



Paul Wilding. Period of search

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It is a great thing, and a rare one, for an artist to continue treading new ground, and it is even greater, and more rare, when the artist has caught the advertising world's fancy with his particular style, and can go on repeating himself, remaining a general favourite, and earning substantial reward.

In the late 1980s, many financial inducements were offered to Paul. *"There was no tempting me, only my vision of my place in art was absolutely clear - I'm in search of a world stage, but it wasn't in promoting products. I wanted to preserve my independence, and integrity - so necessary to my freedom as an individual, and more importantly spend my time finding my art."*

It was time to prove to himself once and for all, what he had long suspected, that there was no pleasure to be gained from a triumph of this kind, and neither public, nor critical acclaim in advertising meant a thing to him.

Background

Paul Wilding was born in 1962, and grew up on a farm in Wharepapa South - a small, rural community south of Te Awamutu. At age four, his family moved to a dairy farm in Okoroire, and when he was 13, they moved to the city of Hamilton.

In 1980 he trained for two years as a graphic artist in an advertising agency. Following that, for the next ten years he freelanced in both Hamilton, and Auckland, as a creative visualiser, working on various accounts, including Maserati, Renault and Moët. Over time, Paul lost interest in graphic design; the challenge of 3-dimensional design called strongly.

In 1986 while in Auckland, he began extending his design ideas beyond graphic art, and started developing his own ideas, which included modern furniture - his first furniture assignment was the Metier executive chair.



COVER IMAGES Left: Paul Wilding, 1995.

THIS PAGE Bottom left photograph: Okoroire homestead.

Top left farm photograph: Wharepapa South.

Top right chair illustration: First sketches of Metier, 1987.



Above: Views over Okoroire farmland. A favourite campsite is situated on this farm.

3.



In 1988, Wilding manufactured, and marketed a range of leisure clothing based on the 'Original' 1905 All Blacks uniform. With new business partners, the range was expanded, and in late 1990 the Prime Minister launched the new range. All Black greats Michael Jones, John Kirwan, and Buck Shelford personally endorsed the range.

In 1991, an Italian company was granted license to the rights to manufacture, and market the clothing in Italy.

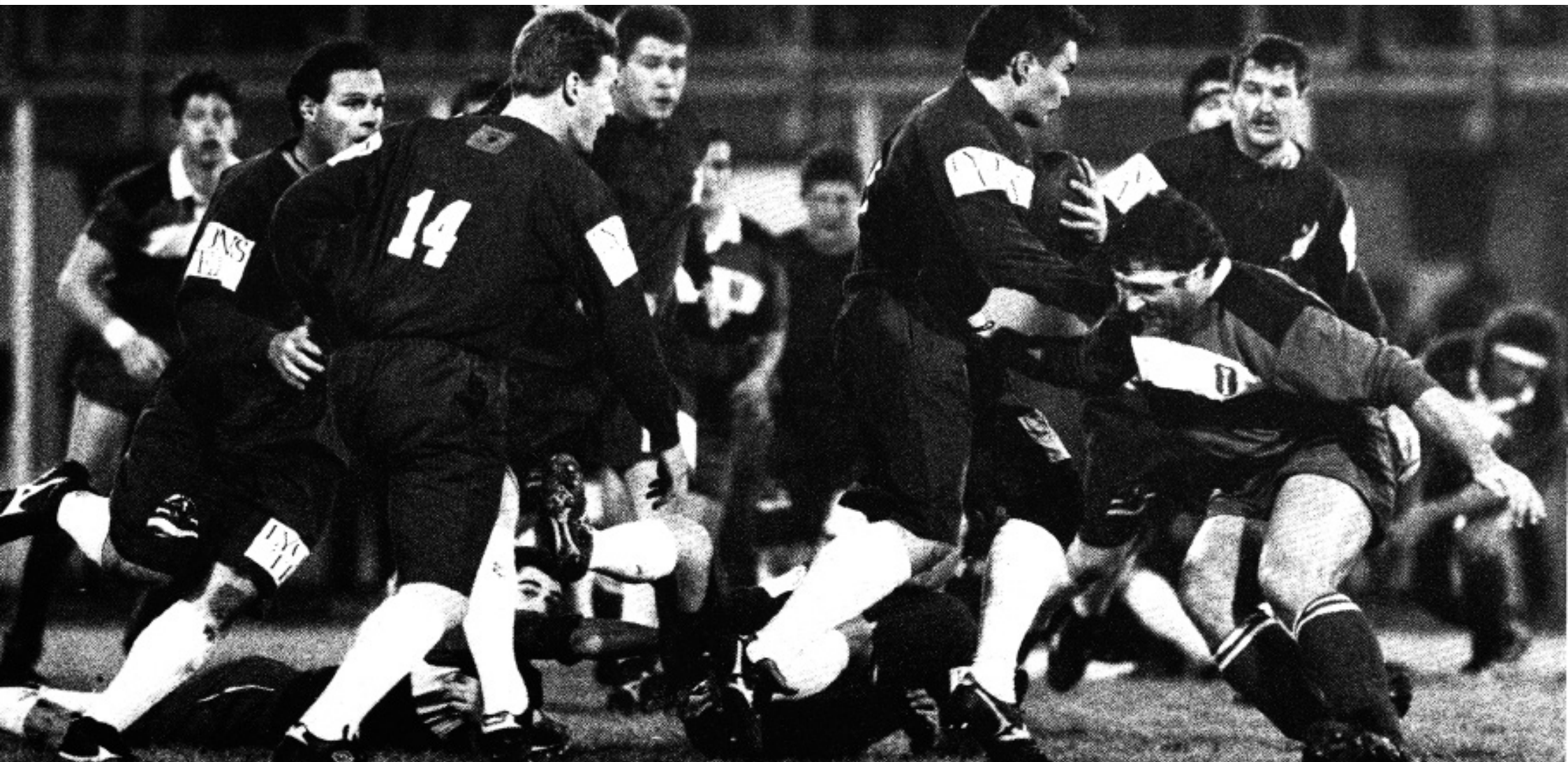
"This period can only be described as one long, continuous high-speed rollercoaster of extremes. The enjoyable phases were fleeting, as every moment of the day, and many sleepless nights, were crowded with endless pressing matters. My experiences made an indelible impression on me, and one of the biggest, was that production, manufacturing, and business management, seriously cannibalised my creative energies".

The business was beset with a number of major problems, and disruptive events. It was not a defeat, but the start of a new era, opening up new perspectives, and opportunities. Wilding had demonstrated that he was not an inveterate dreamer, but someone who was not afraid of chasing a big dream, and risking his neck in battle. He had just learnt that you were bound to clash with the world, if you worked by intuition. In future, he would be on his own - that was the price he had to pay for his way of seeing things, and there could be no question of compromise, or half measures. Wilding knew that he must develop a greater consistency of approach, if he was not only to avoid another less-than perfect success, but more importantly, to survive at all.

The real world, however, would quickly make it clear that it took a dim view of another venture which presumed to be ahead of it's time.



Bottom left: In 1991 Wilding lived at Lake Waikaremoana for three months before launching the new All Black clothing range.



In Treviso, Italy, the All Blacks promote the range by playing against an Invitation XV.

5.



Period of search

In 1992, Wilding moved to the Bay of Plenty, and lived and worked in his Windy Ridge studio high atop the Kaimai mountain range in an abandoned farm homestead, far away from the hustle, and bustle of city life.

It was the moment he had been waiting for, and for once the subjective, and objective time were synchronized. One dream had met another. An individual free from preconceptions about practicalities, was given free rein to create in a heady atmosphere charged with hidden creative possibilities.

Wilding took the plunge into abstract expressionism, but with far more disconcerting results than expected. He became the artist who was prepared to starve, or at least to exist with the help of a few private patrons, and with dedication, could still hope to produce important works of art.



Bottom left: Nighttime view of Tauranga city from the 800 hectare farm.



7.



"I am just going to do this. I had to discover for myself where my creativity would be satisfied- try any frontier; excellence has to succeed somehow, somewhere. My goal being to find my art, then spend my life expanding my powers in this form."

Surviving the inevitable disappointments, and near disasters, requires commitment to the enterprise, and being the possessor of a high degree of self-belief. Foresight is not enough to guarantee a profitable journey towards the future, yet, without foresight, the journey cannot even begin.

Wilding's change of direction during the early part of the 1990s, was a shock to those who had hitherto supported his work. His perpetual restlessness led him to explore a number of traditional genres, with the urge to include everything, to leave nothing out, even if it meant working in a turmoil of contradictions.



Bottom left photograph; Windy Ridge studio workshop at the back of the farm.



Panoramic of the farm towards Tauranga (top left), then towards Rotorua (5).



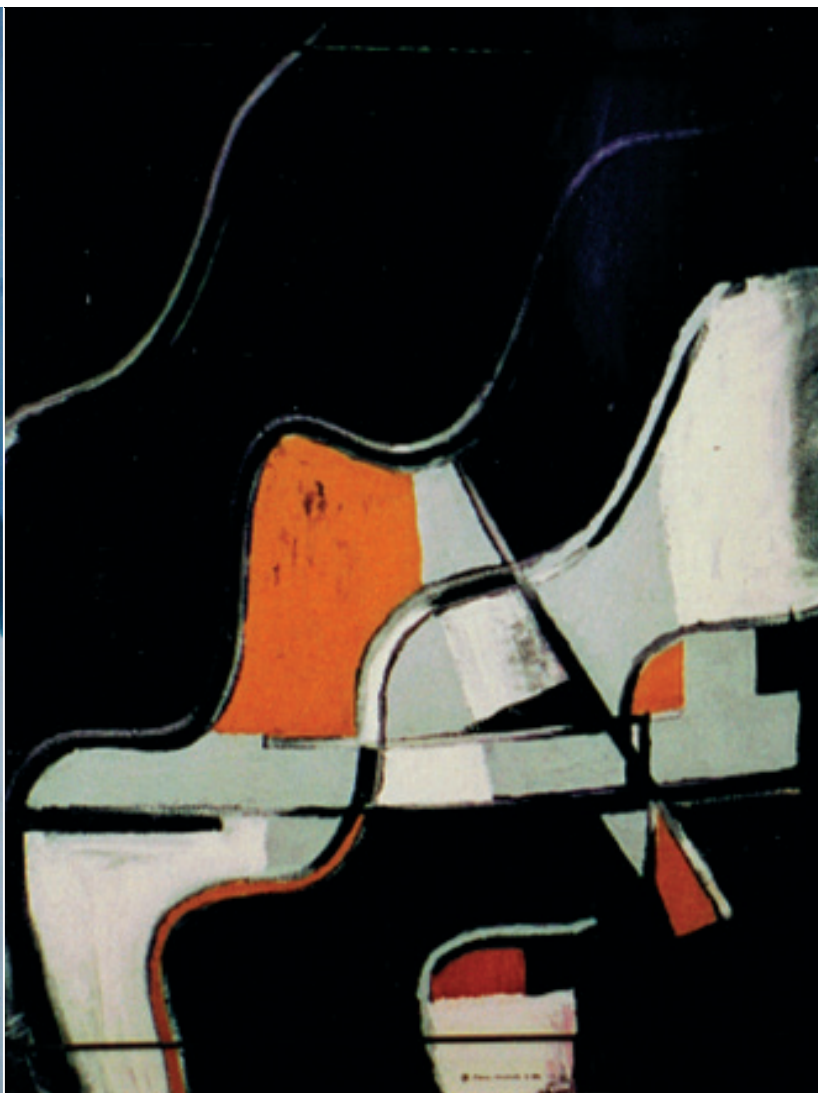
Working in isolation, existing rather on the fringe of group activity, immune to the vagaries of fashions and movements of the day, self-taught, intuitively developing the ability to feel his way round a painting, and discovering which way it wanted to go, Wilding has done it - moreover, on his own. Although an inconsistency of style can be discovered, a certain steadiness of aim is apparent, and he has always followed a course to it's logical conclusion.

Wilding's schismatic nature found expression in many ways, and he produced a body of work which consists of a range of styles - it was possible for him to go in many different, indeed opposite directions at the same time, and this period includes the painting of New Zealand's first rugby game; *The College versus Town*. Today the painting is recognised by the New Zealand Rugby Football Union as the 'official' record of this significant event in New Zealand's history.

"I didn't view my abstract painting in an intellectual or emotional sense - I just started from a random idea, maybe just a brush stroke, then followed it until it told me it was finished. No more, no less. There are connections, but nothing is arranged in a conventional form."

"I'm always moving forward in my work, I could stay in one place, and knock out a dozen pieces in a certain style that I know will sell, but I haven't. Ever. Even though I experienced sell-out exhibitions, I always knew when it was time to move on, move away from it. It's as if I build it up, and then I tear it down again - I just take the hit and start again."







"I don't take myself, or my work too seriously - I think if I did, I might lose my best instincts, and become stuck in that place."

Some of Wilding's paintings are at the same time an acknowledgement of a deep streak of negative emotion and are a deliberate cauterisation of the emotion.

The continual changes, the cross-overs in his art, coupled with financial pressure, and poor exhibition sales, and support, would diminish most people's courage. Lessons are also learned from unsuccessful, incorrect things - how many gems of life are sometimes found in them?

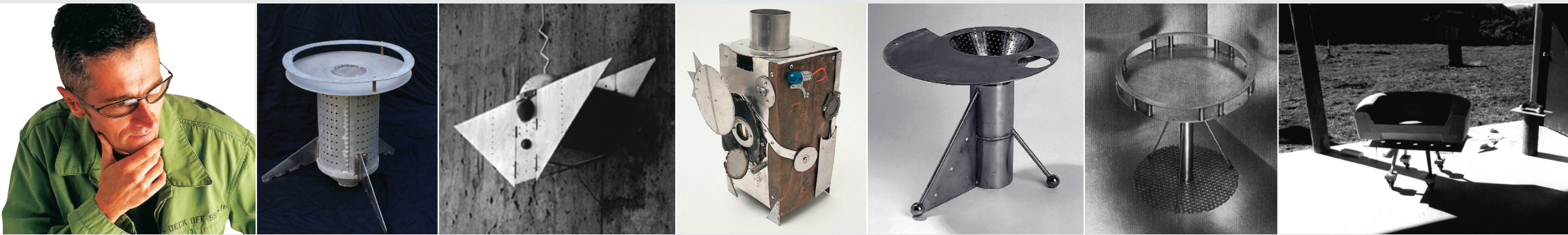
"I found out for myself how superficial the world of art is, and I quote" '...what a wretched lot of schemers, sharks, opportunistics, snobs, parasites, log-rollers, sycophants, social climbers infect the world of art'."

It's a jungle, into which the artist is forced periodically to take his work to live.



Bottom left photograph: Early morning vista towards Tauranga city.





"I pushed myself to achieve what seemed impossible to everyone except me - only a sustained, and invincible belief in myself, allowed me to maintain my integrity, and never to compromise my beliefs. The belief that you are capable of reaching your true potential, and the right path is in front of you all the time - IF you listen to the small voice, the single truth".

Finding my art

In time, the paintings evolved with the introduction of three-dimensional elements, and this form progressed to handmaking one-off pieces of furniture using found objects.

Wilding had found his way back to his metier: furniture.

The last ten years have seen him discover himself, and fix on some sort of genre for what later comes to appear as his particular destiny.

"I like creating furniture, because of the challenge of the different construction aspects, and all the varying perspectives must be in accord. For me, furniture is a far more challenging, and satisfying art form than painting - giving my ideas a much greater range of expression, and stretching my engineering, and styling abilities."



Bottom left photograph: Wilding's 'al fresco' workshop.





To live, and work like this for a long time with little financial reward, takes a certain level of bravery: it's a big risk, and there may not be financial rewards for a long time.

You need the right temperament for this type of endeavour, especially when the path gets lost, and it can seem as complicated as solving a Chinese puzzle, while stuck in a maze.

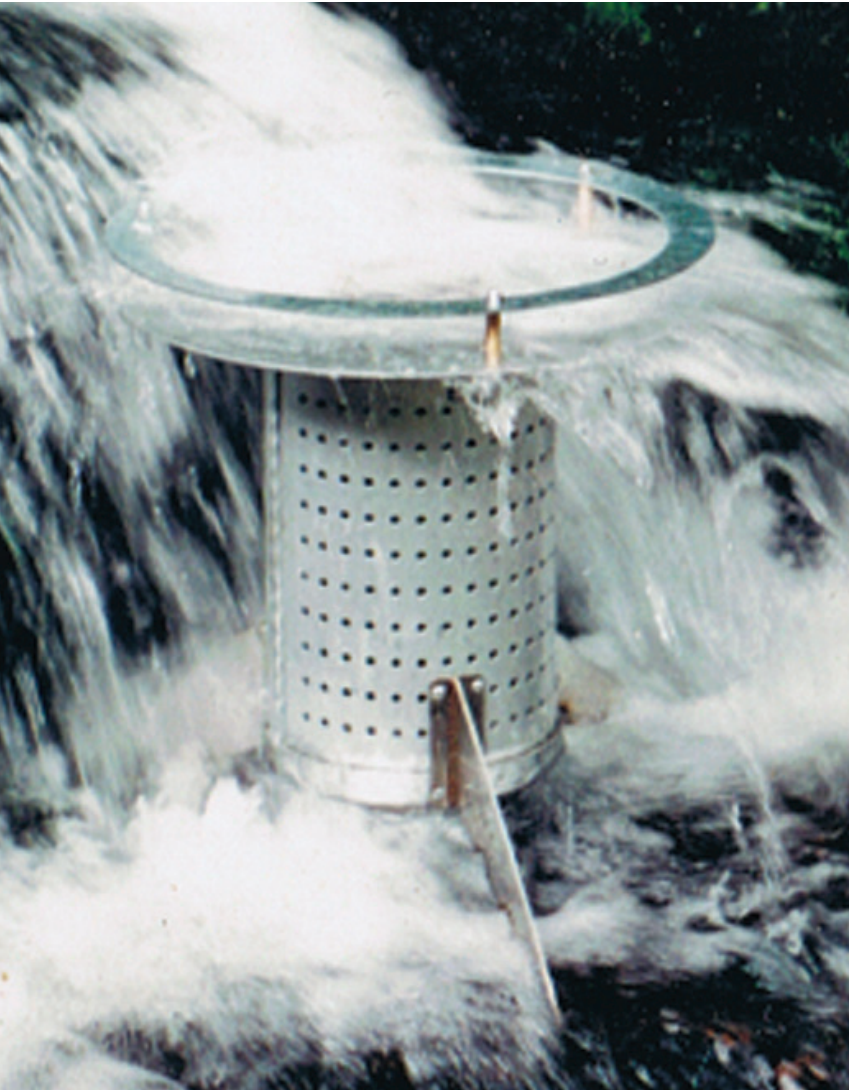
One must be convinced at all times, even in the worst of moments, that they are right, and believe strongly that the lure of the "golden hand-cuff" that comes with the easy path, ultimately leads to nowhere.

"Once you start designing purely for money, thinking about financial security, you are running the risk of eroding your true self, and becoming a facsimile of the hollow man."

It is an important factor in Wilding's life, that despite a varied career, with the stop-starts, lack of support, frequently unpredictable (but always interesting) - his life and work showed from the beginning an originality, and creative intelligence that few possess, and fewer have been as convincingly able to express.



Bottom left photograph: Wilding's Harbourside restaurant top-floor studio, Tauranga 1995 -1996.





"The time is right, I've pushed the creative boundaries to their extremes and beyond - living, and working in a shed on top of a mountain, with ice on the ground, with no power, and a wall open to the elements tells you that. Stepping across the line of safety is where the truth is, but once you cross the rubicon, it is impossible to find your way back. I think about it regularly when things are really tough. In the past, I have made half-hearted ventures to get graphic design work, but get nowhere, because that path is closed for good. This teaches me, that I have to keep pushing forward in my furniture, even when the walls are pressing in on me - to have the faith that the small voice is always there to lead you on."

"I don't recommend my lifestyle, but I know, without doubt, it was the right one for me, and in fact I had no choice in the matter."

"My inspiration comes from pure nature. I am by, and large ignorant, and uninterested in city life, or design trends. I enjoy occasional city trips, visiting museums, libraries, modern furniture showrooms, and perusing magazines and books - never for ideas, but just to enjoy the images that impress me - they motivate me to keep at my work. I do not live, or work from the one place. I am a free spirit, and as the mood takes me, I design, build models, or prototypes, from a number of places in the Bay of Plenty, and the Waikato."

Although furniture is the dominant art in his life, Paul's aim, is to maintain a double metier by dividing his daily routine between his main focus furniture design, and other creative disciplines that capture his imagination.

2002





Above photographs: Designs created at Omokoroa, 2001.



Paul Wilding visual narratives

1. Period of search: 1985 - 2002
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