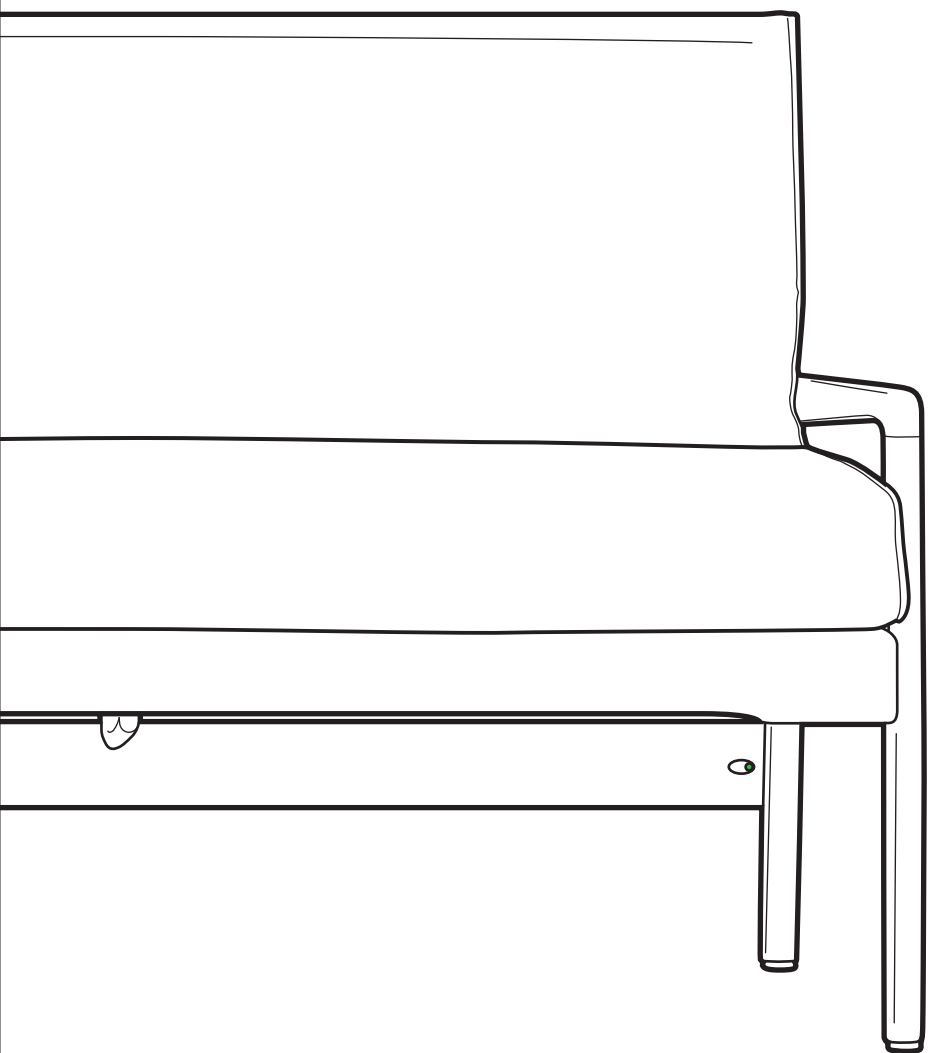


THE PAST.



THE PAST.

MODERN DESIGNERS AND MODERN FURNITURE

“...OPTIMISM, ENERGY AND EXCITEMENT...
CHARACTERISED AUSTRALIAN FURNITURE DESIGN
IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY...INNOVATIONS
IN MATERIALS AND MANUFACTURING...ENABLED
THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW AND OFTEN RADICAL
FORMS OF CONTEMPORARY FURNITURE...”

Kirsty Grant (ed), *Mid-Century Modern: Australian Furniture Design*, Melbourne, Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014, p. 2.

TH BROWN & SONS



TH Brown & Sons established by Thomas Brown and originally known as Brown Brothers Wholesale Chair Manufacturers commenced making and supplying chairs in South Australia in 1911. For much of the 20th century they were based in Mile End with a significant manufacturing facility covering approximately 1.5 hectares by the mid-20th century.

Thomas Brown's youngest son, Peter Brown joined the business following WW2. Drawing on his experience in drafting and design, he was responsible for the creation of the iconic furniture pieces manufactured by TH Brown in this period. The dining chair was first designed for commercial use as a boardroom or office chair but its elegant spade back and runner-less legs became so popular it was soon released as a dining chair. The chair was available upholstered or with a woven rush seat.

Peter and his brother Napier continued to expand the business until 1987 when Peter, then CEO, retired and sold the business which remains today as Workspace Commercial Furniture, a leading manufacturer of commercial contract furniture still based in Melrose Park Adelaide. Peter Brown's son Simon has recently re invigorated the TH Brown brand in partnership with Workspace reissuing a selection of their classic pieces from the mid-20th century.

T.H. Brown & Sons P/L *dining chair*, designer: Peter Brown (circa 1960)
Hilton and Mile End South, South Australia
Teak frame, bentwood backrest, upholstered seat
Courtesy of Paul Gerard, Realm Furniture

T.H. Brown & Sons P/L *dining table*, designer: Peter Brown (circa 1960)
Hilton and Mile End South, South Australia
Teak
Courtesy of Jane Lawrence

LEO CONCI & SONS



Leo Conci established a concreting business in Brooklyn Park following his migration to Australia. The family-run business soon produced formed steel door frames and balustrades which they also manufactured from their Brooklyn Park factory. The balustrades lead to planters, garden light fittings, and decorative items and eventually to steel-framed furniture.

The Conci family were remarkable innovators. They designed and built their own tooling and were early adopters of the latest technologies from Europe such as electrostatic paint spraying.

The iconic (and in Adelaide, almost omnipresent) small mesh chair was designed by Leo's teenage son Dino in 1959. Like all Conci pieces it was manufactured in Brooklyn Park where the family made everything from the tool making to the upholstery.

Conci continues today as a furniture retailer at their original site in Brooklyn Park.

Leo Conci & Sons *outdoor setting*, designer: Dino Conci (1959)
Brooklyn Park, South Australia
Expanded steel mesh, enamel paint
Courtesy of Simon Trnovsky

FLER CO & STAFF (SA) P/L



Fritz (Fred) Lowen is one of the icons of Australian furniture design. A Jewish refugee from Germany who was forcibly expatriated to Australia on the notorious Dunera cruise turned prison ship in 1940.

He established a design and drafting career producing hand-turned table ware and established a business with Ernest Roderick. Their business, FLER - named for the partners initials, manufactured table ware and self propelling pencils under the 'Easy Glide' brand. The pair branched into furniture in the late 1940s supplying the Myer Emporium with chairs designed by Fred Ward. After visiting the Festival of Britain and Scandinavia, Lowen designed the Narvik range that utilised the Scandinavian methods of knockdown construction but still with a handcrafted appearance.

FLER had developed significant manufacturing capacity in Melbourne and in 1959 Lowen's brother Howard moved to Adelaide and bought a small furniture manufacturer in Edwardstown which went on to become the most profitable and successful in the group. FLER had factories in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane and was Australia's first national furniture manufacturer.

FLER Co & Staff (SA) P/L *Narvik daybed and chair*,
designer: Fritz (Fred) Lowen (1961)
Edwardstown, South Australia
Teak, woollen upholstery
Courtesy of Paul Gerard, Realm Furniture

MACROB

Macrob manufactured furniture in Burford Gardens (now Dry Creek) in the mid to late 20th century. Their wall units, room dividers and bar units are highly sought after by mid-20th century furniture collectors yet the history of the design and manufacture of these popular items is not well documented.

The free-standing room divider and the wall unit tells a story of the popularisation of modernism through furniture pieces that were used instead of solid walls to divide open space. The unit speaks of space efficiency and the embracing of new technologies, particularly in-home entertainment such as lighter smaller music devices and television.



Macrob wall unit, designer: Macrob (circa 1960)
Burford Gardens (Dry Creek), South Australia
Teak
Courtesy of Paul Gerard, Realm Furniture

KERBY

Kerby was a furniture manufacturer in St Marys about whom very little is documented. The sideboard chosen for this exhibition has Scandinavian modernist references: horizontal proportions; the appearance of handcrafting through elegant built-in handles; and a set-back undercarriage. It floats in space and talks of order and cleanliness.

A very deliberate move away from the cluttered china cabinet, these types of sideboards were widely manufactured to support a sparer and more curated approach to the display of objects in the home.



Kerby (SA) Ltd *sideboard*, designer: Kerby (circa 1960)
St Marys, South Australia
Teak
Courtesy of Paul Gerard, Realm Furniture

ER NOBLETT & SONS



ER Noblett & Sons were one of a significant cluster of furniture manufacturers based in the West Torrens area of Adelaide, alongside the Perry Furniture Company, Robb Furniture, Wraight Furniture, South Australian Plywood Limited, Walker Furniture Manufacturing, and TH Brown and Sons.

The nesting table as a typology is emblematic of the period demonstrating flexibility in space usage through furniture pieces that are lightweight and adaptable.

Noblett produced dining chairs, tables, sideboards and iconic nesting tables in the Scandinavian style in the 1950 and 1960s. They produced furniture throughout the 20th century until they ceased trading in 1999.

Noblett Furniture P/L *nesting tables*, designer: Noblett (circa 1960)
Richmond, South Australia
Teak
Courtesy of Paul Gerard, Realm Furniture

THE COLLECTORS.

MODERN DESIGNERS AND MODERN FURNITURE

“COLLECTORS OF MID-CENTURY DESIGN ARE A CURIOUS BREED. I OFTEN WONDER WHAT POSSESSES AN INDIVIDUAL TO COMMIT BOTH TIME AND MONEY TO THE PURSUIT OF FINDING AND OBTAINING ARTEFACTS FROM THE PAST. PERHAPS IT’S THE THRILL OF THE CHASE THAT LEADS MANY OF US TO SUNDAY MARKETS AND GARAGE SALES WHILE OTHERS ARE SLEEPING; OR IS IT LONGING FOR A PLACE AND TIME THAT EMBODIES THE MODERNIST IDEAL OF A BETTER TOMORROW MADE POSSIBLE BY GOOD DESIGN?”

Dean Keep, ‘The Collector Collecting the past: memories of mid-century design’, in Kirsty Grant (ed), *Mid-Century Modern: Australian Furniture Design*, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014, p. 76.

The curators are grateful to the collectors who have supported this exhibition by so generously making their pieces available:

Paul Gerard, Realm Furniture
Jane Lawrence
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