of contemporary American and European designs, showing a marked transformation of sophistication and style from his earlier work. After this time Meadmore's focus switched to the making of often monumental abstract sculpture.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **House of Professor Benjamin, Canberra**

1958, printed 1972

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased through the Victorian Arts Board, 1972

PH132-1972

Czech-born architect Alex Jelinek designed this house in the Canberra suburb of Deakin. It was awarded House of the Year in 1957, and Schulim Krimper was commissioned to design and make the furniture.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Brunt residence, 33 Holroyd Street at corner of Belvedere Street, Kew, designed by Peter McIntyre**

1959

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/230

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Brunt House in Kew, Melbourne**

1959, printed 1986

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1986

PH99-1986

The Brunt House in the Melbourne suburb of Kew was designed by Peter McIntyre and completed in 1954. A study in modernist geometry, with slatted triangular sunscreens that cast shifting shadows across the surface of the house as the sun moves across the sky, the house lives up to the image of vibrantly coloured mid-century architecture, with various planes picked out in shades of plum, citron, yellow and blue, among others.

## **E. G. Adamson**

Australia 1895–1974

### **I.C.I. House**

c. 1958

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Mr E. V. C. Adamson, 1982

PH366-1982

Designed by Bates, Smart and McCutcheon, I.C.I. House on the corner of Spring and Nicholson Streets, Melbourne, was completed in 1958. In addition to breaking the height limit of 132 feet (40.2 metres) imposed on buildings in Melbourne since the early twentieth century, its exterior of curtain walls of glass made I.C.I. House a striking addition to the mid-century architectural landscape.

# Wolfgang Sievers

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

## Interior, staff Cafeteria, ICI building, 1 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne 1958

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Gift of Sunbury Heritage Society, 1985

H88.40/983

Grant Featherston's *Mitzi chair* was used as seating in the staff cafeteria at I.C.I. House, Melbourne. Designed in 1957 and manufactured by Aristoc Industries, the *Mitzi* was Featherston's first success in terms of mass production, finding a market in both public and domestic spheres. More than 160,000 were made during its first decade.

## **Mark Strizic**

born Germany 1928, arrived Australia 1950, died 2012

### **Coates Building, Collins Street east**

c. 1960

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1992

PH105-1992

Designed by J.L.A. LaGerche and completed in 1959, the Coates Building was one of Melbourne's first 'curtain-walled' buildings.

## **Wolfgang Sievers**

born Germany 1913, arrived Australia 1938, died 2007

### **Fairlie flats, 54 Anderson Street, South Yarra**

1961

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria  
Purchased, 2001

H2001.40/290

Designed by Yuncken Freeman Architects in 1961.

## **Gordon Andrews designer**

Australia 1914–2001, lived in England 1951–55

### **Perch stool**

1961

steel, slink-hide

Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection,  
Historic Houses Trust of NSW

L90/32

Marion Hall Best sold this design as a 'saddle stool', but actually Gordon Andrews designed it as a simple perch for shop assistants working behind a counter, to take the weight off their feet. According to Andrews it was never meant to be sat on like a saddle. This example, owned and used by Best, incorporates a footrest, which is a modification to Andrews' original design.

### **For Kids**

Shop assistants become very tired from standing all day. This saddle stool was designed to stand behind a shop counter so that the assistant could perch or sit on it and still see over the top. It has a footrest added to make it more comfortable.

Do you have stools at home? Which room are they in?

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Aristoc Industries Pty Ltd, Glen Waverly, Melbourne** manufacturer  
1946–68

### **Scape armchair**

1960

steel, plywood, vinyl, (other materials)

Collection of Cameron and Alison Lyon, Melbourne

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Aristoc Industries Pty Ltd, Glen Waverly, Melbourne** manufacturer  
1946–68

### **Scape armchair**

1960

steel, plywood, cowhide (replacement), (other materials)

Collection of Cameron and Alison Lyon, Melbourne

From 1957 to 1970, Featherston worked as a consultant with Aristoc Industries, a manufacturer of steel-framed furniture whose slogan was 'Planned perfection through machines'. During this time he designed a series of successful mass-produced chairs. The *Scape armchair* echoed the elegant sculptural form of the 1950s *Contour* chairs and prompted a contemporary reviewer to note: 'The extreme simplicity of the frame of a chair such as *Scape* is possible only in steel. Modern materials and technology have made possible a chair of apparent lightness and fragility, which is in fact stronger and more comfortable than its bulky predecessors'.

## **Frances Burke Fabrics, Melbourne** manufacturer

1942– c. 1967

## **Frances Burke** designer

Australia 1907–94

## **Black opal**

1964–65

screenprinted cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Dr Frances Burke, 1989

CT87-1989

'Fine fabrics play a major role in a decorating plan. Upholstery, curtain, cushion and lampshade materials combine to provide that degree of colour, pattern and style necessary in any room ... Choosing damasks, silks, velvet or satin surfaced fabrics to go in the same room as chairs covered with a flecked tweed boucle should be an obvious enough mistake for anyone to avoid. Just as you wouldn't wear a cocktail hat with a tweed suit.'

*Australian Home Beautiful*, January 1965

## **Gordon Andrews** designer

Australia 1914–2001, lived in England 1951–55

## **Spider chair**

1961

steel, fabric (replacement), (other materials)

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney  
Gift of Mr and Mrs Richard Andrews, 1994

94/44/1

## **University of the Air, Design in Australia, Interiors 1964**

hosted by Robin Boyd  
29 minutes 45 seconds

### **Fred Lowen designer**

born Germany 1919, arrived Australia 1940, died 2005

### **Tessa Pty Ltd, Clayton, Melbourne**

manufacturer

active in Australia 1970s

### **Twen T-Four lounge chair and footstool**

1971

laminated wood with Brazilian Rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*) veneers, nylon, leather, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Tessa Pty Ltd, 1974

D33.a-b-1974

In 1968 Fred Lowen started a new furniture-manufacturing business, Twen, which was later renamed Tessa. One of his most successful designs for Tessa was the *Twen T-Four lounge chair and footstool*, which was exported to Germany, Hong Kong, Japan and Dubai, as well as being sold through Heal's in London. The distinctive slings that supported the cushions of the chair and footstool were initially made using fishing net sourced from a local shop, and made reference to the hammock that Lowen had slept in on his journey to Australia on the infamous boat the *Dunera*.

## **Max Hutchinson** designer

Australia 1925–99, lived in United States 1976–99

## **Gallery A Pty Ltd, Melbourne and**

## **South Yarra** manufacturer

1959–70

## **Contract armchair**

1962

Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), leather and  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1962

506-D5

Max Hutchinson ran a shop-fitting and furniture-manufacturing business in Melbourne and in 1959 opened Gallery A in his Flinders Lane showroom. Hutchinson was encouraged in this venture by Clement Meadmore, who saw himself as ‘an artist with a strong interest in design’, and saw Max as ‘a designer and craftsman with a strong interest in art’. The result was a vital centre for cross-disciplinary creativity. Both Meadmore and Hutchinson designed furniture produced under the Gallery A label, but art became the primary focus, with Hutchinson opening Gallery A in Sydney in late 1964, and another gallery in Greene Street, New York, in 1970.

## **Fred Lowen** designer

born Germany 1919, arrived Australia 1940, died 2005

## **The Fler Company, Richmond,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

est. 1946

## **Narvik**

1961

Teak (*Tectona grandis*), wool, cotton, metal,  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Fred Lowen, 1996

1996.388

By the late 1950s The Fler Company had established factories in five states, and in 1959 Fred Lowen travelled to Europe to study mechanised production methods. One of the outcomes of this experience was the Narvik range, which responded to changing fashions in furniture, and was made by machine in a manner that created the appearance of being handmade. Lowen designed the Narvik lounge furniture so that it could be produced as a 'knock-down' pack, also an inspiration from Europe, but found little enthusiasm for this in the marketplace.

## **Michael Hirst** designer

born England 1917, arrived Australia 1922, died 2002

## **Michael Hirst Pty Ltd, East Hawthorn,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1955–65

## **Coffee table**

1960

marble, brass, steel, plastic

Harris/Atkins Collection, Melbourne

## **Yvonne Audette**

born Australia 1930, lived in United States 1952–55,

Italy 1955–66

## **Il miracolo**

1957–58

oil on composition board

Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with  
the assistance of Coles Myer Ltd, Governor, 1991

A24-1991

The mid-century industrial designer's aim of mass production was often thwarted by technological limitations in regard to materials and methods of manufacturing available in Australia. For example, the technique of moulding plywood to form organically shaped furniture, used by Charles Eames and others in the United States from the 1940s, was prohibitively expensive. Local designers including Grant Featherston and Roger McLay, who used plywood during the same years, created their curved forms through tension and joinery alone. The relatively small scale of the local market was also a factor, which resulted in an imbalance between the financial outlay required for production and the return on sales.

It was not until the 1960s that Grant Featherston achieved his goal of mass production with the *Delma chair*, a sturdy, functional and stackable steel-framed chair that furnished classrooms and waiting rooms across the country. Aristoc Industries made more than 250,000 *Delma chairs*, and numerous copies and variations were subsequently produced by other manufacturers. A decade later Charles Furey designed the *Integra chair*, the world's first one-piece, stackable, injection-moulded polypropylene chair. Manufactured by Sebel Furniture, the *Integra chair* remained in production in Australia for forty years, and in early 2014 the machinery used to make it was shipped to the United States, where it will continue to be manufactured.

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Aristoc Industries Pty Ltd, Glen Waverly, Melbourne** manufacturer

1946–68

**Delma chair**

1963

steel, plywood, vinyl, (other materials)

Collection of Mary Featherston, Melbourne

**Charles Furey** designer

Australia 1917–2009

**Sebel Furniture, Sydney** manufacturer

est. 1951

**Pair of Integra chairs**

1973

polypropylene

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Promised Gift of Sebel Furniture Pty Ltd

## **For Kids**

Schools, halls and festivals are some places where lots of chairs are needed. They are moved about, stacked, packed away, dropped and set in rows time and time again. They need to be strong, light, easy to clean and cheap to make in a factory.

Think about the chairs you have at school. Are they a suitable design?

An international world's fair focusing on the theme of 'Man and His World', Expo'67 in Montreal, Canada, brought together displays from seventy countries and attracted more than 50 million visitors during its six months. Australia's theme was the 'Spirit of Adventure', and the glass-walled pavilion designed by government architect James Maccormick was described by him as a model of functional simplicity and restraint. Offering a 'real' Australian experience, the pavilion was surrounded by a recreation of the Great Barrier Reef and bushland, complete with kangaroos and wallabies.

Architect Robin Boyd oversaw the interior of the Australian pavilion and invited Grant Featherston, Kjell Grant and Fler to design furniture for the various spaces. Fler contributed a reception chair and curved desks based on the existing Fleronde range, and Grant designed an elegant steel-formed dining chair. The Featherstons' futuristic *Expo '67 Talking chair* stole the show, with speakers set into the headrest that were activated when the seat cushion was depressed. Colour-coded chairs played recordings in English and French of notable figures, including Sir Robert Menzies, Harry Hopman, Sir Robert Helpmann and Googie Withers, describing aspects of life in Australia.

Both the *Montreal chair* and the *Expo '67 Talking chair* were later put into commercial production for the Australian market, the latter known as the *Expo Mark II*.

## **Kjell Grant** designer

born Scotland 1929, arrived Australia 1957

## **William Latchford & Sons Pty Ltd,**

## **North Melbourne and Box Hill**

manufacturer

1953–86

## **Montreal chair**

1967

steel, vinyl, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented by William Latchford & Sons Pty Ltd, 1968

1972-D5

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Mary Featherston** designer

born England 1943, arrived Australia 1953

## **Danish De Luxe Pty Ltd, Huntingdale,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

c. 1958–99

## **Aristoc Industries Pty Ltd, Glen**

## **Waverly, Melbourne** manufacturer

1946–68

## **Expo Mark II sound chair**

1966

polystyrene, polyurethane foam, wool, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Plastmobler Pty Ltd, 1972

D79-1972

In many ways, the futuristic *Expo '67 Talking chair* defines the technological advancements of the mid twentieth century in Australia, incorporating many materials developed just before or during that time – Dunlopillo foam rubber, Pirelli webbing, fibreglass, polyurethane foam, expanded polystyrene and velcro. It also stands as an exemplar of collaboration between the designers and Aristoc, who undertook assembly; Danish DeLuxe, who produced the Plastmobler polystyrene moulding (the largest moulding of its kind in Australia at the time); and the Olympic Tyre & Rubber Co., who supplied the polyurethane foam padding.

## **For Kids**

A talking chair? More than 240 of these chairs were made in the 1960s for a world expo in Canada. When someone sat on the chair, the tape recorder in the headrest would turn on and recite interesting information about creative Australia. The chairs were made with the latest materials, including fibreglass, foam and Velcro. What a great way to show the world the cleverness and ingenuity of Australians!

Have you ever been in a chair that was activated in some way when you sat on it?

# Janet Dawson

born Australia 1935

## Coffee table

c. 1964

Laminex plastic on composition board,  
metal legs

Queensland Art Gallery

Gift of James Mollison, AO, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2010

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

2010.427

First produced in Australia in 1953, Laminex was available in a vast range of colours and patterns, its hard-wearing surface marketed as being 'Lovelier for a lifetime'. In the early 1960s Laminex commissioned the abstract painter and printmaker Janet Dawson to design a series of coffee tables using its product. Dawson's response was to design a circular tabletop decorated with a series of concentric circles in various colours of Laminex, which sat on simple metal legs. Recalling Jasper Johns's late 1950s target paintings, these striking pieces also responded to the 1960s fashion for bold juxtapositions of hard-edged colour.

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Mary Featherston** designer

born England 1943, arrived Australia 1953

## **Furniture Makers Of Australia, Glen**

## **Waverley, Melbourne** manufacturer

1931–75

## **Pair of Stem dining chairs**

1969

polyethylene, thermoplastic, steel, foam rubber

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1974

D16.a-b-1974

The 1960s and 1970s saw the increased production of furniture in various plastics, which Grant Featherston believed 'most ideally [met] the requirements of modern technological production, which seeks to increase the functional properties of a product, while decreasing its mass, number of components and cost'. The *Stem dining chair* was the result of eighteen months of determined effort, on the part of the Featherstons, to produce a plastic chair that incorporated curvilinear forms that reflected shapes found in nature, which had not been possible with traditional furniture materials.

## **James Doolin**

United States 1932–2002, lived in Australia 1965–67

## **Artificial landscape 67/5**

1967

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Purchased, 1969

87-6

## **For Kids**

Sometimes designers need to work on an idea for a long time before it is successful. After eighteen months of designing and experimenting, this chair was made. It was one of the first times plastic was used in Australia to make furniture. Plastic was a new material that could be moulded into a single rounded shape. There was no need to join many different parts. Plus, it was light and strong, and many could be made in factories. Look for more plastic furniture.

## **James Farrell** designer

active in Australia 1970s

## **Module Company & Staff Pty Ltd,**

**Fairfield, Melbourne** manufacturer

1965–92

## **Oroglass chair**

1970

transparent synthetic polymer resin, wool,  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Module Company and Staff Pty Ltd, 1974

D51-1974

The 1960s witnessed the development of new technologies in the field of furniture manufacturing, including plastic moulding, which was increasingly used by local designers. The Melbourne-based Module Company defined its aim as 'good design, good materials honestly used, craftsmanship and reasonable cost'. Within its catalogue of timber and steel-framed furniture upholstered in wool and leather, it also offered the very contemporary *Oroglass dining suite* in clear or bronze resin. The chairs could be upholstered in wool, velvet, vinyl or leather and came with a circular laminate tabletop supported by a central chrome base.

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Mary Featherston** designer and  
draughtswoman

born England 1943, arrived Australia 1953

**Production drawing: Numero IV chair**

1973–74

coloured technical pens, fibre-tipped pen and transfer  
lettering on tracing paper

Featherston Archive, Melbourne

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Mary Featherston** designer

born England 1943, arrived Australia 1953

## **Uniroyal Pty Ltd, Dandenong,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1970–81

## **Numero IV lounge**

1971–74 designed, 1974 manufactured  
polyurethane foam, wool, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented by Uniroyal Pty Ltd, 1974

D101.a-c-1974

The so-called 'unit furniture' of the 1950s, which enabled flexibility of function, was in many ways a precedent of the modular furniture developed in the 1960s and 1970s, which could be rearranged according to the space and purpose. The Featherstons' *Numero IV lounge* consisted of three units, multiples of which could be combined in various configurations for sitting, lounging and so on. Each unit was made of polyurethane foam, a new material, which was cast in an aluminium mould and covered with a two-way stretch fabric. The commercial success of the *Numero IV lounge* led to the subsequent production of the *Numero VII*.

## **For Kids**

The idea of making pieces of furniture that could be moved around into different arrangements was popular from the 1950s. More pieces could be added if needed as the family grew. Today many homes have modular furniture. It can be arranged in different ways so that you can lie, lounge about or sit on it.

How would you arrange this modular furniture?

**Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

**Mary Featherston** designer

born England 1943, arrived Australia 1953

**Module Company & Staff Pty Ltd,**

**Fairfield, Melbourne** manufacturer

1965–92

**Poli chairs**

1971

fibreglass, cotton, (other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of Grant and Mary Featherston, 1982

D44.1-2-1982

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Uniroyal Pty Ltd, Dandenong,**

**Melbourne** manufacturer

1970–81

## **Obo chair**

1974

polyurethane foam, polystyrene beads, jersey,  
(other materials)

Collection of Mary Featherston, Melbourne

## **David Aspden**

born England 1935, arrived Australia 1950, died 2005

## **Brazil series no. 7**

1971

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by  
Australia Consolidated Industries Limited, Governor, 1983

AC6-1983

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Uniroyal Pty Ltd, Dandenong,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1970–81

## **Obo chair**

1974

polyurethane foam, polystyrene beads, jersey,  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Promised gift of Bernadette Foley

Mary Featherston recalls that the *Obo chair*, Grant Featherston's last seating design, emerged fully formed as he experimented with the possibilities of moulded polyurethane. With references to Gaetano Pesce's *Up chair*, 1969, which was purchased as a small disc and popped into shape when unwrapped, the *Obo chair*, with its zip-off jersey cover available in fashion colours, was the ultimate in hip furniture – perfect on a shag-pile rug in the sunken conversation pit of the 1970s interior. The beanbag, based on a 1969 Italian design, became ubiquitous at this time, and ultimately the *Obo chair* could not compete against it on price.

## **Grant Featherston** designer

Australia 1922–95

## **Uniroyal Pty Ltd, Dandenong,**

## **Melbourne** manufacturer

1970–81

## **Obo chair**

1974

polyurethane foam, polystyrene beads, jersey,  
(other materials)

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased, 1990

1989.1524

## **For Kids**

The *Obo chair* looks like fun to sit on, but please don't. It is made from polyurethane foam, which is light and strong. It changes shape when sat on, then pops back into shape when no-one is in it. The cover can be zipped off to be washed. Not many were made because the beanbag was invented at about the same time, and was much cheaper to buy.

Do you have a fun piece of furniture at home?

## For Kids

Bright colours were all the rage by the end of the 1960s. New colours, patterns and materials were put together to make 'groovy' homes. This *Rondo* chair could swivel on its shiny aluminium stem and base, and was very well suited to the times. Bright wallpapers and shaggy mats added to the fun fashion.

Would you like a room like this in your home? Why?

## Gordon Andrews designer

Australia 1914–2001, lived in England 1951–55

## Pair of Rondo chairs

1956 designed, c. 1969 manufactured  
fibreglass, aluminium, foam rubber, wool

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1999

1999.100.1-2

## **Mona Hessing**

born Australia 1933

### **Circular rug**

1965

wool, hessian

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1999

1999.101

Marion Hall Best was one of the leading interior designers in mid-century Australia, renowned for the creation of bold interiors that celebrated colour and pattern in a manner that was largely unprecedented in this country. Richard and Joan Crebbin were longstanding clients of Best's, and this display comprises elements that were acquired from their home in Castlecrag, a suburb on Sydney's Lower North Shore. The interactive Jack Meyer wall piece was originally designed for and exhibited in *A room for Peter Sculthorpe*, Best's contribution to the *Rooms on View* exhibition at Blaxland Galleries, Sydney, in 1971.

## **Jack Meyer**

active in Australia 1960s –80s

### **Industrial revolution**

1971

transparent synthetic polymer resin, neon, electrical wiring, glass, metal, wire, speaker, tuner, amplifier, tape player, cassette tape, fabric

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1999

1999.103

‘Where will we find a great artist–designer, who will gather together our ragged ideas of modernism and functionalism, sort them out, ally them with art and grace of line, and from our wonderful assortment of materials produce a style of furniture worthy to be remembered?’

The answer to this question, posed in 1938 by an *Australian Home Beautiful* writer, came in the form of the avalanche of modern furniture – innovative in its use of materials, functional and often imbued with a good dose of style – designed and manufactured in Australia following the Second World War. The local furniture industry was transformed during this period; the postwar desire to live differently and better, borne of practical necessity and the prevailing optimism of the time, coincided with the development of new materials and manufacturing processes and saw the emergence of a flourishing industry and market for contemporary furniture. The simultaneous recognition of industrial design as a profession encouraged a new breed of designers, who were schooled in the principles of good design and eager to make their mark by harnessing the possibilities of new technologies.

The years between 1945 and the mid 1970s in Australia produced many classic furniture designs. While a handful of them are still in production today, there remains an active collectors’ market for the type of furniture that is characterised by the work in *Mid-Century Modern: Australian Furniture Design*, each one a model of function, material and style.

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