



# Crafting a feel-good factor

A new exhibition aims to evoke a positive emotional response in the viewer, **Arne Sjostedt** writes

**D**esigner and furniture maker Ian Factor is on a journey to create simple work with an architectural look. Sculptural pieces that make people feel good.

"My aim in design", he says, "is to evoke a positive emotional response in the viewer. Some of the forms I use are a bit quirky-looking. Some of the pieces stand out in terms of scale or elegance. They also use colour to initiate a response. I think the simplicity in design and lack of ornamentation allows the emotion to come through. The eyes are drawn to the form and the simple materials I use."

On display during July at Craft ACT, *ABSTRACT* is the product of

Factor's interest in Modernist design and years of professional experience.

"I'm trying to take that craft-based element and move it to a different dimension of arts sculpture. And that's one of the reasons that I want to show my pieces in a gallery setting," he says.

When discussing his ideas, Factor's conversation is flooded with references to Modernism and the German Bauhaus.

"My inspiration basically stems from my architectural training, which took place in the early '70s. My teachers were devotees of the Modernist International style of design."

This is clear when you see some of the pieces that are being exhibited.

"I guess those influences, they lay dormant in me for many years. I became a builder and brought up a family, but my passion has always be furniture design and making."

Already an experienced builder, in 2006 Factor made the important decision to attend the Sturt School for Wood in Mittagong.

"Basically, I wanted to learn the craft of being able to handcraft beautiful objects," he says. "During that year I realised that the making was something I could achieve. But I needed more, I needed the design element. Which goes back to that architectural training."

This drew Factor back to his roots. Consequently, he says, the furniture he has made is quite architectural in look, and quite simple.

"I try to make it elegant, unadorned, which reflects that Modernist period of design."

Using plywood, veneers and timbers that come from certified sustainable sources, the work fits in well with our need to look after the planet. With a personality of their own, the niche designs are also made to last.

"My furniture is of an heirloom quality, so it will last as long as an antique, or perhaps become an antique. But the quality is there. And that's a difficult thing to sell to the public."

One of the reasons, he

says, for naming the exhibition *ABSTRACT*, is that it seems that the designs end up in an abstract kind of form.

"You can see some of my pieces, like my *Stack of Draws* as a Mondrian painting, or an abstract painting. You can assemble the draws with their various colour fronts in any way you like to create different patterns and abstract forms."

"It just boils down to what emotionally works for me. If I see that, my mood is lifted."

Putting it in a gallery also moves the work "away from just the woody, craft context," Factor says.

Diana Hare, curator and exhibition manager at Craft ACT, says the first thing that captures her attention about Factor's designs is their presence in the room.

"I think," she says, "that comes from the size of the work as well as the structure of them. They are really quite refined and well made, and he definitely has polished and high skills as a wood maker. The works themselves command that presence through that skill, but also as an object in their own right. So while they are furniture pieces, there also is that finely honed crafted object that sits within the space."

The kind of people who purchase his work are often those

with an interest in "design and clean living". There is a fashion, Factor says, back to Minimalist or Modernist type of interiors. Though because of their simplicity the, pieces will fit into any setting. "I've produced pieces for inner city terrace houses that have a mixture of, not antique, but older world furniture. It doesn't clash with anything."

Out of the home, Factor is also happy with how his pieces translate into a gallery setting.

"It just looks fantastic. It gives each piece a space around it. You can see the context of the design elements and how they relate to each other," he says. "Having a solo show is like, to me, it's a huge achievement."

Operating since 2006, Factor is already becoming recognised. He has been published in various design magazines, and his cantilevered media cabinets are soon to be included in a book called *500 Cabinets*.

■ All visitors to *ABSTRACT* are eligible to enter the draw to acquire a Factor Design Abstract Side Table, valued at \$495.

The exhibition runs until July 31 at Craft ACT's Gallery 1, Level 1 North Building, Canberra City. Tuesday to Friday 10am-5pm and Saturday noon-4pm. Free entry. Phone: 6262 9333.



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