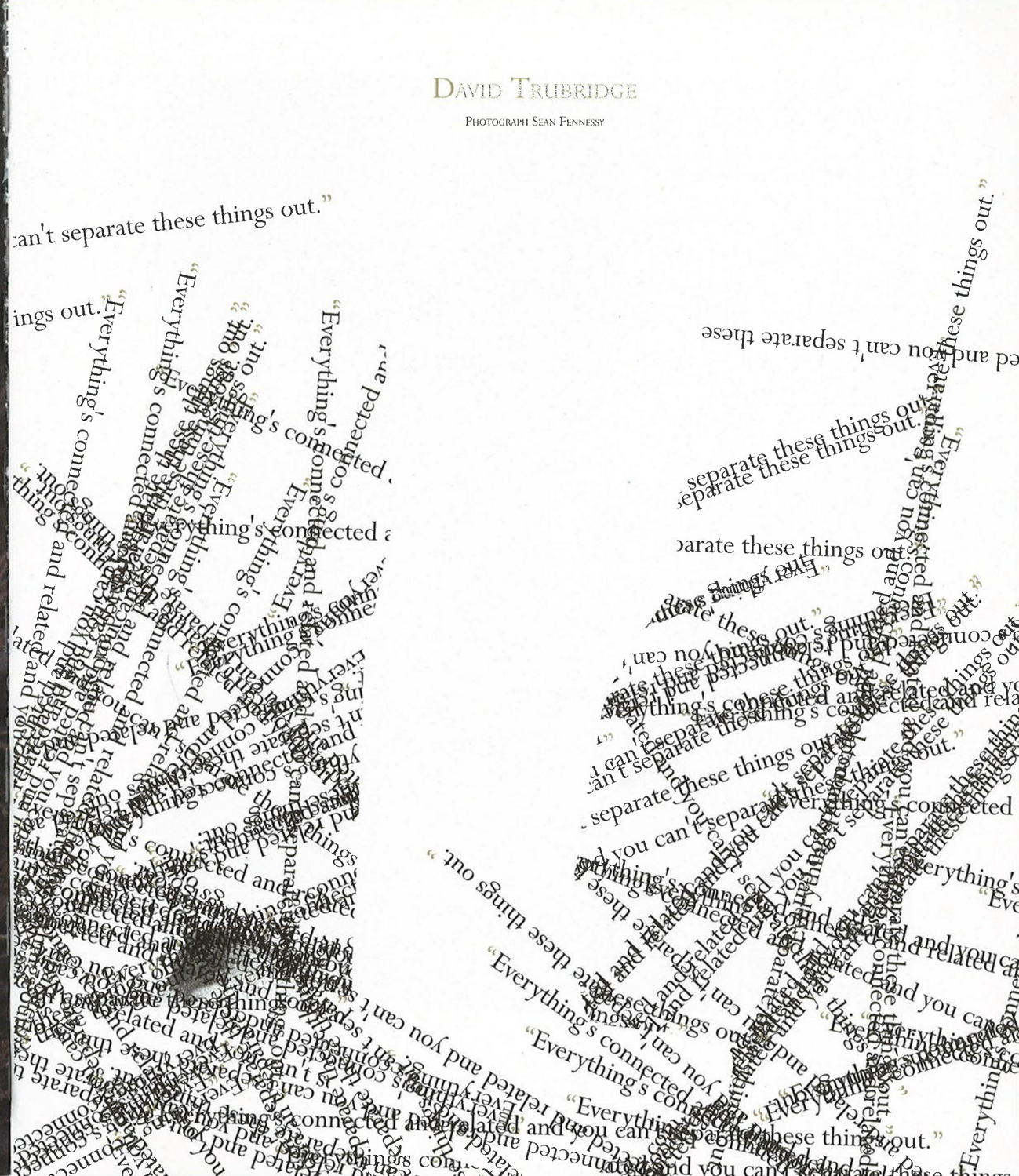
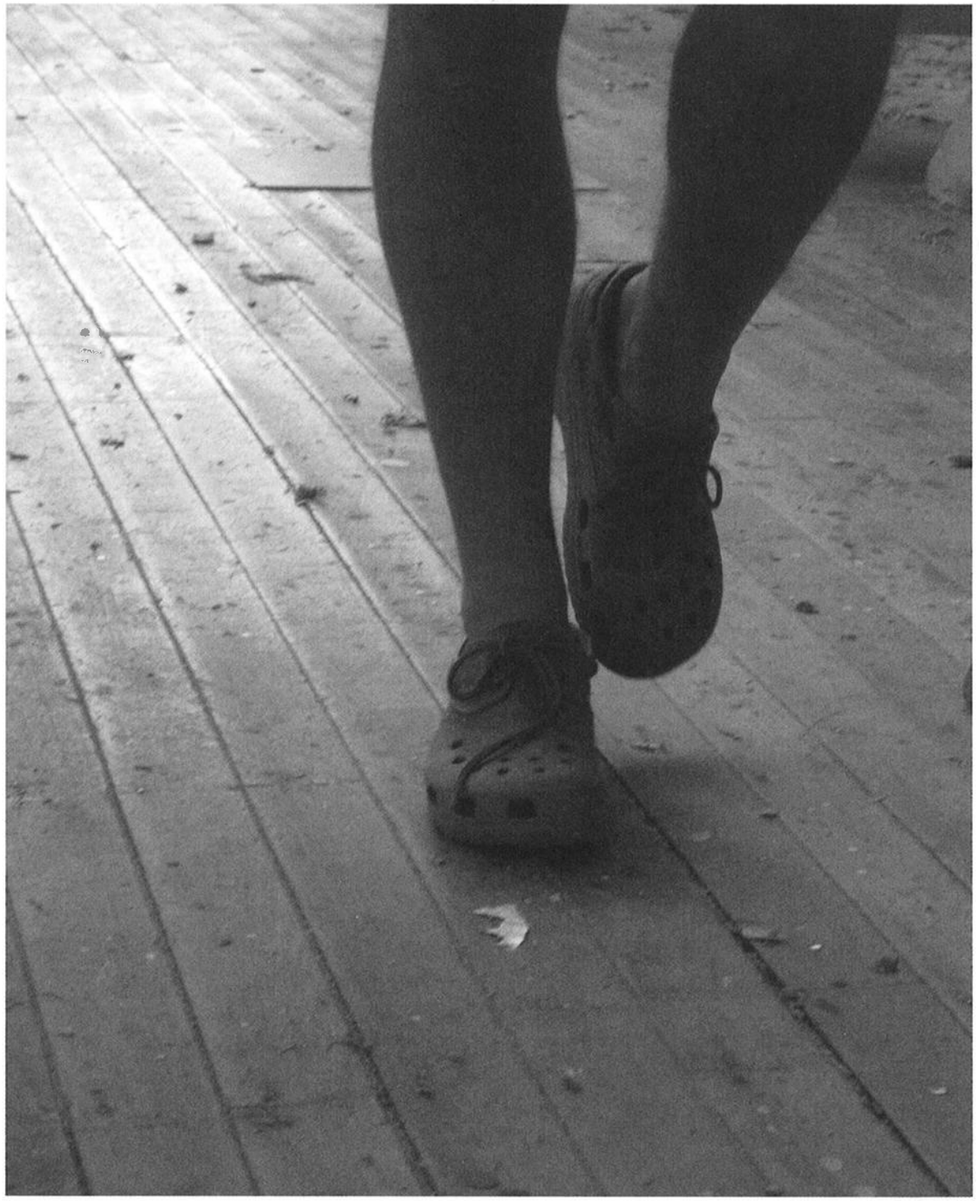
DAVID TRUBRIDGE

Photograph Sean Fennessy





Photograph by Kate Bezar

In 1981, David Trubridge and his wife Linda sold all their worldly possessions, bought a yacht called Hornpipe, and set sail from England. David left behind a budding career as a furniture designer - he'd recently fulfilled commissions for the Victoria & Albert Museum and St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh. They took with them their two small boys and a desire for adventure. For five years they sailed through the Caribbean and Pacific, eventually landing in New Zealand where they've been ever since, and where David has managed to carve out an extraordinary reputation as a furniture and lighting designer. His immediately recognisable lights adorn the chicest of cafes, homes and offices. Here David shares with us his story and ground-breaking ideas that could revolutionise the way we buy and consume design, and in turn significantly lighten the load on our environment ... Df

Df How long have you been in New Zealand?

David About 25 years, since the mid '80s. I think we came in the Christmas of '84.

Df Did you ever think you'd be here that long?

David When we first got here we wanted to leave. New Zealand in the mid '80s was very different, and we were different because we'd just spent nearly five years living on tropical islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific and we'd got used to that very relaxed lifestyle. Coming back into a western, more-English-than-England outpost, having come half-way round the world, we thought, "Oh my god what have we come to?"

Df New Zealand wasn't the intended destination was it?

David The destination was the journey, entirely. We'd spent a year and a half in Tahiti in Moorea, and loved it there, but it's quite hard to live there, we were lucky to stay there as long as we did. Tourist visas are much shorter and it was only because our boys were in school there and the headmaster wrote a glowing report saying,'"We like these people and we'd like them to stay" that the immigration authorities allowed us to.

Df Did you put the boys into schools when you could along the way?

David Yeah, which was great for them. Billy was in the maternelle, the kindergarten, and Sam was in the primary school and they had to speak French. The Tahitian kids didn't speak French either, so they were all in the same boat. The one form of communication they had was drawing so Sam used that a lot – he'd draw pictures for people.

Df How old were they when you left England?

David Four and one and a half. They're relatively easy at that stage because when you're that age whatever happens is life. You don't question it, you just go along with it. If today you're on a boat, then that's what everybody does isn't it?

Df Was sailing halfway round the world something you'd dreamed about doing for ages?

David Yeah I'd loved sailing but I'd only ever sailed around the coast and I'd done one trip down to the Mediterranean from Britain.

It was always my dream to go across an ocean.

We had a sailing boat in England for a couple of years, a little catamaran in the Irish sea which was quite dangerous and not very satisfactory. It was also 50 miles away so we were driving all the time. We realised that these two lives were totally incompatible, it was one or the other and we'd done the other one for a bit, so thought we'd try the sailing one.

Df It's one thing to have the wonderful, romantic idea of setting sail for destinations unknown and quite another to actually do it, to uproot everything ... I suppose you probably didn't think you were leaving for good either.

David No we didn't, it was very much an open-ended thing. If we had, it would have been much harder. It made it easier to leave to say, "We're just going on a trip."

Df Did you leave much of a career behind?

David Not really, I took it with me pretty much ... It was my toolbox and ideas. In New Zealand you do tend to be put through your paces a bit more ... People don't accept you for what you say you've done in the past, you've got to prove yourself again. That's very much part of New Zealand culture which, like all those things, has its good and its bad sides.

Df But it wasn't furniture design you were doing back in England was it?

David I was making furniture yeah. I'd trained as a Naval Architect at university and at the end of that I had the choice of going and working in a shipyard in Belfast or Liverpool, or doing something else. It was the early '70s, lifestyle-option time, and the thought of living in a town was hard enough. It was more about creating your own lifestyle first and then building things around that. So the first thing we did was to find somewhere to live in the country which was nice and then the rest came along afterwards; the making and woodwork.

Df Was that something you'd grown up doing?

David I was creative in that sense, but when I was at school I was more interested in painting very Turner-esque landscapes, quite representational. I used to make things, models. I used to collect used matchsticks along the promenade by the South Coast resorts where we lived and make model boats out of them. We never bought games; we'd copy them and make them. So I've always been like that. When we bought and renovated a ruined house in central Northumberland, in Northern England, a lot of

it was that 'make do', rather than buy everything, attitude.

The same kind of spirit carried on, but it was now translated onto a bigger scale into buildings. So rather than buying new timber we'd go to shipwreckers' yards or demolition yards and get timber and reuse it because the timber was better quality timber and we wanted to do a really good job. That way of thinking, which grew out of building the house, became the way I've always worked; caring for materials and only using good quality ones, and recycling, and only building to last. All those qualities. That's the way houses had always been built in England, they didn't build these tacky wooden ones that fall apart in 50 years. They'd build them to last and we followed along with that without really thinking about it. I think things come round and we've been through this time of excess and we're coming round to that way of thinking again now. Those values are becoming much more important.

Df It is about being frugal, but it's also about being careful with resources.

David Frugal is the result, but I think it's wrong to see it as being frugal. It's because you care. I can't waste things because I care about where they come from, the people who made them and all the rest of it. I don't want to just be offhand about that and throw stuff away. It's more about caring than a parsimonious attitude that is small-minded.

Df There's a very positive intention behind it, rather than a negative one.

David Our parents who had gone through the war really had to make do. Left over from that was this rather mean attitude towards things which was understandable given what they went through. Now, seeing it in a different light, it becomes much more important.

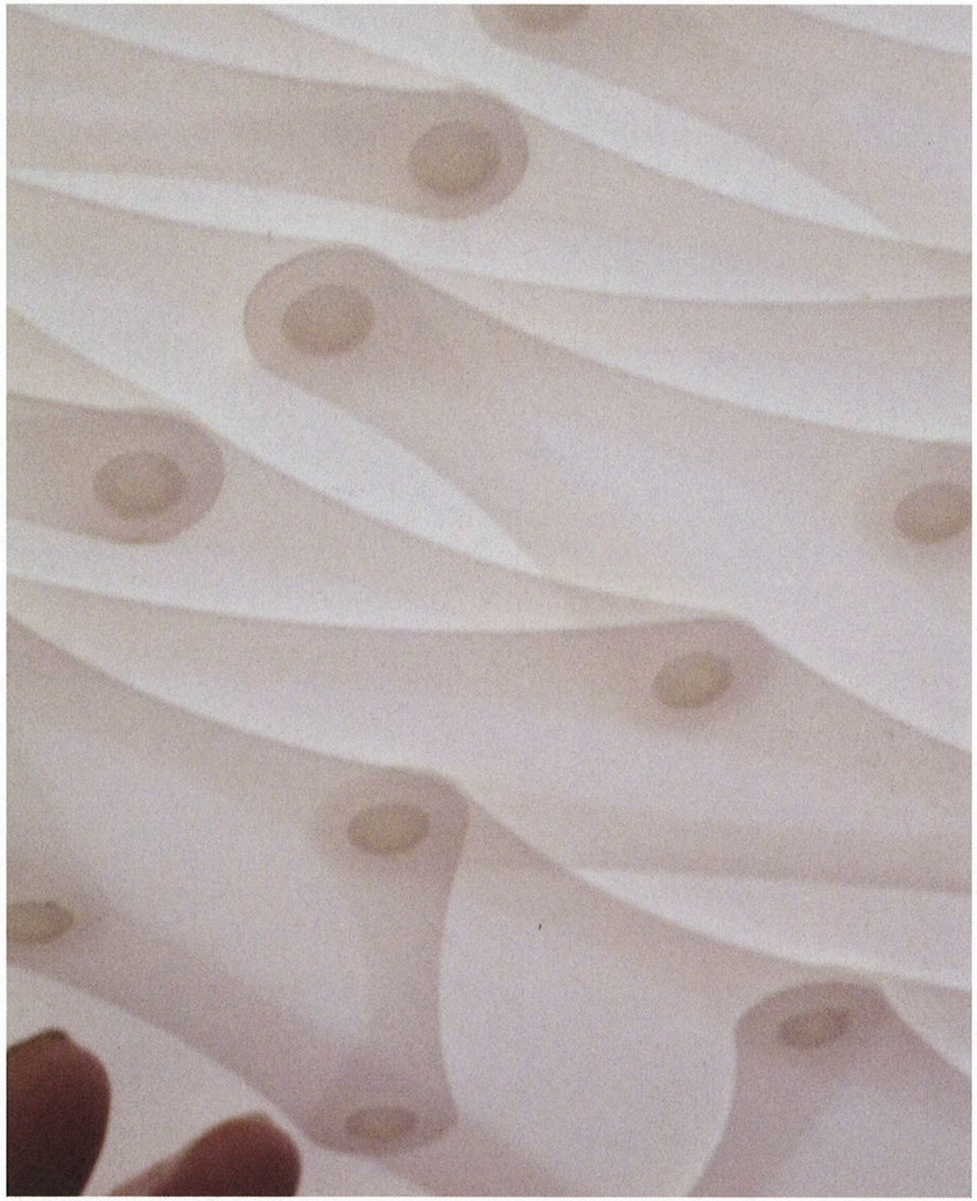
Df Perhaps, if for the past 50 or 60 years we'd been a bit 'meaner' then we wouldn't be in quite as much strife as we are.

David Yeah, or a bit more caring, to the point really. That's where I think craft is so important, because

embedded in craft is the model of caring.

It's not producing stuff to sell, to make a profit, to keep

Photograph by Kate Bezar



Photograph by Kate Bezar

*Shedding new light

David Trubridge believes that stories are vital to nourish and spread wisdom. His most recent lighting installation 'The Three Baskets of Knowledge' (on display during Milan Design Week in April and New York in May) was created to feed the minds, bodies and spirits of those who were lucky enough to experience it. He hoped it would give them something to think about, to connect them to nature, and to nourish them spiritually. David drew inspiration for the installation from one of the ancient stories of his adopted homeland, New Zealand.

THE STORY

In the mythology of the New Zealand Maori, after the creation of the earth and life on it, the demigod Tane was sent up to the heavens to receive the knowledge that mankind needed to live on earth. The ascent was a great struggle against adversity, but once he was admitted into the heavens he was given the knowledge1 in three baskets or 'kete'.

✻Kete Aronui contained knowledge of the earth and the natural world, which is for all (body).

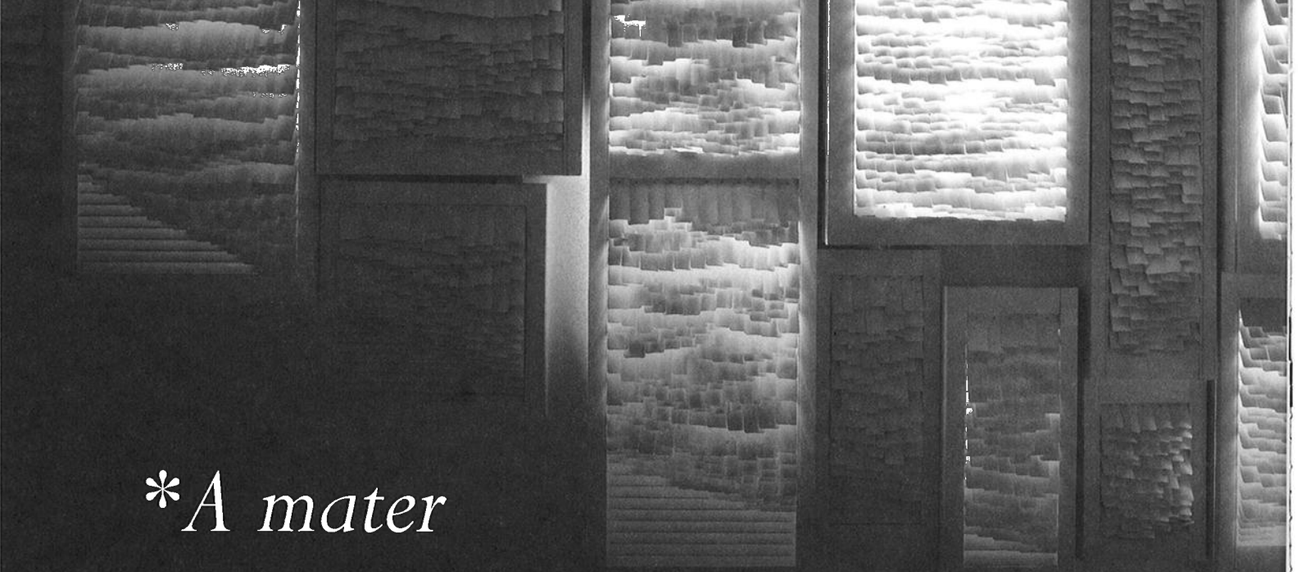
✻Kete Tuauri contained our rational knowledge, which we keep for ourselves (mind).

✻Kete Tuaatea contained knowledge of the spiritual world, which we give out for others (spirit).

These three need to be in balance to live harmoniously on earth. Currently our rational knowledge is dominating our spirit and empathy for the earth. This installation suggests a redress to a balanced state. The three lights shine equally on the earth, overlapping at the centre in harmony.

1. Descriptions of the contents vary, depending on the telling, and are freely open to interpretation.

Image courtesy of David Trubridge Designs



*A material world

By Judith Abell

I have discovered a beautiful material and it's hanging in a sunroom near you (for a limited time only).

Aluminium venetian blinds. The wide ones like Nan and Pop used to have, maybe even those with blushing pink or sunny yellow on the curved underside, bestowing a cheery glow.

I've been working with this material in my art practice for a couple of years and I love its thin, curved flexibility, its mix of stiffness and pliability, and the ease with which I can cut it, score it, drill it or sand it to make jewellery or large scale art pieces. Layer upon layer form a feathery cladding and the blush of the underside is revealed when the lighting is right.

Aluminium blinds are just one material lining my jam-packed studio. I collect, consider and wait for the right (re)purpose to emerge. The materials are often recycled, sometimes industrial, usually simple and generally not considered glamorous or special. Sometimes the pieces just rest together, the slightest bump breaking the connections established. I look, touch, bend, stretch, suspend and test in order understand the innate qualities, but the material is always the guide. Touch is important throughout, as the making must be, in itself, a satisfying experience. What I strive for are moments of transformation. The works take time, sometimes many months and, as they build through a process of slow accretion, a relationship develops.

I have many art heroes whose approach is similar. In the early 1940s, Anni Albers made jewellery from anything she could find in the chemist or hardware store; strainers, bobby pins, corks, paperclips, rubber rings. I adore my Albers necklace made from 12mm galvanized washers cleverly woven with red ribbon. In the '60s Eva Hesse explored prosaic materials like wire, washers, rope, plastic tubing, magnets and pegboard. Her works are layered with conceptual meaning, but I also see in them the results of intelligent, compulsive play. Closer to home, Australian Rosalie Gascoigne obsessively collected, arranged and processed material scavenged from her local area. Some of her best known works are constructed from sliced yellow and black road signs, with the realigned pieces forming rhythmical, abstracted landscapes peppered with fragments of text that catch the light like cats' eyes.

As an artist, I enjoy being part of this heritage that considers that anything any material, irrespective of how commonplace, can harbor beauty and the seeds of creative reuse.

www.judithabell.com

'Shutter' 2008. Judith Abell. Reused timber louvre doors, reused aluminium venetian blinds, medium density fibreboard, paint, flourescent light. 8m X 2.5m. Photograph Peter Whyte

the shareholders of the business happy. It's making stuff because you want to make it, and you care about making it, and you use the best materials and processes because you want it to last. It's innate in craft that you care. I think that is really important, that we should elevate it more and give it more attention and place in our lives.

Df At what point does it not become craft and become industry? Is it when you've got twice as many guys down there working for you?

David I don't think it's a question of numbers, it's what's driving it. Why does the company want to sell the goods? The bind we've got ourselves into over the last 10 or 20 years of this consumer binge is that the companies making things are making them not because we need to buy them usually, but because they need to sell them, and not only sell them but increase sales of them. We've got this insane addiction to growth which is impossible. People talk about 'sustainable growth', well hello, it just can't happen, it can't go on forever. It's like we're in this situation where the whole consumer thing is a pyramid scheme. For sure, it's creating more wealth at the top of the pyramid, the nearer you are the more obscene the wealth, but like all pyramid schemes, it can't go on forever. It's just redistributing wealth and there comes a point when you run out of stuff to redistribute and the bottom becomes more and more empty. We're now seeing the limits of that and it requires a very uncomfortable change and shift in our values and morals. I'm finding it as hard as the next person. I still do most of the things I do, knowing that I actually can't go on doing that.

Df And you're trying to run a business here.

David That's the other part to it. I myself could go and live in a cave, or a bach [a New Zealand holiday house] or whatever and have minimal impact. That'd be great, but it's not solving the problem because what do the other people do who had employment from me?

We can't all go and do that because there aren't enough caves or wild boar

or whatever you need to live off.

The dilemma we have is to find a way to maintain employment and lifestyles for people, but do it in a way that doesn't require the massive resources that we currently do. That's a design issue. That's where design becomes so important. It's much easier, at least I hope it is, for young designers coming through with a new kind of training to go straight into that change. My training is, well it's not so much my training because I taught myself mostly, but everything I've done over 30 or 40 years of work has become embedded. My thinking and my way of designing is all about aesthetics and emotional experience, more towards the art end of the scale, whereas design is seen more as problem-solving. That's the way designers are trained now and that's what we need to solve our problems. Not to solve the problem of how to make more money for the big businesses at the expense of the rest of us, but how to solve the world's problems of the inequities in the way people live and the fact that we're using resources at an unsustainable rate. Up till now, designers have been used, every year, to design a new product to make it look different, not because there's a need for it, but to make you lust after this new one which you don't really need, and that's the problem. If the resources to supply that were there, and if everyone had the opportunity to get it, then that would be fine, but the problem is they aren't.

Df In relation to your work, and what you're doing here, what are some of the things you do that you think help address some of those problems?

David In a way there's quite a gap between what the business is doing and what I'm thinking and talking and writing and lecturing about. I'm trying to bring them together, but that is the dilemma. As far as the business is concerned, I take the stance that I don't claim to be an eco-designer because I think that word has become tarnished with a lot of greenwash. People have called me that, and I don't mind to an extent, but I certainly don't want people to think that because I'm an 'eco-designer' that everything I do is green, because it's not. It's as green as we can make it, but it's still causing pollution, it's still using resources

and it's not completely sustainable. We do what we can and all the time are trying to improve it, but we're still essentially selling stuff which is giving work to the people here. We pay to recycle things, we try to use the best materials we can, we limit the amount we use, we don't use big volumes of materials, we try to create maximum effect with the smallest amount, and more and more we're trying to ship lights as kit sets. In all the calculations I've seen of embedded carbon or energy in a product, the bulk of it is shipping. Particularly for us here that's a massive issue. You can have a very sustainable product, like bamboo in China, but by the time you've brought it here and then taken it to Europe, it's actually become a very unsustainable material. Whereas if that bamboo was grown where it was used it'd virtually be perfect. So the shipping is the problem. The practical side is to think, well what are people buying when they're buying one of our lights? You can buy a basic light from Harvey Norman or Mitre 10 for a few dollars that gives you light, but they're not buying that, they're spending a lot of money on something that's quite different.

What they're buying is an experience, a connection to an artist, a connection to nature

through the patterns, through the timber, some sort of emotional experience, something that will last and keep longer. So how can we supply those kinds of experiences without the object, is that possible? Music does that beautifully. Music is brilliant because you can download it. The thing itself is a completely virtual thing you can ship around. We obviously can't do that with our designs, but one of the things I've talked about with a few people in different parts of the world is building a network of manufacturers so that, rather than me shipping stuff to Italy and Italians shipping stuff to New Zealand, we make each locally. I'd send files to them and they'd make my stuff there, and vice versa, so that all the materials and energy is as localised as possible. That certainly improves things a lot. We could use the digital internet worldwide communication thing to get a bit closer to that music model.

Df And is this where the rapid prototyping machines come in?

David Yeah. That's an extreme ... We don't have that, we just have a computer-controlled router which cuts the shapes out of plywood for the lights, and they're everywhere and relatively cheap now. There are people who can do that ...

Df Anywhere, as long as you supply them with the pattern?

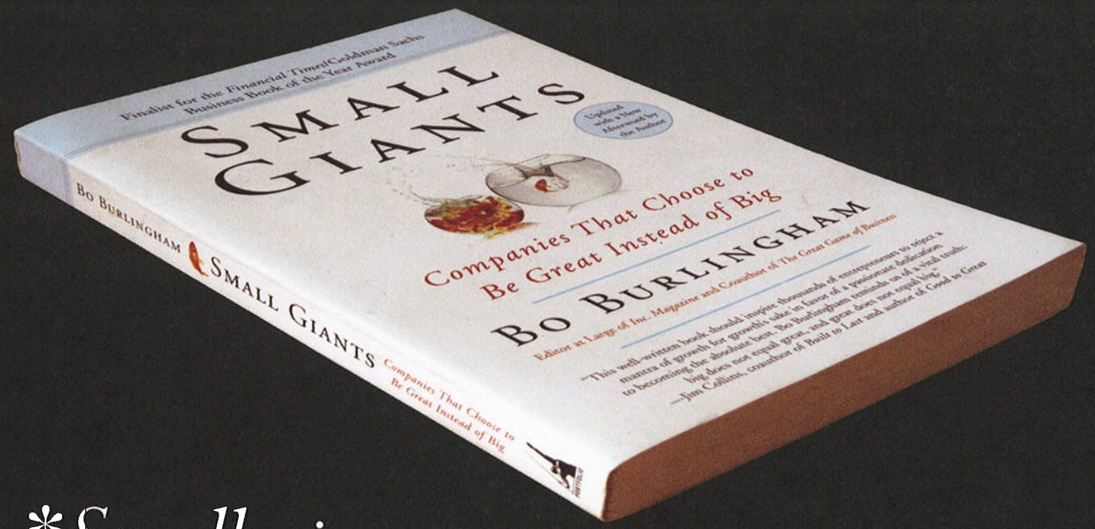
David Yeah and you can send that by email. Maybe, not so far in the future ... You think about how quickly computers have developed from being big ugly boxes to, well, cellphones almost. It won't be that long before rapid prototyping machines are like a printer on your desktop. You'll be able to go onto your computer and go, "Oh I like David Trubridge's designs of mugs, I'll have a set of those." You'll pay a few cents, or whatever it is, for the design and somehow, which we haven't quite worked out yet, that's enough to only make six. You plug it into your desktop and put a bit of old plastic you've got lying around from something else, and the machine spits out your new mugs. Those are the sorts of things that can begin to solve some of our problems. It's a mixture of technology and thinking ...

Df And innovation.

David And giving up some of the things we've had and valued and really like, but unfortunately can't go on doing any more. That requires quite a big shift which is not easy to do. I find it as hard as anybody.

Df How do you think living where you do has shaped some of that thinking? Is there something about being in New Zealand and being in Hawkes Bay has influenced that?

David I think it's a chicken and egg, which comes first? In England I lived in the Pennines, up north in the hills, 50 miles from Newcastle, so I've always kind of ... I can't live in a big city, so in that sense it has to be somewhere like this. Then, having made that choice, those places feed you. If I was working in Europe, or Moorea, or here, or wherever,



*Small giants

By Kate Bezar

Sometimes the pressure to grow, to be bigger, to achieve 'scale' can be exhausting, especially when you're 5ft 4" (at a stretch) and the notches stopped moving up the door frame about 15 years ago. We live in a society that most definitely sees big as better. Just today there was a news story about research showing a strong positive correlation between height and pay. On the weekend I read an article about parents injecting their 'normal-sized' children (at great expense to their pocket and child's sanity) with human growth hormone. And, a couple of weeks ago the story broke of a Queensland councillor who had spent $40,000 to undergo nine months of radical cosmetic surgery in Siberia to lengthen her legs.

Height isn't the only aspect of life in which more is seen as better. In business too, the prevailing attitude is that growth is good. Because business media is dominated by stories about publicly-listed companies, and the imperative for listed companies is to grow (both sales and profits), the common perception is that growth is critical for all businesses.

In his book, *Small Giants*, Bo Burlingham argues that it's time that we stop seeing the world so myopically and embrace the concept that greatness does not necessarily equal bigness. Burlingham believes that, "quietly and gradually - under the radar, as it were - a new class of great companies has been forming. The companies don't fit comfortably into any of the three categories we normally put businesses into; big, getting big, and small." Yet, "they are all utterly determined to be the best at what they do." Often they have "had the opportunity to raise a lot of capital, grow very fast, do mergers and acquisitions, expand geographically, and generally follow the well-worn route of other successful companies. Yet they have chosen not to focus on revenue growth or geographical expansion, pursuing instead other goals that they consider more important." How refreshing!

These companies have had to remain in private hands so as not to be at the mercy of external shareholders' interests, and instead best meet the priorities of their private owner/s. Those priorities may include maintaining a balanced lifestyle, wanting to remain hands-on and providing outstanding customer service. Burlingham calls such companies 'Small Giants'.

Growth hormone injections and leg extensions aside, there is little chance I could be taller even if I wanted to. I do have more choice however in how I run my business. My business, a (rather stumpy) magazine with an identity crisis, might just prefer to stay small and in doing so have a much bigger chance at being the best it can be and achieving greatness.

the place feeds you. If you're working through the art process - which allows you to accept those influences and to channel them through your work - automatically, by default, your work has a flavour of that local area you're working in.

It's not something you can identify, it's not a contrivance, it's sort of like a grape.

The flavour of a grape gives the wine a different flavour. It could be the same grape that comes from France or Australia or here, but where it's grown gives it a very different flavour due to the local climate, soil, weather. Artists absorb those influences locally which affect their work in some way.

Df And being in this part of the world poses its own particular logistical challenges as you mentioned, so some of those issues around carbon miles are further exacerbated by being here.

David That is a big challenge. Also the access to materials, processes, technologies ... If I lived in the middle of Europe and was a designer I could design a lot more variety if I wanted to in terms of different ways of making things and access to multiple factories that can do things in large volumes which we can't do here. So, by default, the kind of things we make have a certain sense or look to them which is based around that form of construction which is available to us. I'm happy with that. Sometimes it gets frustrating because you want a part or something, it's in the catalogue but, "Oh no we don't have those in New Zealand", and you've got to order them in and it'll be six months.

Df Sometimes it's those constraints that force you to be the most creative.

David Yeah. Wood is a very easy, versatile material you can use everywhere.

Df You're starting to move into other materials too aren't you?

David We are, for the lights mostly we're using plastic. I'd much rather use wood because it's a material you can relate to much more, but all the wood off-cuts we have to throw in landfill. You can make them into bricks and burn them, but there's no-one here who does it and shipping them up to where there is a brick-making plant is too much. So basically we can't recycle the off-cuts of wood, but plastic you can and at the end of the object's use you can do the same.

Df Isn't that ironic, that plastic, which we've always thought of as one of the most offensive materials, might in some ways be one of the least.

David It has the potential to be, but then how do you factor into that equation the other qualities of wood; its connection to nature and its soul - if you want to call it that ***(see page 95 *Shedding New Light)***. You can't put that into the numbers. What percentage of the appeal of the wooden object is that?

Df So is it still a bit of an experiment at this stage?

David Yeah. When you're working with light there's a limit to what you can do with wood because it's opaque, whereas with translucent plastic you can overlay pieces and build up quite interesting patterns which is quite lovely ***(see page 96 *A Material World)***. I'm not really sure at this stage what the market response is going to be to that. A lot of what I've achieved so far in terms of awareness of the brand has been through wood and it could be a danger that we're going in the wrong direction.

Df Your work does have an amazing level of recognition around the world. Is that due to you getting on your bike and shopping it round?

David Yeah, though I dearly wish it was a bike and not an aeroplane! I've been to Milan every year since the first time I went in 2001 and that's really important. The consistency is more important than anything. Your reputation's built on a number of things, not just on one. You've got to prove your commitment by being there each year and

by coming up with new ideas that show that you are thinking.

Df Has anything else helped?

David Well the internet. There's no way 50 years ago I could have done it. Everything came together in around 2000, the internet, the computer for the drawings and going to Europe. All of those things at once opened up doors.

Df And was that when your business expanded to be more than just David?

David Yeah.

Df Which European manufacturer was it that first picked up one of your designs at Milan in 2001, was it Cappellini?

David Yeah, that was the turning point.

Df Was that the first time you'd ever been over there?

David I'd actually done a show in London about 18 months before called 100% Design. That was the first big overseas trade show I did. It was easier in an English-speaking country first to understand how these things work. I took things I'd handmade myself, sort of craft pieces, to that one and I was surprised by the response I got from Italian manufacturers and people who saw me,

not as a crafts-person, but as a designer. At that point I was borderline,

still straddling both camps, but I then developed the designs more into things capable of being produced in a production way. There's a guy in the States who's also making pieces using the steam-bent forms of sticks over a frame like I do, but he's using that sort of work in a much more complex, one-off, handmade, craft way ... Each curve is completely different.

Df So Cappellini picked up that one product to license ...

David Initially we made the first batch for them here and sent them over in a container while he was supposedly getting his system up and running, then the slump that followed 9/11 hit Italian manufacturers. Americans stopped ordering for six months and suddenly they really got into hard times. A lot of factories closed down and Cappellini nearly went bust and they were bought by Poltrona Frau, one of the big companies, and in the process a lot of their catalogue got shrunk. They were making a couple of other pieces [of mine] at that point, but they dropped the other two and just kept the Body Raft one. I thought that would start other licensing agreements with other companies, but I don't know if the nature of the work is not what they want or that the distance is too great and that there are so many good designers locally that they ... The perception of distance from there to here is far greater than from here to there. So that never really worked out. I also found that I could have more control of what I was doing if I was making it myself. If you have to fit in with other manufacturers and design to their 'look', you spread yourself around a bit, whereas just designing for us to make here, you retain the integrity of the work. In a way, although the sales are obviously far, far less and the name's less out there, it's far more satisfying doing it that way ***(see page 100 *Small Giants)*** and more appropriate to living here.

Df Until you get these production hubs going anyway.

David Yeah.

Df Is the business still growing at the same rate?

David No, it's shrinking at the moment because of what's happening, but up until this time last year it was great, it was growing really fast. Before Christmas we laid off quite a few people and dropped right down. We've picked up again now, we're busy for the next couple of months, pretty full on.

Df I'm surprised it's had such an immediate impact. Have people cancelled forward orders?

David Things were sort of falling apart even before the banks went crazy. A lot of what we sell is retail, through shops, kit sets.

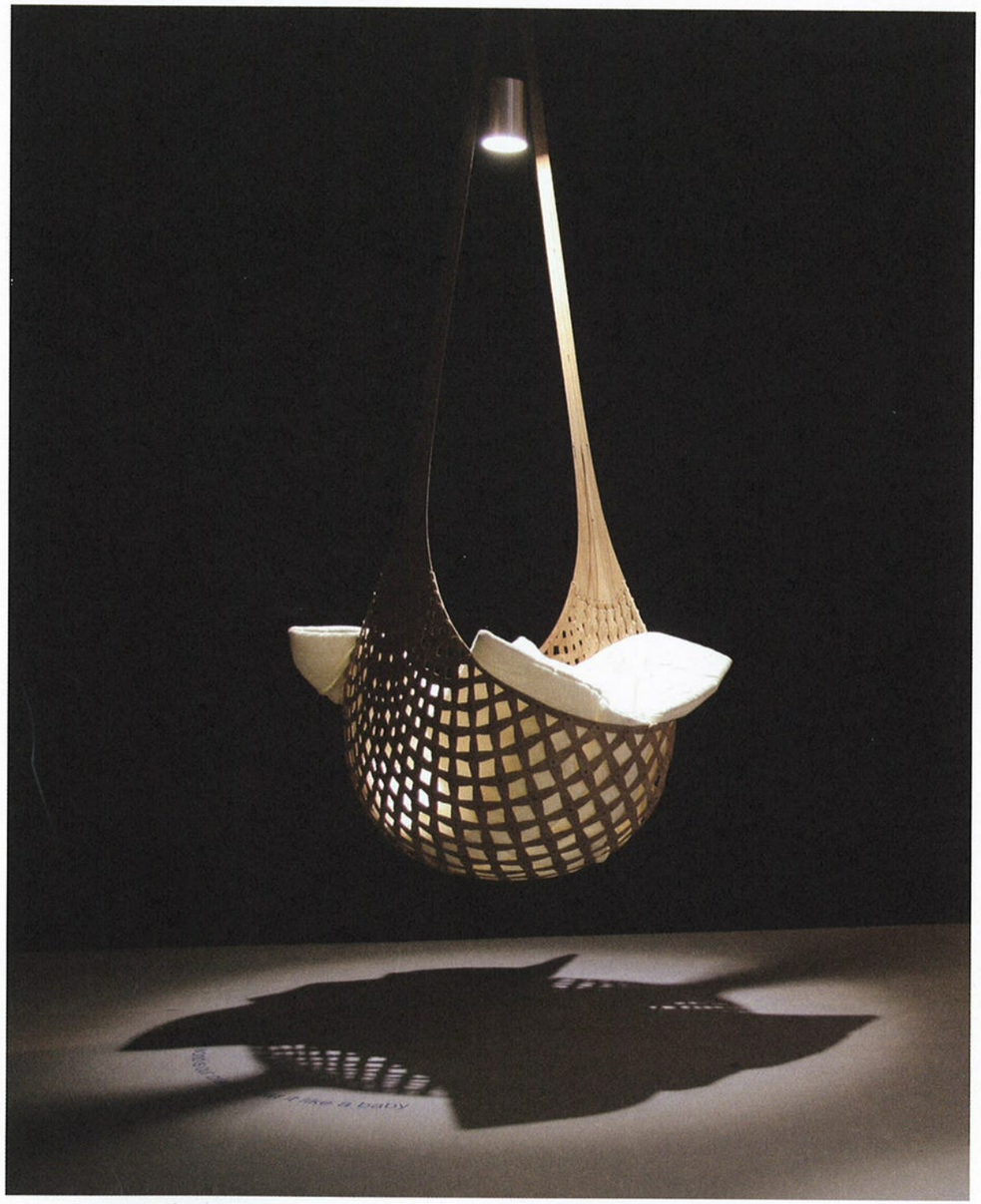


Image courtesy of David Trubridge Designs

Photograph by Kate Bezar

There was a company in Auckland selling our stuff that went bust and I lost a lot of money - that hurt. What we're doing more now are the big commercial contract jobs which have longer time spans. Maybe in the future they'll drop off, but hopefully the retail will pick up before that happens. I expect this year to be tough.

Df Batten down the hatches and ride it out ... Where is your biggest market?

David We've just been looking at that, Australia and New Zealand. Australia's doing really well for us, particularly Melbourne. There's a big company there, Studio Italia, who sell heaps for us in Melbourne. Sydney and Brisbane too, those three. There's a company in Brisbane I work with called Urban Art Projects. They're great guys and do some amazing stuff.

Df The twins. We profiled Daniel [Tobin] in *Dumbo feather* about five issues ago now. What do they work with you on? Do they commission you to do public art projects?

David What they do is pitch for big jobs and for those projects they will show the client a selection of artists they can use, and then the client will pick one or two. We're doing some outdoor aerial light-sculpture forms for KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology) in Saudi Arabia. It's pretty grand.

Df When I interviewed Daniel, that project was still very confidential and he couldn't really talk about it, but he was so excited about the potential for getting a lot of artists involved.

David We're also doing a thing in Culver City, Los Angeles, for them. So yeah, they're doing really well. We just had four designers from Brisbane over here last week on a bit of a road trip. They came and stayed at our bach for a night and then came down here and gave a public lecture in Napier. We're trying to build that connection and do more things together because it's quite nice to share different experiences and what we've got in common and learn from that.

Df Is there much of a design community in Hawkes Bay?

David Yeah. A few years ago

I started a design incubator here because I was getting approached by a lot of graduates wanting ways into the business

and wondering how you get into it when you go to a company saying, "I want a job" and they say, "Well, actually we want someone with some experience, can you come back in a year." "Well ok, but where do I get the experience if you won't give me a job?" There's obviously this big gap between design school and work, and we tried to help fill it by giving them a place to work while developing their own ideas alongside what we were doing here. They could see what we were doing and learn from that. We gave them a bit of contract work as well which helped with cashflow and helped us having other people to help out. Unfortunately that had to close through a surprising lack of demand, but it bought quite a few people into the area and they've stayed and have their own businesses in one way or another.

Df So are your boys New Zealanders now?

David Yeah probably but they'd both call themselves 'citizens of the world' because they travel a lot.

Df So that spirit of being on the boat never really left them?

David I don't think so, I think once you've had that very open experience ... The older one, Sam, is based in Wellington, he's in theatre. He designs and directs multi-media theatrical experiences with dance and video and music and live Skype connections even. He's got a small company of people which he's put together who help put the shows on. He travels a bit, he went to the Prague Quadrennial last time it was on and he gives talks at universities as well, lectures and reads papers ... The last performance he designed, started in England and then came here and then went back to Italy. He took

*The seven chakras

By Kris McIntyre

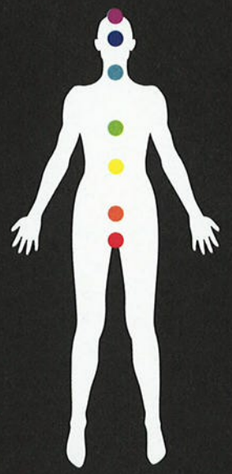
When I moved from Sydney to Cape Town in South Africa it took me a while to work out that I was energetically out of kilter. Initially I thought it was just good old-fashioned culture shock. I was used to the feverish buzz of Sydney but Cape Town had a different beat. It wasn't until a friend told me that Cape Town's iconic Table Mountain had a strong energetic relationship to the planetary chakras that the penny dropped. The city's vibrational energy was different to where I'd come from – I'd moved to a different part of the earth's 'body' and I realised I had to shift gears to adapt. That experience of the earthly chakras also helped me understand the concept of chakras within the human physical body (which despite my yogic training I had always somehow struggled to comprehend).

'Chakra' is derived from the Sanskrit (an ancient Indian language) for 'wheel' or 'disc'. In Yogic philosophy, it is thought that the human body has hundreds of wheel-like vortexes that channel energy culminating in seven major chakras that sit between the base of the spine and the crown of the head. Each chakra is considered to represent a specific organ, hormonal system and vibrational colour as well as emotional and spiritual aspects of ourselves. Like the moving parts in a car engine, the chakras are interrelated so when one chakra is out of sync it can create an imbalance in the whole body - usually felt on a mental, emotional or physical level.

There are many different techniques recommended for balancing the chakras including specific meditation, visualisation, pranayama (breathing) and yoga practices such as the Tibetan Rites (also known as The Five Tibetans). Thought to be more than 2,500 years old, this system of exercises was first publicised in 1939 by Peter Kelder in his book, *The Eye of Revelation*. Kelder recounts the story of a British army colonel who was taught these five exercises by the lamas he lived with in a monastery after retiring from his post in India during the 1930s. The Tibetan Rites (combined with the appropriate diet and meditation) are credited with improving overall health, strength, flexibility, digestion and mental clarity.

For The Tibetan Rites visit www.mkprojects.com/fa_TibetanRites.htm

For information about the Earth's chakras visit www.earthchakras.org/



Chakra	Sanskrit name	Location	Colour	Element	EmotionalQuality	Earth Chakra
7	Bindu	Crown	Violet	None	Bliss	Great Pyramid, Mt Sinai, Mt of Olives (Egypt)
6	Ajna	Brow / Third Eye	Indigo	None	Intuition	Table Mountain (South Africa)
5	Vishuddhi	Throat	Blue	Ether	Communication	Glastonbury, Shaftesbury (UK)
4	Anahata	Heart	Green & Pink	Air	Love	Lake Titicaca (Bolivia)
3	Manipura	Solar Plexus	Yellow	Fire	Willpower & anger	El Tule Palenque (Mexico)
2	Swadhisthana	Navel / Spleen	Orange	Water	Sexuality, creativity	Mount Shasta (USA)
1	Mooladhara	Base of spine	Red	Earth	Physical Security & Fear	Haleakala Crater (USA)

the basic structure of the performance and then used Italian actors rather than import them, so it had a whole different flavour. It was the same basic story, but rooted in the local environment. The younger one William lives in the Bahamas and he's a free diver, trying to make a career out of it, which he's managing. It's not easy but he's doing all right. The whole key for him to be able to do that was to get a world record and he's now got two. That means that people are prepared to spend money to train with him there. Linda, my wife, is also an artist. She's been a part of the creative side right from the start because she is a sculptor and has a lot of input; just discussing and helping with ideas. It's nothing you can out your finger on but it's enormous over time, that effect. She does her own ceramic art part time, and teaches art part time and teaches yoga part time.

Df How much teaching would you do now?

David I do quite a bit of one-off lecturing and that's quite important to me. I'm even going to a local school in a couple of weeks because I think it's really important to give them some of those ideas they're not getting anywhere else. The only teaching I do is the Vitra Summer School in France.

Df So where else to next?

David Personally my dream over the next year is to write a book. I've started it and I thought I had a publisher, but I think he's not so keen any more.

Df He's stopped returning your calls?

David Well, I'm not sure why he's gone off it, I probably need to look around again. I wanted to tell the story of the physical travels and the artistic travels as two separate journeys overlaid. I want to show that the things I'm saying and what I'm trying to put across about design now are not a 'Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus'. It's not like I suddenly realised, oh hell we've got to do sustainable design,

it's what I've always done. It's not an idea that just comes out of the ether,

it's your life. Everything's connected and related and you can't separate these things out. When you're working as an artist, everything has to be involved and connected; where and how you live are all part of that story.

Df They're fundamental beliefs that govern how you live your life rather than the latest fad you've picked up on?

David Yeah.

Df It's not just about putting an 'e' or 'eco' in front of your business name, I agree. As you've been writing it, have you uncovered or realised anything that you hadn't before?

David I've got an ongoing lecture, I've got a number of them, but one's the story of the different things I've done in the past, a number of designs, placed in the context of where we were working or other influences. Half the pictures are of my work and half are the story around them. As I built that over time, added to it and changed it, I realised that there's a very clear structure to it that relates to a fundamental part of yogic/Hindu philosophy; the kundalini and its chakras. You've got this energy course up your spine and situated along it you've got these energy points that rise up from the bottom one to the top one – there are seven of them ***(see page 106 *The seven chakras)***. Each stage along the way of my working life relates perfectly to those chakras. The first one is Earth and that was in England when I was working part of the time as a forester. I did a lot of building with rocks, an old stone house, but absolutely based in the landscape, absolutely grounded. The things I was building in that Earth phase were very earthy, Henry Moore kind of organic forms, not trained design, but instinctive responses to the timber and the environment, not chunky but quite solid. The next one is Water and that was when we sold up and got on a boat. In that phase I'd broken free from the surface of the

land and was now moving. The structures became lighter and more flowing and respect that sense of movement ... Boat forms came up a lot in the furniture. It's interesting also that the symbol for the Earth chakra is a square, so that's the Stonehenge sort of solid building, and the symbol for the Water one is a crescent moon which is the boat form. Then the next one is Fire and that was a phase I went through when I came here. I took a year off when we first came down to Hawkes Bay and I was artist-in-residence at the local art school/polytechnic. I went back to trying to develop that first part of the design process, an understanding of what

the Maori call 'turangawaewae' which means the place where you stand and where your heart is.

To them it's also related to genealogy and their ancestors, but it doesn't need to be. I was finding a way to develop what I felt about the landscape into a vocabulary and a series of forms which could then become my building blocks for design. To me it's really important that I went through that stage because that is where your integrity comes from. If you don't start design through that phase and you just start shuffling around shapes and lines for the sake of it, why? What's the story here? It's just like you're putting square legs instead of round legs because that's the fashion or something. That period was learning about the art part of the process where you're developing your vocabulary from your own source. I was connecting back into the landscape and having spent a number of years in a boat sailing I had this idea that land was back where it was solid, yet we'd come to this area where there's earthquakes and you're suddenly aware of what's underneath, this fiery molten mass and volcanoes. So all those things came into my work. Colour also, I used a lot of colour. Then Air, so now we're into real light ... The structures have taken off from land onto the water and now they're in the sky, they're really lightweight lights, floating. Then the fifth chakra is the throat one which is Ether, the element. It now has no form at all, it just has ideas, stories, books, lectures, communication ...

Df And the intellectual property behind designs, rather than the structures themselves.

David Yeah. So it fits perfectly.

Df How amazing to be able to look back and see that structure flowing through your life and work.

David Yeah. Also, the main thing about the whole yoga principle is balance. You have to have all of these things there all of the time. If any of them are too strong or too weak then the balance is upset and there's blockage and you don't get the flow of energy right. If you can maintain the balance then it's working well.

Df Do you practice yoga as well as Linda?

David No I don't, only vicariously. My equivalent is going up a mountain or going wind-surfing or something. I get the same, well not the same, but that's my way of getting something.

Df I think everyone has a different way of accessing that meditative state of flow.

David And connection with yourself in some way too. You have to keep that connection there, especially if you're working as an artist.

Df Did you find that connection easier here in New Zealand, and in Hawkes Bay? Is that why you stayed?

David There is a physical space here that I love, but it also has a metaphorical aspect or component to it that allows you to think much more expansively. In Europe there's so much pressure from everything that's happening around you and all of the other people doing stuff that you're aware of. There's this pressure of history, of what's been done before, the way things are done, the forms, the bureaucracy, the structure and what's expected of people. All that creates this glass box around you which is quite hard to break out of. Here those glass walls are much further out and I love that.

Photograph by Sean Fennessy during 'Design Island' 2009, courtesy of Arts Tasmania