



## HORE BET

A couple of surf-loving chippies are making altogether different waves in pursuit of novel creative collaborations.



When Margaret River furniture designer and former carpenter Gary Bennett first came up with the idea of working with artists – including poets – people looked at him sideways.

Years later, he notes with mirth that artistic collaboration among creatives has inched its way from the avant-garde edge towards the mainstream. Now, it seems, everyone's doing it.

The notion of innovative inquiry and collaboration has been a central component in Jah Roc, the furniture-design business he established with partner David Paris back in 1987, to the extent that the pair recently published a book on the theme.

Collaboration catalogues the pair's decade-long cross-pollination campaign with the likes of artists Shaun Atkinson and Larry Mitchell, the late architect Ian Bailey, poet John Kinsella, and the creatives at FORM Contemporary Craft and Design.

Gary describes Larry Mitchell as one of the country's premier photorealist artists and still has to pinch himself at his good fortune in working with such talent.

"Larry reads land and seascapes so well – I'm just chuffed that people like him want to work with a couple of woodworkers like us. We have learned so much from him in terms of seeing more than we would have otherwise

when interpreting landscapes in our furniture designs," he says.

Working with Shaun Atkinson brought a different dimension to the table.

"Shaun's more abstracted, stripped-back approach to the landscape has taught me to

Always Offshore, Gary joined forces with surfboard maker Jim Banks to craft one-off timber surfboards that have become highly prized collectors' items.

"When two creative people turn their hearts and attention to an endeavor, they

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read the effect of light and colour on form. In Project West Kimberley, I used silver leaf to introduce light, to great effect."

The fruits of these engagements can be seen in a rich and expansive series of furniture designs that variously recall moody winter seascapes, crystal-clear and dappled Abrolhos Island pools, and Australia's legendary Kimberley region.

Most recently, in a collection titled

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richer, more nuanced and better than what either one of them would have come up with on their own," he says.

"One plus one equals three – it is a truly compelling kind of alchemy, which has always made sense to me."

Gary is convinced that the "power and natural energy" inherent in the landscapes of the capes region attracts and compels creative souls, and that harnessing that energy makes sense. The business itself was built on the notion of resource sustainability, with timbers that were sourced from paddocks or recycled from factories and rail yards.

Many of these timbers carry the distinctive patina of having endured and prevailed through drought, fire and flood, their imperfections lending a distinct and uncommon quality to the wood grain. Gary's work with the late architect and designer Ian Bailey, for example, produced an entire furniture range from a single fallen log that was salvaged from Boyup Brook farm.

But, how exactly does a wood craftsman – a non-academic man at that – collaborate with a poet?

"John [Kinsella]'s poetry seems to say the unsayable in the most succinct way – his words seem to pull all of the elements together by interpreting art, furniture, landscape and the emotions beneath them," Gary explains.

"Working with him and with other artists continually inspires new and fresh ideas, and that works both ways." 3

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