

DTA10Y

A RETROSPECTIVE

ADDRESS BY: PHILLIP 'SUNNY' DRURY

10 YEAR LAUNCH EXHIBITION

ARTS TASMANIA, HOBART

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THE IDEA, THE HISTORY AND THE CATALYSING
IMPACT OF THE TASMANIAN DESIGN AWARD
ON THE TASMANIAN DESIGN INDUSTRY.

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Welcome one and all to this exciting milestone for all involved in the Design
Tasmania Award, as we celebrate its 10th anniversary.

And for those designers in the 2017 top 10, those ‘finalists’ and their outstanding
work will be revealed tonight with the winners announced in December. Sorry to
tease, as I know who the winners are of course...

In December we’ll add a name, or two, to the Award’s history pages, amongst those
who have forged their own pathway and reached that ever-elusive pinnacle of
excellence – in its most practical and inspiring form. We are here to celebrate the
very endeavour that has resulted in some 20 major award recipients over the
ten years.

I was invited to reflect on the Award’s journey in this address. As a sponsor, past
board member and ‘veteran’ Awards judge (apparently) I’ve met a lot of great
people, so I can focus on them and their effort rather than subjecting you to my own
agenda. So, please allow me to take you through some retrospective thoughts and
reflections from past winners and insights to what was going on ‘behind the scenes’,
as the Award evolved throughout the years.

In preparing this address I must say the memories that came flooding back and
the conversations had with past winners highlighted the positive impact the Awards
have had on so many. And engaging again with people who helped drive its success
along the way has been a complete pleasure. Now I have the humble opportunity to
share some of that history and emotion with you.

Given that, firstly there are acknowledgments that must be made. I’m referring to
those who had the inspiration and vision and the energy to chase and dream big.
This passion runs through the framework and the principles that have driven the
Awards on its successful path to this day.

Firstly, Gary Cleveland, the man with the idea – and one I believe he'd canvassed over many years with many people. Gary's vision is ultimately why the Awards began. A big thank you to Gary for that spark that ignited the fire in us all.

Also, Clemenger ex-MD and Board member Tony Hart, who on hearing about this idea, marched into my office and said "what do you reckon?" I'm often too quick to support creative endeavours that then demand high levels of dedicated personal time and financial backing to realise, so I was pensive. But when I understood the principle drivers for the award – that of commercial and resource sustainability, to nurture and champion distinct Tasmanian design, to support both emerging and established designers and makers, promoting product development with purpose to satisfy market and retail realities, and I met the people I'd be working with, I was in – and I'm still happily connected. So thanks to Tony who opened the creative department and applied some sponsorship to allow us to be part of the foundation group to launch the Awards.

That brings me to a man who I was lucky to be partnered with to put the detail and tools in place for many of the 10 years. A person who inspired me, and I'm proud to call a friend – Rye Dunsmuir. Our relationship was forged on creating meaningful outcomes with this powerful platform. As self-confessed result junkies, we looked at every opportunity to gain an edge for designers and their products, however small, however bold. Rye is a 'giant' in my mind. The sheer effort, intelligence and his never-fail attitude meant mountains were both formed and climbed that cemented the success of these Awards – success that I'd expect for many years to come. Thanks Rye for your outstanding contribution.

Then there are the Board Members and staff in support, the committed sponsors along the way, Peter Whyte capturing images that tell the stories so well and also my fellow Judges. Thanks to all those individuals that collectively kept the Awards financial, relevant and progressive.

For myself and the Agency more broadly, we've enjoyed the privilege and honour to partner with Design Tasmania to realise Gary's dream and help so many designers

to fulfil their dreams also. I'm very thankful for that opportunity – the best hobby in the world really. That said, let's talk design.

We know design influences so many things – virtually everything: our processes, our methods, our everyday experiences. But in essence, design exists to change our lives for the better. For me, I recall a defining conclusion I made about myself in adding a personal statement on our company website years ago. It was simply: Design is my life, I designed it that way.

I believe the evolution of a modern functioning society, the nature of how we live and use tools to solve problems, how we innovate and excel, is the direct result of the compounding effect of a continued, revolving design process. By that definition, "Design makes the difference". You may have heard that before? It's the positioning line we launched the re-branding of Design Tasmania with just a few years ago.

So it's that very inquiry, that journey of discovery that ultimately fulfils itself into a physical object. That solution itself is then tested, improved, redefined by the very process that gave it life and relevance in the first place. That innate human passion - to invent and reinvent - is why design is such a force of nature - and nurture. It's a seductive, addictive, pursuit and once in your blood it can generate all manner of investigation, perspectives and outcomes.

That's pretty hard to dispute when you investigate the history of the Design Tasmania Awards' 10 fabulous years. The evidence is there all around us. It's in us and realised in the work, from often very unassuming people who dedicate themselves to the pursuit of perfection in their own design-life journey.

I'm very pleased to have been given the opportunity to present you some of that evidence, and some of the personal stories involved. Tonight is a celebration, so please, indulge me as we immerse ourselves down memory lane. Let's reflect on what these awards and the work mean to us as an industry and as individuals. And to our evolving lives.

In the Award's first year, 2006. We launched mostly with mainstream and print media (as you did back then) and the response was instantly gratifying. To many people's surprise, we set a \$50 wholesale price cap. This presented the realities of retailing, given the market 'list price' would be \$100. This simple product/price setting has been a disciplined, strategic, key driver of the small product category ever since and it's increased incrementally over the years aligned to market drivers and price acceptance.

Critically, it was based on a researched consumer insight - to meet the known spending habits of tourists in the state. Little did we know we were also preparing for inevitable, future challenges.

As history shows, the categories beyond our Top Ten have expanded, but the same market insights have informed the relevant entry criteria ever since: to meet those objectives and challenges present at the time.

The Judges then were, myself, Pippa Dixon and Nicole Johnson. I was certainly in good hands. These ladies were well experienced in the sector and had profiles that ensured the integrity of the decisions made. Our combined perspectives worked well in determining both the design and commercial imperatives required to be Awarded with such a significant accolade.

The 2006 and inaugural overall winner was David Mayhew with his Whale Salad Servers, utilising assorted Tasmanian timbers and magnets. The Judges were impressed with its innovative form and function and the use of old wine barrels which gave the product its beautiful curvature. The magnets worked as a virtual spring – an ingenious snap action to grip and serve food. Its shape reminiscent of a whale also gave it distinction and appeal. David had this to say about winning the Award: “The most important thing the award gave me was ‘peer affirmation’. A stronger self-belief in the product's potential, worthiness and financial viability.”

Moving on to 2007 and it was Richard Levett who took out the overall prize with his Trout Net, made in Huon Pine, Blackwood, Aluminium, Stainless Steel and nylon.

This piece was simply perfection, in both design and execution. The use and nature of Huon Pine giving it a durability fit for purpose – a perfect use of one of our most iconic natural timbers. Reflecting on his win, without prompting Richard said, “The award allowed me to work with Clemenger Tasmania to develop a website, create new cards, swing tags and material for advertising in targeted media. Without the award these are things I simply couldn’t do.”

Now, who recalls the GFC? Not me too fondly. It was this event that sharpened our message to the industry through Design Tasmania’s network. We used the Awards platform to harden the focus on strategically designed products and their commercial viability and attractiveness in what was a disrupted, redefined market. We believe that provided confidence and direction to many struggling in the downturn, and it worked. The data shows that this new wave of products generated ‘new revenues’ for many key Tasmanian makers through the GFC, offsetting the downturn in consumer spending on traditional one-off, high-cost pieces.

Over the 2008/9 period, we saw the trend increase, with these distinctly innovative small products increasing in numbers, as the Award in turn continued to inspire, acknowledge and contribute to their success.

In 2008 the overall winner was Chris Berndt, with a clever, component design, Tribol made with wood mill waste and plantation pine sheeting. It was conceived to satisfy the market need as I identified earlier, and it did so with surprising simplicity and elegance. Chris sent us this message: “The ‘Tribol’ has remained unchanged since winning the award. The brand and an innovative packaging solution has been developed through working with Clemenger Tasmania. Reflecting on the award, I can only see positives – the encouragement it gave me to continue designing is one, and as a teacher the life stories I have been able to share whilst instilling a ‘can do’ attitude is another. Entering the award is something I would encourage any budding designer to do. The process of development and entering is so much more rewarding when you can complete the process with marketing to support mass production.” Chris is currently doing Honours in 3D Design at the Hunter Street campus of UTAS and teaching Housing and Design at Rosny College.

Just for the record, the Clemenger factor is lessened in the coming descriptions. I think we've advertised our contribution well enough...

At this point the Award made its first critical changes. We looked at the source, the next generation, and a student prize was added to encourage creative thinking at an early age. Easily said, harder to muster, but thankfully several schools took on the challenge, and we understand that experience has had a positive effect on their creative arts curriculum.

A People's Choice was also added to gauge relevance and draw further insights in both the criteria we'd set and the work it produced. This also created an event in its own right. If success is driven by participation, then we hoped people would vote with their feet and with their minds.

So in 2009 it was Anita Dineen who took out the overall prize with her exquisite Gourmet Glide Knife, made in stainless steel. The Judges learned that the Knife was born from Anita's frustrations using pâté knives with no balance. And her solution is a stunning example of reinvention. We'd never seen anything like it. It simply reinvented an entire category with its modern, sculptural styling. In doing so, Anita was the first to take out both awards, and also the first female to win, and the first to win with a metal object. True to say she swept the board and reset the bar for future entries to aspire to. When I spoke to Anita recently, she said, "Winning the Tasmanian Design Award has opened new doors for me in extraordinary ways! It has strengthened my credibility as a designer, giving me added confidence to grow my business."

Also in 2009 the Student Prize went to Adam Aberle with his Flat Pack Fruit Bowl. Adam's reflection on winning was, "For me the Tasmanian Design Award was certainly a good motivator to push my design skills further. From a conceptual university project to a further refined piece that would have to stand amongst the high quality work of the industry. It was exciting to have this opportunity as my first taste of the commercial market and even more exciting to then achieve the Award." If you're wondering where Adam is now, as I was, I can tell you he now works

as a graduate architect in Perth, WA, utilising his design skills in a construction context. He credits his work for the Design Award that features in his folio as the major catalyst to gaining the position. I'm sure you'll agree that design has made a difference in Adam's life and I'm sure he'll look back fondly at his first 'public' adventure into the world of commercial design.

In 2010 we continued to evolve the categories, adding the 'Timber Prize' category and extended the 'People's Choice Award' with a successful exhibition at the Design Centre for the public to engage with and have their say. The event was hugely successful, both in attendance and sales.

The overall winner in 2010 was Linda Van Niekerk with her stunning Silk Dew Drops made in recycled sterling silver and 100% silk thread. This product wowed the judges as a clear stand out for its modish simplicity. Created in two sizes and two price points for broad appeal, made in ten colours and presented with a 100% recycled cotton rag gift card, it completed a finely considered, commercially attractive product with flawless execution.

Linda spoke of her experience gaining the Award: "I was persuaded to enter the Tasmanian Design Award. I was convinced it wasn't possible [to enter] within the constraints of commercial viability. In other words, a product that was priced to suit gift giving, repeatable, and have broad appeal. I was surprised and delighted to find design solutions that fulfilled these criteria, an exercise I might never had undertaken had it not been for the encouragement from Design Tasmania. Then...for a very simple design to win the overall prize was very gratifying – not just for my ego but also a significant boost for my cash flow. The experience has encouraged me to continue to search for further designs and I hope to find another as of equal quality, to satisfy my desire to enter the Award again."

There's a personal connection with Linda's work as she graciously gave my then partner Andrea a Dew Drop necklace, stating it was for her wedding day. So, no pressure Linda, thanks for that, but she did indeed predict the future... And that skill certainly shows in your work. Andi is wearing it tonight, along with her engagement ring from the Design Tasmania shop designed and made by Geoff Roberts...

2010 saw the Timber prize go to Mark Bishop for his Business Card Box. True to say it was a piece that thought outside the box, not defined by the often ephemeral nature of such personal items.

And the 2010 People's Choice Award went to Anita Dineen with her second Awards entry entitled Slice Cheese Knife. Anita gave me this reflection on this and her first Award, and I quote: "I'm so over making the Glide Knives – I've made friggin' thousands of them." Apart from that truism, she went on to say, "I'm extremely fortunate to have developed a barometer now on better product development, the Slice Cheese Knife came out of that understanding and popularity gained from winning in 2009. I want to compete with the best in market. The New York Award for my Cheese Knife, marketed under the Alberto Alessi brand, has been the greatest highlight yet. I will continue to strive to the highest level...until I reach that mark I won't enter in respect of myself and the Awards."

I've come to learn that apparently her Cheese Knife was re-named under an obscure Australian rodent species, but as she came to reconcile with it, realised it sounded pretty good in Italian. Such are the vagrancies and virtues of cultural-centric marketing.

Moving on to 2011 where we saw the overall and the People's Choice Award go to Nathan Freeman with his minimalist, ethereal Liliium Platters, made of porcelain and presented as a stacked form of small plates. It's the one year I recall judges being seriously challenged - challenged to separate a few entries for the overall winner. In fact it was settled days later after further investigation and reflection. I think the process of 'sleeping on it' was put to good effect that year.

In the end we felt awarding a Special Commendation, to what in effect was second and a half place, was appropriate that year. That said, the 2011 Special Commendation went to Linda Van Niekerk with her second Awards entry entitled Drop, Drop Dew Drops. Linda's entry was clearly designed to capitalise on the success of her 2010 Winning entry Dew Drops and to keep the judges on their toes! They were another stunning example of 'extension thinking' to a product that had

already resonated with consumers. It did have us wondering if 2011 would witness the arrival of the Drop, Drop, Drop Dew Drops, that would have no doubt given all involved a headache – but as history thankfully shows, we were spared!

Then in 2012 we added the ‘Innovation Award’ and Furniture Prize’ categories to go beyond the small product theme that we’d relentlessly pursued due to prevailing, challenging market forces up until then. Importantly the Award also changed name from The Tasmanian Design Award to The Design Tasmania Award, to reflect the branding and positioning that gave birth to Design Tasmania as an entity with a level of revered and respected industry support, no doubt partly gained through the Award’s significant reach and influence.

Then in 2012 it was Indeco’s Patrick Senior who won the overall prize for his Nestling Bowls, masterfully formed in Huon Pine. Originally created as a special Tasmanian gift to a Government delegation to New York, the nesting bowls are based on his three-part ladle designs which also nestle together. A true example of clever design extension and re-purposing, executed in distinctive, flawless, crafted perfection Indeco is revered for.

I believe Patrick has entered every year with an extraordinary range of work that has delighted Judges, all works embodying a high-level of intellect and finesse. Patrick, who would normally, humbly, leave his work to do the talking, after some prompting shared this reflection: “I had previously rejected the nestling bowls idea because I like my designs to be totally utilitarian. In any case, I made the effort, and then was fortunate enough to win the 2012 Design Award.”

Not letting him off the hook, I again asked Patrick to consider where he is now, in terms of the Award’s influence on his business. He sent this response: “As we sit here, in our humble workshop, overlooking the beautiful Tamar estuary at Swan Point, as we have done since Indeco’s inception 24 years ago. There’s no doubt the quiet and natural environment assist in the design process. The Design Awards help to raise our profile – both here in Tasmania and nationally and the extra sales provide a wonderful stimulus to the business. I look forward to annual participation

in these awards as I need that design process to help relieve the humdrum of daily production; I also get a kick out of making any jigs that might be necessary for batch production. Thank you to Design Tasmania for its continual support and promotion of design in Tasmania.” Thank you, Patrick, for your participation, skill and inspiring work!

Also in 2012 the Furniture Prize was awarded to Stuart Williams for his Georgette Lamp. The Innovation Award went to Brandon Lee for his Flat-pack Side Table, with the Student Award going to Jamie Dobbs’ Seiza Table 2.

As another student having taken the challenge to enter the Awards, James reflected, “The Design Tasmania Student Award has given me confidence to pursue my particular design path and continuing education. That path will definitely both sustain and frustrate me creatively, physically and intellectually for the rest of my life. For that I am truly grateful.” Welcome to a design-life James. I hope he takes inspiration from his early success.

At this point you may be wondering, where’s 2013? We chose to ‘project’ forward the 2013 results to be ‘date-stamped’ as 2014. Mystery solved! This change was made due to recognising that we announce winners late in the year and this forward-focus would allow future recipients to retail their products for a full year, carrying that year’s badge of honour.

It was also the year Laura McCusker joined the team, with her penetrating eye for detail and uncompromising principles regarding the skills and quality of workmanship required to gain the Award’s recognition. That was put to good use, as in 2014 we saw a very special entry. The 2014 overall winner was Jye Edwards with his ingenious Ted Stool made with Tasmanian Oak.

The Judges recognised the Ted stool as a deeply considered and well resolved piece. Ted manages, in a world seemingly saturated with stools, to create a niche, while presenting a load of personality and versatility at the same time. The stool can stand alone or be used as a side table or in multiples, creating a range of dynamic

furniture objects for home or commercial environments. A clever, contemporary and commercially sustainable product redefining how we think about the humble stool.

It wouldn't be too strong to say we regarded the work as possessing a level of genius that had us wondering about the maker, and the story behind such innovative thinking in action. Wearing my Agency hat we had the privilege to hear that story from Jye first hand, and create a brand identity for TED, to take him to the world stage. We feel we're part of this inspirational story now, an experience I hold personally very dear having spent time with Jye and being drawn to his positive, inquisitive nature.

In contemplation, Jye offered this statement: "For me, entering the Award has been a life changing event! Just being part of the Award was a great introduction to turning a small practice into a proper business. The support and feedback provided, helped make better informed decisions when designing and deciding on business strategies. The Design Tasmania Award will challenge you to think creatively about how designs will work in the real world and then helps promote this unique design strength that Tasmanian Designers hold!"

If that wasn't inspiring enough, let's reflect on where Jye is now. Winning the Award has given Jye the boost of confidence to push himself further and has directly helped him gain work overseas designing for a company in Thailand. That work is to try to find a way to utilise a revolutionary recycled plastic for manufacture.

At this point, I can enthusiastically confirm that David Mayhew, Anita Dineen and now Jye Edwards have all used the Award to launch international distribution and marketing partnerships. A brilliant result for them, the Tasmanian Design industry and Tasmania's broader identity as a smart, innovative, practical population driven to show the world what we are capable of.

It's these personal efforts in producing outstanding product design innovations, that has forged pathways for other Tasmanian practitioners to hopefully follow. There could be no greater motivation than seeing a few appeal to so many.

Continuing 2014 and the Highly Commended Award went to Mabel Design's Dave Boyer with his Wedge Bracelet and Ring, in an intriguing combination of timber and acrylic.

2015 was the year Terri Winter of Top3 fame joined the judging panel. She brought her successful retailing mind-set to strengthen the focus on market appetites and trends, and the product presentation required to meet those opportunities. It was the first time we'd invited a 'mainlander' into our fold and it brought a balance between our own objectives and those of wider markets.

That brings us to 2015's overall winner Scott Van Tuil with his entry 'X' Coat Stand, in Tasmanian Oak. What impressed the judges in this product was it appears minimal and effortless, but in fact it's working hard in every detail of its design to reach its intriguing, transformative functionality. At the heart of this simple, elegant design, is a clever and concealed joinery solution. This enables simple collapsing for easy and economical shipping without compromise to function or aesthetic. With the need for only one bolt to lock and secure the joint, it can be easily 'fanned' out by the user and can safely and confidently bear a heavy load despite its small footprint.

Blink and you'll miss the brilliance, which reminds us that investigation informs appreciation. We certainly wanted to award this product to that principle in both design and practice. Scott is another winner that has engaged with us at the Agency to enable his next step in his journey. His perspective, after winning the Tasmanian Design award, is: "I completed my studies in Furniture Design in 2015 and established my own studio practise in Hobart. I'm continually inspired by our island way of life, and have had opportunity to create work on all scales - from small product through to large bespoke commissions. I'm optimistic about the Tasmanian Design scene and excited about helping raise its collective voice to the rest of Australia and the World."

Also in 2015 a Highly Commended Award was presented to Simon Ancher for his Clipped Wing Stool.

Twelve months on and we added the The Hawthorn Prize. An active partnership that manifests itself as a meaningful community initiative in action.

The 'Veneer' category also added to promote an ever-increasing interest and need for the sustainable use of our natural resource materials. We also saw the trend continue regarding innovative jewellery. We held our breath to see if Linda was going to drop us a challenge (pardon the pun) but instead, there was a twist in the script - we were surprised to find an entry called Drip Drop Earrings. On further inspection it wasn't Linda's, but a new entrant, Megan Perkins whose design had no resemblance to Linda's Drop Earrings, so all good there.

In fact so good, that Megan won the overall prize for 2016 with her unique transition optical lens and sterling silver earrings. Now they are earrings, but not as we commonly know them. When you look closely, they are an exploration of submerged perspectives, that of droplets, bubbles and the refracting and darkening light of the ocean. The design and materials reflect these ephemeral qualities of our surroundings. This product is a head turner, highly intriguing and surprising, fashionable beyond their aesthetic and infused with an ever-changing personality, that in turn projects your own.

An insight to Megan is that she's a graphic designer with a master wood craftsman father. You can see these influences in her jewellery as it seeks to be unconventional and concept driven, considering materials in new, engaging ways with innovative approaches to functionality. Sounds like a great recipe for producing cutting-edge works to me. Megan now works from her studio in The Huon Valley and she sent me this message with these reflections: "Winning the 2016 award has ensured me greater recognition in Tasmania for my practice. That success has led to a more strategic approach to product and production. Ongoing – I will ensure that a number of pieces appeal to specific markets and price points, providing a more accessible offering to complement the existing meticulously made, more labour intensive pieces I offer to existing galleries."

Also in 2016 the Hawthorn and Veneer Prize went to Geoff Marshall, with his highly inventive form 'LV' Conus Floor Lamp, made in Tasmanian Oak Plywood Veneer. Judges were captivated by Geoff's solution - the light is suitable for a variety of commercial and domestic applications and based on his personal design philosophy to achieve aesthetic appeal with everyday functionality. By paring back the familiar form of a shell, he created a sculptural piece that a viewer can engage with on a number levels. The lamp is smart, component-based design; a combination of metal and timber, superbly hand-finished and assembled in a way to ensure both structural quality and artistic integrity.

Speaking to Geoff, he considered his win to be a great stimulus to his journey. "Winning a Design Tasmania Award really helped raise my profile as an emerging designer. Additionally, I was fortunate enough to win two sections of the Award with prize money. I was able to fund a making space and new equipment that enabled me to set myself up to make my designs commercially viable."

And now we come to 2017. I'm excited about the winners to be revealed... in December, of course. I'd like to acknowledge a new judge this year, Dr Zoe Veness. Zoe brings a depth and balance of experience and new perspectives that is needed as the Award continues to grow and develop with ever expanding categories.

It was another year of Judges being challenged to reach agreement. I'm not suggesting conflict - it was more about how to define the difference between contending products, each with their own unique way of reinvention. So watch this space.

Lastly, I'd like to leave you with a defining reality regarding what all this means. We could ask ourselves, what has been the Award's overall contribution in terms of its commercial success, in real dollars and cents?

Sales data at the Design Tasmania Shop, along with other national touch points, show significant results. We've calculated the Award has generated easily over a million dollars in product turnover for a wide range of Tasmanian designers and makers.

That's truly remarkable, and you'd have to recognise that this revenue is mostly 'new' money, as these products simply wouldn't exist without the Award's encouragement and retail support.

On that high-note...

Thank you everyone for your attendance and support of the Design Tasmania Awards. Thank you to the Designers who continue to strive to gain the Award's and market recognition. May they, and all others in our industry, have continued success into the future in the name and pursuit of design excellence. And I wish the Design Tasmania Award another ten fabulous years, in support of that goal.

Thank you.