

SEPT.
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Living by Design

THE BRIGHT LIFE
**Let natural light
into your home**

ARCHITECTURE
**Innovative ideas
in a nutshell**

MADE IN
MELBOURNE
**Tomcar,
the little big
off-roader**

PET PROJECT

David and Tamara Gorrie
have created a world of
inspired woodcraft

THE SUNDAY AGE

Trendsetter **Furniture**

For the Gorries, a seachange meant a new life and a recycling design venture, says **Sue Peacock**.

YOU DON'T have to be a dog lover to appreciate Brown Dog Furniture. Although it will help you understand what this small Victorian-based, contemporary furniture maker is all about.

The brown dog in this business is Chuck, a 10-year-old chocolate Labrador belonging to David and Tamara Gorrie. His presence lights up the wall of their North Melbourne showroom, juxtaposed against piles of reclaimed timber on a floor-to-ceiling image.

"For us, chocolate Labradors represent strength, warmth and honesty, values that underpin our design philosophy and a belief that furniture should uplift and inspire as well as being a practical companion in a home," Tamara says.

Brown Dog Furniture began life as an online business after the pair, their two young children and two brown Labradors moved from inner-city Melbourne to a remote coastal property at Cape Otway in 2008. It gave them the headspace to finally launch the business they had been thinking about, as well as providing a natural landscape to inspire the creative design process.

For David, who had spent years working in media, it was a chance to return to his country roots and revisit a creative, yet practical pursuit. It was also an opportunity to live more sustainably and build a more rewarding lifestyle for the whole family.

"I had always designed and made furniture for family and friends and I wanted to pursue something which reflected our passion for design and sustainable living," he says.

All of Brown Dog's pieces – from tables to bench seats, magazine racks and bookstands – are handcrafted in south-west Victoria using reclaimed wood up to 300 years old and locally sourced steel.

The timbers include french oak, blackbutt, Victorian ash, jarrah, blackwood, messmate, oregon, redgum and ironbark, each with its own story.

The current collection of dining, side and coffee tables features french oak reclaimed from large, decommissioned wine vats at the Mildara Winery in Mildura.

The timber is matched with powder-coated steel legs in bold colours, giving the pieces a weightless look.

"One thing we have found with using the steel is that it breaks up the wood look, if you already have a timber floor," explains Tamara. "The colourful steel acts as a real contrast."

It is a point of difference that has been noticed.

Clients have come from places as



A blow-up of pet Chuck dominates a wall in Tamara and David Gorrie's Brown Dog Furniture showroom. Right: The contemporary tables are a combination of reclaimed timber mounted on steel legs. PICTURES: SUSAN GORDON-BROWN

far afield as Port Hedland in Western Australia and Stradbroke Island in Queensland, as well as from overseas, with 50 per cent of sales sight-unseen.

Recently Brown Dog was commissioned to provide pieces for the new East Hotel in Manuka, Canberra, Twenty & Six Cafe in North Melbourne and Cervo restaurant at Crown in Melbourne.

According to Tamara, Brown Dog resonates with those who want good-quality, locally produced pieces that have a story behind them.

"When we began there was a lot being done with reclaimed furniture but

nothing that had a modern aesthetic," she says. "People are also looking past things which are disposable, they want something that will last and that can be handed on to the next generation."

For David, forging new relationships with local manufacturers has been particularly rewarding. All the furniture range is handcrafted and custom designed (including colour) for those looking to match a piece to a particular place.

"There is an increasing awareness among potential clients who are attracted to furniture that is designed and manufactured in regional Victoria using



Australian materials," he adds.

The pair is now looking at adding to their range with lighting and artwork. A small showroom will soon open in Sydney. But that doesn't mean Chuck and his younger mate Maurice will be heading north anytime soon.

"Oh no," laughs Tamara. "Cape Otway will always be home. It is where much of our design inspiration comes from, when everything is quiet and you're able to switch off."

CONTACT

■ Brown Dog 9650 8131
browndogfurniture.com