



NATIVE ABILITY

A set of tools gifted by friends saw *George Harper of Tide Design* take a 180-degree turn in his career. *Annie Reid* visits his Melbourne studio to get the full story.



Clockwise from top left
 » George Harper in the workshop with 'Lyssna' side table (foreground) and 'La Paz' side tables (background)
 » 'Lyssna' side table

Sometimes, it takes years for a native ability to be realised. In Tide Design founder George Harper's case, it wasn't until his mid-thirties that his talent for furniture design revealed itself.

"I just couldn't see myself confined to an office," he says. But, for many years he was, stuck in a desk job in Melbourne and a long way from his hometown in New Zealand. "Then, one day I made a table for my record turntables – something that I needed at the time – and I really enjoyed the process, but didn't think anything more of it," he remembers.

Luckily, his friends did. They banded together and bought him some tools, recognising that Harper had found something to really embrace and explore creatively.

The realisation hit Harper too, and he decided to study furniture design and making at TAFE.

Two years on, he was awarded the prize for best furniture at the graduate exhibition, and Tide Design followed soon after.

Inspired by the softer side of design in the 1950s, Harper's range features high-quality made-to-order pieces, including stools, sideboards, chairs, tables and entertainment units. He works mainly with sustainable timber – sourced mostly

from forests in North America – and output is on a limited production basis. "My style is contemporary, but quite light, elegant, simple and refined," he says. "I love the tactile nature of timber. It has personality traits and each piece is different."

Restrained in terms of aesthetic but still with a touch of character, Harper's work is quietly dynamic and alive. It also imbues an honesty that reflects his personality.

"I'm striving to create furniture that is timeless – but only time will be the judge of that," he says.

After wondering whether his leap of faith would work, he's happy with his current range and the weeks are flying by at his workshop in Box Hill.

"You get the feeling you're on the right path, but it's only been in the last year that I have really gained traction," he says.

Harper has recently employed a staff member and the next step is finding a bigger workshop and showroom. He's also planning to add lamps, shelving and new table designs to his range. "It's a confidence thing, and as things progress, I'd like to push the boundaries a little more. But the core Tide values will remain," he says. ◉

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