

20
minutes
with...

Angus Ross

F&C talks to award winning furniture designer Angus Ross whose company works to deliver exceptional craftsmanship and thoughtful design

Prior to working as a furniture maker Angus graduated with a degree in industrial design and during the 1980s, designed for high street brands Mothercare and Boots. He has worked within manufacture of injection moulded plastic products and then retrained in practical furniture making at Rycotewood College, Oxfordshire.

At Angus Ross the ethos is to combine thoughtful design, exceptional craftsmanship, personal service and the company's Scottish heritage whether the client is buying a stool or commissioning a piece of large scale public art. *F&C* decided to find out more about the man behind this successful company.

F&C: What are you working on at the moment?

Angus Ross: In the workshop we are making a private commission for a dining table and set of eight chairs, and a further set of 10 dining chairs. I am in the early 'seeking inspiration' phase for a speculative one-off exhibition piece to take to 'SOFA -Chicago' in November, and I am currently at the research phase of a public art project with our local community school – it's great to be doing something more local after many years of public art projects all over the UK.

F&C: Why did you become a furniture maker?

AR: I trained in industrial design and worked as a commercial product designer in the 1980s, specialising in the mass manufacture of injection moulded plastic products for high street brands. I decided to retrain as a furniture maker as it would allow me to design and make my own work.

F&C: What inspires you?

AR: I am inspired by structure – as in the arrangement of, and relations between the parts of something complex. But design is 95% perspiration and 5% inspiration and my design ideas develop through lots of thinking about the context and functionality of a piece. I am always looking for ways to improve doing things – for example, my 'Unstable Stool' adds movement, and improves the ergonomics of sitting on a stool. Inspiration also comes through exploration of techniques; I am currently fired up about steam-bending!

F&C: What do you admire in the craft at the moment?

AR: The sculptural steam-bent installations of Matthias Pleissnig.

F&C: Who has been your greatest mentor/role model?

AR: Generally I admire and am inspired by people who think – Thomas Heatherwick, and Tomoko Azumi spring to mind. Matthew Burt has been a role model.

F&C: What comes first, design or technique?

AR: I can't disassociate the two; design influences technique and technique influences design. But thinking is key.

F&C: Are we too obsessed with outdated modes of work?

AR: In order to run a business making bespoke furniture, making efficiently is key. So I won't do something in a laborious way if I don't have to.

F&C: How or where do you exhibit your work?

AR: We have an online portfolio on our website with examples of public and private commissions and



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batch produced pieces. We attend local shows and attend at least one major exhibition a year in London or internationally. We are fortunate that Craft Scotland is very proactive about attending international shows at the moment.

F&C: How comfortable are you with working at someone else's design?

AR: I don't.

F&C: What's your creative process like?

AR: It is difficult to verbalise but I am always thinking about how things are made. Design ideas sometimes come quickly and sometimes require a lot of time but I like to combine creative thinking with practical making. Being absorbed in making allows ideas to develop subconsciously. Walking is also helpful.

F&C: Do you consider yourself an artist or a craftsman?

AR: A designer.

F&C: What's the practical process you undergo when moving through the stages of a project?



'Fishing Platform', one of a series of sculptural fishing platforms with integral seating made from steam-bent Perthshire oak for Canterbury Council

AR: Sketchbook to models to detailed drawing and, if it's a new chair, a full size mock-up. I cannot stress enough the importance of models and model making as fundamental to the process of design and the best way of presenting work to clients. Model making is a skill that is very underestimated.

F&C: Do you think furniture making is in danger of disappearing?

AR: No. There are people with a genuine love of wood and there is always a demand for exclusive products, the one-offs and the unique.

F&C: What advice would you give to someone starting out?

AR: It is going to be very difficult at the beginning but have a vision and stay true to what you want to do and don't get sidetracked for commercial gain. It also helps to have a working and supportive partner!

F&C: What irritates you about the industry?

AR: Lack of good quality innovative thinking and too much obsession with craft details. *F&C*

'Y Writing Desk' has an ergonomic top which is supported by legs created from sliced and steam-bent lengths of solid local oak. The 'Unstable Stool' rockers are single lengths of bent oak or ash



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