

Recognition by London's furniture establishment is an exciting milestone for New Zealand-born furniture designer **LEONHARD PFEIFER**



Austrian by name, New Zealander by birth, Australian in accent and now resident in the UK, Leonhard Pfeifer defies classification. He has spent the last decade making a name for himself in Europe, and this year celebrates with a prestigious Design Guild Mark for his 'Farringdon Laptop Desk' from The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers. The Mark is awarded for excellence in design, use of materials, manufacture and function, and places Pfeifer amongst the establishment of British furniture design.

Design drew him in from age 14, when he started helping in his father's Brisbane antiques business. On weekends he stripped and sanded furniture, and made deliveries. After completing a degree in industrial design at Queensland University of Technology, he spent four years travelling and working in the Northern Hemisphere. "That experience still informs my design inspiration," says Pfeifer. "The idea of being unencumbered by material things and creating objects that have multiple uses or store away innovatively."

In 1996, he returned to Australia to complete a graduate diploma and went on to work in exhibition design and in the drawing office of a Satellite Communications manufacturer. But, he was drawn back to homewares. Working after-hours in his father's workshop, he experimented with construction

techniques and sold enough to self-fund more development. From selling photo frames and CD racks at Brisbane's Riverside Markets, he went on to create a range of apartment furniture. "I won an award in 2000 for a piece I exhibited at the Cooroy Butter Factory on Queensland's Sunshine Coast," he recalls. "That sealed my fate – furniture had pulled me in. But, two months after that, my partner and I moved to the UK and everything stopped for a few years while we established ourselves here. We were drawn by the size of the market in Europe, and to London as one of the creative hubs."

The early years in London exposed him to different companies, products and projects. He developed ergonomic accessories for Vitra, Herman Miller and Knoll, and in 2003, set up his own studio to work freelance for the likes of Studio Conran and Linley. While contracting to these large design studios, he continued his own work and exhibited yearly at the big furniture fairs: ICFP in New York, Maison et Objet in Paris, and Ambiente in Frankfurt. He was helped by the British European Design Group (BEDG) – an organisation which promotes British-based designers – to exhibit at the big shows with 30-odd other emerging designers. "These opportunities are another reason why being in London is so amazing," says Pfeifer. "I was a member of Hidden Art, a group that helps artists and designers

and who are linked into Metropolitan Works [a creative industries centre at London Metropolitan University] and the BEDG. Together they make an ecosystem for independent designers who are trying to compete on a very unlevel playing field with the big companies."

It was the big fairs that really opened doors for him. He was not only exposed to buyers and the press, but also to manufacturers looking for design partners. Following the launch of his 'Occasional Table' at the London Design Festival in 2005, a *New York Times* feature prompted the Estonian manufacturer, Woodman to contact him. Six years on he has had over 400 pieces produced by them. His ranges appear in UK department stores John Lewis and Heal's; Kodin Ykkönen and Asko in Finland; 3 Suisse and Deco Clico in France; Ellos in Sweden; and Heine in Germany.

His focus in the last five years has been living and home office furniture for the retail market. He has a reputation for design with a small footprint both physically and environmentally. And, in all his work he pursues adaptability and economy of means. "Our values are reflected in the decisions we make," notes Pfeifer, "so the furniture we choose to live with in part defines us." He keeps his studio small and flexible too – it is just himself and an assistant – which allows him to travel home regularly with his Australian partner and their three-year-old, to visit family in New Zealand and Australia.

Following the success of his 'Farringdon Laptop Desk', he launched his 'Drum' tables in July through Heal's, and has just exhibited his 'Ravenscroft' desk and shelves at Maison et Objet in Paris.

Time in his father's workshop grounded him in a wood tradition, and the craftsmanship of his European manufacturers gives him confidence in the longevity of his work. "Furniture can last a lifetime, or many lifetimes. Quality is the key – quality in design, quality in manufacture, quality in materials, and quality in care."

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WORDS ANDREA STEVENS



"The furniture we choose... in part defines us"

LEONHARD PFEIFER



LEONHARD PFEIFER

LIVES London, UK
BORN New Zealand
WORKS AS furniture designer
NEWLY LAUNCHED Farringdon Laptop Desk' was launched in Australia by Woodmark in November this year
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LEFT 'Mini.BarBoudior' was also released in a collection of eight limited edition pieces
ABOVE LEFT Pfeifer's new 'Ravenscroft' desk
ABOVE 'Drum Tables' – originally designed as a lampshade – launched at the Heal's Discovers project