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## Cutting-edge design with a conscience

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Designer Brodie Neill has taken his childhood passion for furniture-making and turned it into an international career, creating innovative pieces that could help to save the oceans.

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Growing up in Hobart, designer Brodie Neill always loved making things.

“It’s always been part of me,” he says. “My grandfather was an engineer and I inherited a lot of the fundamentals from him, so I grew up making things like chairs and tables. My parents still have some of the pieces and it’s pretty funny to return home for Christmas and see them still there.”

His interest in furniture making was further fuelled by his love of the great outdoors, so as a teenager he looked to the natural world around him for inspiration.

“Tasmania is surrounded by nature and there are so many amazing timbers available there, native to the island, that are used to amazing outcomes by the local designers and craftspeople and boat makers,” he says. “I was inspired by that, so I always had a respect for natural materials and the natural world, and wanted to celebrate and harness it, and work with it to make beautiful objects.”

## Taking centre stage

His boyhood passions for creating unique furniture and connecting with the natural world reached their full expression in 2016 when the London-based designer unveiled his best-known creation, the Gyro table, at the London Design Biennale.

Created in partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria and the University of Tasmania, this extraordinary table was forged from more than half a million fragments of ocean plastic blended to create a speckled substance that Neill calls “ocean terrazzo”.

“People walked into the room and were confronted with this table of magnitude and beauty, galactic in its array,” he says. “Then, as they got closer to it, they could actually see that all the little fragments, all of the little stars that make up the galaxy, were in fact fragments of plastic collected from beaches and coastlines around the world.”

Neill collaborated with a wide range of experts to create the Gyro table, from marine biologists to oceanographers, and the plastic fragments used were sourced internationally, sent through by passionate volunteers and beachcombers after a call out on social media.

“Some of it was a bit smelly, but it was all cleaned and processed and sorted into colours,” he says. “If we hadn’t collected them, they’d be sitting in nature or consumed by sea life and fish and, eventually, ourselves. It was quite an epic project.”

The luminous Gyro features in the National Gallery of Victoria’s (NGV) Triennial, which runs until 15 April 2018.

## Journey around the world

Like his designs, Neill’s journey to international success has been more curves than straight lines.

After studying fine art at the University of Tasmania, Neill moved to the US to complete a Master’s degree at the Rhode Island School of Design. It was here that he developed his cross-disciplinary knowledge of digital practices used in architecture and animation.

He then settled in New York before shifting temporarily to Milan to work in partnership with the renowned furniture design company Kundalini. With them, at the age of 24, he created his first standout piece, the ribbon-like E-Turn bench.

Milan was followed closely by a move to London and the release of his Remix chaise longue, made from an innovative fusion of wood and recycled plastics and carved using state-of-the-art digital processors.

“We sourced the materials from construction sites and signmakers, just took their scraps and sandwiched them together,” Neill says. “We very much shifted people’s perceptions of what recycled materials can become.”

## An environmental mission

While Neill was no stranger to incorporating recycled materials into his work, the Gyro table puts him at the forefront of the movement to develop a new style that is aesthetic yet respectful of the environment.

“We show that you can take a scrap of worthless plastic from the beach and turn it into something desirable and museum worthy,” Neill says. “It just takes time and application.”

It has also become increasingly clear that Neill is now as much an environmentalist as he is a furniture designer, although he stresses that he is primarily the latter; he continues to build on the success of Gyro with his new Flotsam series using an updated version of the ocean terrazzo.

His future projects are mounting and include partnerships with major recycling companies, coastline management organisations and government agencies (including the European Union in Brussels), who are all interested in joining him on his mission to transform waste material into something beautiful and useful. Although he doesn’t exactly see it that way.

“I don’t think of it as waste material, I see it as opportunity,” Neill says. “If you can shift people’s perceptions of what these things are then hopefully you can inspire more momentous change. And I might just kick start it.”

Find out more about [Brodie Neill](#).

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