

Tabling the issues

These furniture makers don't lounge around when it comes to sustainability. By Sinead Stubbins

When David and Tamara Gorrie abandoned their busy corporate routine in Melbourne in favour of an eco-friendly life in Cape Otway, they had no idea it would inspire the business opportunity of a lifetime.

With a young family and two chocolate Labradors in tow, this sea change prompted the Gorries to begin their own furniture design trade – appropriately named The Brown Dog Furniture Company.

“It really was that desire to reconnect to the environment that led to Brown Dog,” David says. “I’d always dabbled in furniture design, but it was moving down to Cape Otway that galvanised us to create the pieces.”

Both had experience in design, and the couple aimed to create pieces that, like their pets, were “great to be around” and also reflected the environment they now called home. “The curved legs that we sometimes use are designed on the mountains near our house rolling into the sea,” David says. “They’re not your typical dining room table design.”

David and Tamara’s unique, limited-edition French oak collection is on show this month at the Hogan Gallery in Collingwood. What makes the collection so distinctive is that the timbers used are reclaimed from old Victorian wine vats, with the red wine stains still visible. This “history”, according to David, is a key component of Brown Dog’s designs.

“You can have a piece of furniture that started from an acorn in France somewhere, and then was timber imported into Australia, built into these massive Mildura wine vats which for 10 or 15 years aged some of Australia’s great red wines, and then it comes to us... It adds an extra dimension to it,” he says.

“With the French oak, you only have to drill into it to get this really strong wine smell – it’s like you’ve opened a bottle of red. It makes for good dinner table conversation!”

Using recycled components is a must for David and Tamara, who have previously used reclaimed wood from stables in Western Australia.

The couple are passionately opposed to

the culture of disposability that often accompanies the furniture industry.

“In this age of throwaway [society] we tend to get things and then move on and buy new things all the time,” he says. “To us, sustainability is such an important thing.”

David says the furniture industry is slowly becoming aware of the importance of environmentally friendly production.

“Consumers are definitely now looking for materials that have a great story behind them.” ■

The Brown Dog Furniture Company French Oak collection is at the Hogan Gallery, 310 Smith Street, Collingwood until February 28.

