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Internationally-acclaimed New Zealand-based designer David Trubridge says we don't need 'iconic' designs, we need a way to fulfil people's needs without creating waste and pollution

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HK\$48
US\$18
€15

Inspired by both land & sea

Internationally-acclaimed New Zealand-based designer David Trubridge talks about making things with a better world in mind

TEXT:

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PHOTOGRAPHY:

Bill Hedges, Gotyaphoto; courtesy David Trubridge | www.davidtrubridge.com

Englishman David Trubridge has strong connections to both the ocean and dry land. In 1972, he graduated from Newcastle University with a degree in naval architecture, then worked as a forester in rural Northumberland, where he taught himself how to make furniture.

In 1981, he sold all he had and bought a yacht named Hornpipe. He then set sail through the Caribbean and the Pacific with his wife and two young sons before arriving and settling in New Zealand in 1985, where he was inspired to set up his eponymous furniture and lighting design business.

In 2001, fortune shone on the hardworking craftsman-designer when Italian furniture house Cappellini bought the production rights to his Body Raft bench after seeing it at the Salone del Mobile Milan. This was followed by international recognition for his 2004 Coral light, which became the blueprint for his innovative and sustainable Seed System lighting kitset series.

Trubridge's commitment to the environment led to a 2004 Antarctica Arts Fellowship programme, where time spent in the fragile environs of Antarctica increased his environmental sensitivity – the guiding force behind his work. In 2008, he was named one of the world's top 15 designers by French magazine *Express*, and in 2012, his installation *Icarus* became a permanent exhibition at Paris' Pompidou Centre.

On the subject of need versus wants, Trubridge's thoughts on the home furnishing industry today aren't particularly flattering – there is too little true innovation, for a start, but there is a lot of manufactured hype, "where we are being duped into believing that our wants are the same as our needs".

"As I see it, the industry needs to sell things more than people need to buy them, and that is not healthy. We need new and effective solutions to the problem of how to fulfil people's real needs without being responsible for the creation of waste, pollution, resource depletion and exploitation," he says.

"This is something we need far more than 'iconic' designs."

That said, there are some who are getting it right. Among the designers who Trubridge feels are addressing needs in positive ways is clothing and sports gear company Patagonia, known for its environmental focus, and whose business ethics he says he has always admired.

“ We are being duped into believing that our wants are the same as our needs. As I see it, the industry needs to sell things more than people need to buy them, and that is not healthy ”

David Trubridge has come a long way since he sold everything he owned in 1981 to head for New Zealand by way of the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean on a yacht named Hornpipe



"Yvon Chouniard's book *Let My People Go Surfing* has been a big influence on the way I run my business," he says. "Patagonia has pumped lots of money into saving wild environments from excessive development and raising public awareness for nature conservation."

Trubridge practices what he preaches – or, as the saying goes, puts his money where his mouth is, designing innovations such as the Seed System kitset lights to help minimise the environmental footprint. Initially drawn to designing lights because they offered more sculptural freedom and

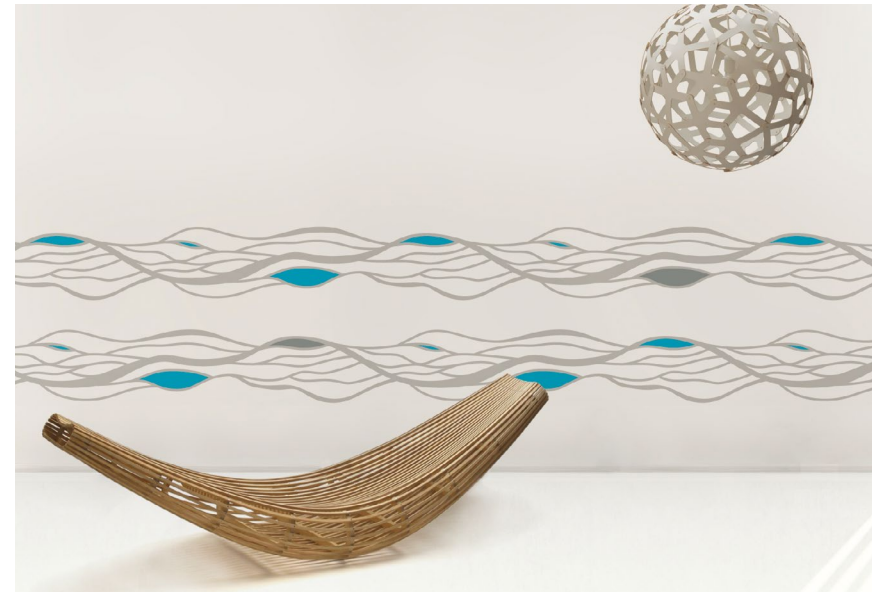
expressive opportunity than furniture – and the profit margins were also better – he discovered that freighting pre-assembled lights was too expensive in both monetary and environmental terms.

"We commissioned a Life Cycle Analysis with assistance from Landcare Research which confirmed this. So we decided to sell them as kitsets, flat-packed like a jigsaw puzzle for the owners to assemble themselves in their own home or office," he explains.

"By doing so, we reduce our carbon footprint in freight and shipping. Because the consumer is



Seen here are some of Trubridge's sculptural luminaire designs, including Coral, Floral and Koura, all inspired by nature



Above from left

Sydney-based graphic design studio Bleux translated a collection of Trubridge's hand-drawn sketches into a range of applications for use as wall coverings and glass textures — seen here is the Sand Lines design • The Floral light was designed three years after the Coral, both being based on geometric polyhedra forms



involved in the construction of their purchase, the item's emotional worth increases."

On the subject of 'greenwashing', Trubridge is pragmatic. While it isn't ideal, at least those companies guilty of this practice realise that being green matters: it's a step in the right direction, he says. "Unfortunately, some of them make big claims about some green aspect of their operation, while hiding other not so green aspects. When I make purchases I look for an honest label and not some loud distracting claim.

"What my company does is tell the full story – the good, the bad and the ugly – because I believe that honesty and openness are important. We do this with Environmental Product Declarations, which give consumers all the information they need to make up their own minds."

His advice for young designers hoping to make beautiful things, sustainably and responsibly, is simple. Don't be distracted by the need to fit in with all that is going on around you, but of course remain aware of it all, for a start. Then, avoid following fashion, because if you do, you risk being dropped as fast as the trends. Most of all, never cease to care.

"Believe in yourself, be honest and maintain your integrity – there is only one of you in the world, and that is your greatest asset." ●

Below from left

Trubridge helped create Nightlights, New Zealand's first design-led tourism experience, in which visitors can explore Rotorua's majestic redwood forest after dark, illuminated by the lights created by Trubridge in his workshop • The Life Raft bench (centre) is constructed using a similar method as boat building techniques, resulting in a statement indoor seating piece

