



PROJECT ABROLHOS

# INTRODUCTION



Project Abrolhos; An artistic representation of the Abrolhos Island Atolls that lie 60km west of Geraldton off the West Australian coast.

Three artists Larry Mitchell, Gary Bennett and David Paris collaborate to interpret this unique sea/landscape in their respective genres.

# GARY'S PERSPECTIVE



When Larry and I first discussed the idea of collaborating for an exhibition with the Abrolhos as the basis for inspiration, I was immediately excited at the thought of spending some time at such a unique part of Western Australia.

The idea of collaborating with an artist such as Larry Mitchell was particularly appealing. Larry has a deep understanding of the region and I thought it would be fun to see the outcome of our individual interpretations in our respective mediums.

For me the Abrolhos Islands are a thoroughly intriguing juxtaposition of extreme beauty and harsh craggy with the water surface providing a lens to the main attraction. When the southerly is howling, as it often does, the lens is blurred but when the wind drops and the water turns to glass the most exquisite colours and forms of the vast coral platforms are exposed. Luckily this doesn't happen all that often or the place would be crawling with tourists.



Above the waterline the harsh surface of limestone platforms that form the Islands have provided the basis for settlement of the wily Cray fishermen who inhabit them. Their makeshift weather beaten shacks are also a disguise for often elaborate interiors full of treasures collected from both above and below the waterline. Amazing shells, corals and driftwood lining the walls and forming rudimentary furniture, seems to belong there and perhaps nowhere else. The seemingly over extended jetties, that stretch over shallow coral atolls, provide the link between the shacks and the deeper water; giving access to their bounty. These jetties appear ungainly and often undulate due to the hiding they get from both man and the elements, provide an insight to the pioneer like nature of this unique community. I had an overwhelming feeling that both the natural and built environment need to be preserved along with the hard-fought fishing culture of the region.

David and I, as furniture designer/makers explored many aspects of the area and found it hard to zone in on one particular aspect. We therefore decided to create a collection of one off pieces that relate to various different aspects of this highly inspirational land/seascape. Larry took a large number of photographs over our 5 day stay and with the help of those, our memories of the physical experience and by relating to Larry's paintings we got started. Our first reference point was a session that we had when we climbed inside one of the many mangroves' that skirt the edge of the islands. This was quite a revelation as, on all my trips to the Abrolhos, I had never paid much attention to them. Again a hidden treasure had revealed itself and we had a lot of fun marveling at the sinewy branches under the lush canopy as they emerged from the angular lime stone overhang. The effect of the still water reflecting filtered light (through the mangrove) on the underside of the rock overhang was something that later emerged in our work.

It is interesting to note, now that our work is complete, that certain loose relationships between the pieces have emerged that weren't necessarily planned. I guess what has happened is that our subconscious took over and provided the link that we found difficult to verbalize in our discussions. This is something I love about the creative process. The trick is to make a start and the mind takes over.

# LARRY'S PERSPECTIVE



I have been coming to the Abrolhos Islands for nearly 20 years, and before that went to school with the sons of Abrolhos fishermen, and later taught art to their sons. It is difficult now to think of a time when this rough chain of coral islands have not been part of my make up.

“Project Abrolhos” is the second collaborative project I have been involved in concerning these islands: The first being with a photographer and journalist which resulted in the publication of “Abrolhos Island Conversations”. It is also part of a broader ongoing project call the “1 degree Centigrade Project”, in which I am recording islands and their cultures around the world which are under threat by global warming and cultural globalization.

It is always interesting to visit this place, then, with people who see it with a new and different eye - in this case the eye of furniture makers and designers Gary and Dave (travelling with these guys is an eye opener in itself) - I was fascinated by their direct response the the Island's physicality and tactility - the shapes , colours, textures, lines, angles and changing light of the place.

My interest is also in the rare physical beauty of these islands and the surrounding sea; the sparkling shallows, cavernous drop-offs, early morning glass-outs, rickety jetties and crusty landforms. But the resultant paintings for this project have, as well, a more topographical look, - this is “art as record” - like the work of artists from the age of exploration who first depicted the ‘New World’.

My intimate involvement with the Abrolhos and it's inhabitants mean that every structure, every shack, cove, rock and lagoon are attached to a memory, a person or a family and I am passionate about recording the actuality of this detail.

There is a sense of urgency in this approach: As I travel around the Indian/Pacific region, I witness the threats to these unique places and cultures from pollution, sea-level rise, coral reef bleaching, government interference, tourism and development. Gary, Dave and I really felt strongly that the culture of those places represent a uniqueness, an optimism and a tough individuality which must be allowed to persist if we are to keep the colour in our world. It also became obvious to us all that the best guardians of the frail marine environment concerned, are those who know it because they live there.

“Project Abrolhos” has become a 'loose knitting together' of the responses of 3 very different artists to a single place, and although we made no attempt to homogenize our collection of works, I am sure that real connections have been made between us and the Abrolhos Islands.

# “MANGROVE CHAISE”

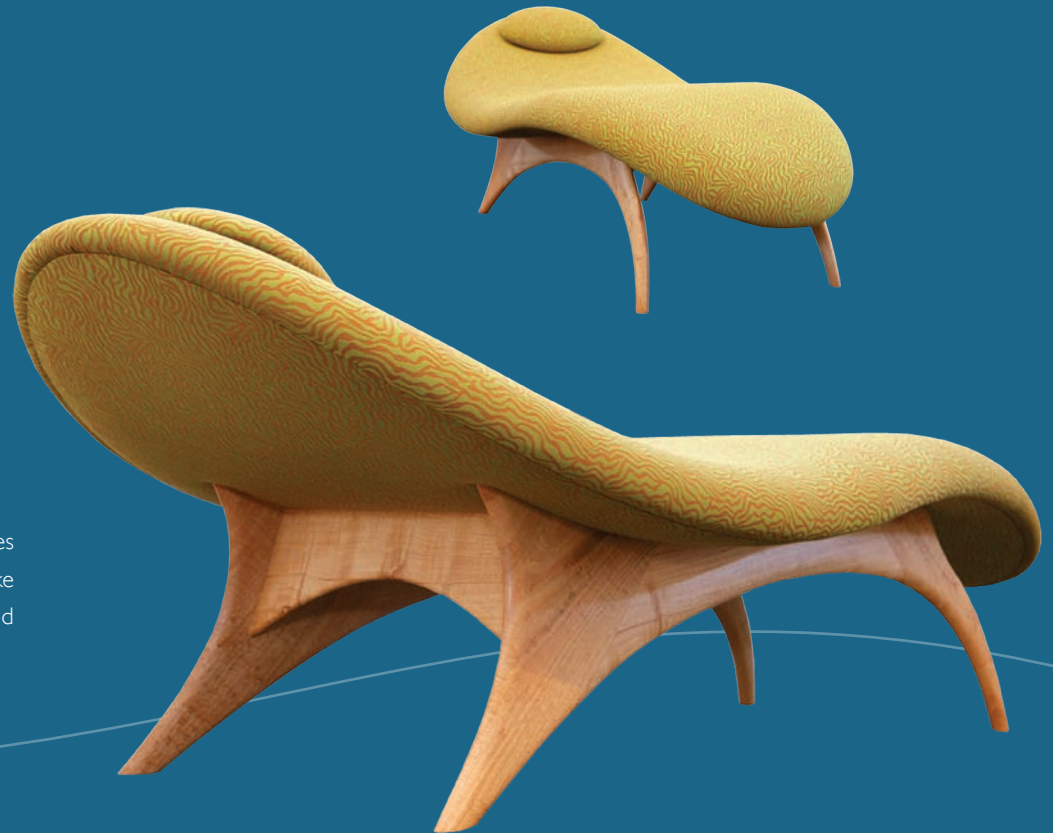
Chaise Lounge/day bed

**Size** 1900 long x 850 deep x 700 high

**Materials** Black Butt, Australian wool fabric( Delta -Valley)

**Finish** Tongue oil and waxes

**Description** Inspired from our session in the Mangrove. The sinewy pale branches with its lush billowing canopy seemed to demand that we make a sculptural daybed. We chose Black Butt for its light colour and hardness and the fabric for its texture and colour.









"Post Office Lagoon - Inside" Oil on Canvas 3000 x 900mm









# “CRAB” DINING CHAIR

Dining Chair

**Size** 800 wide x 700 deep x 900 high

**Materials** Black Butt, Australian wool fabric (Sanctuary- Happiness)

**Finish** Tongue oil and waxes

**Description** Started as Cray fish but became a tall sand crab







"Reef's Edge - Southern Group" Oil on Canvas 3000 x 1000mm









# “ISLAND” DINING TABLE

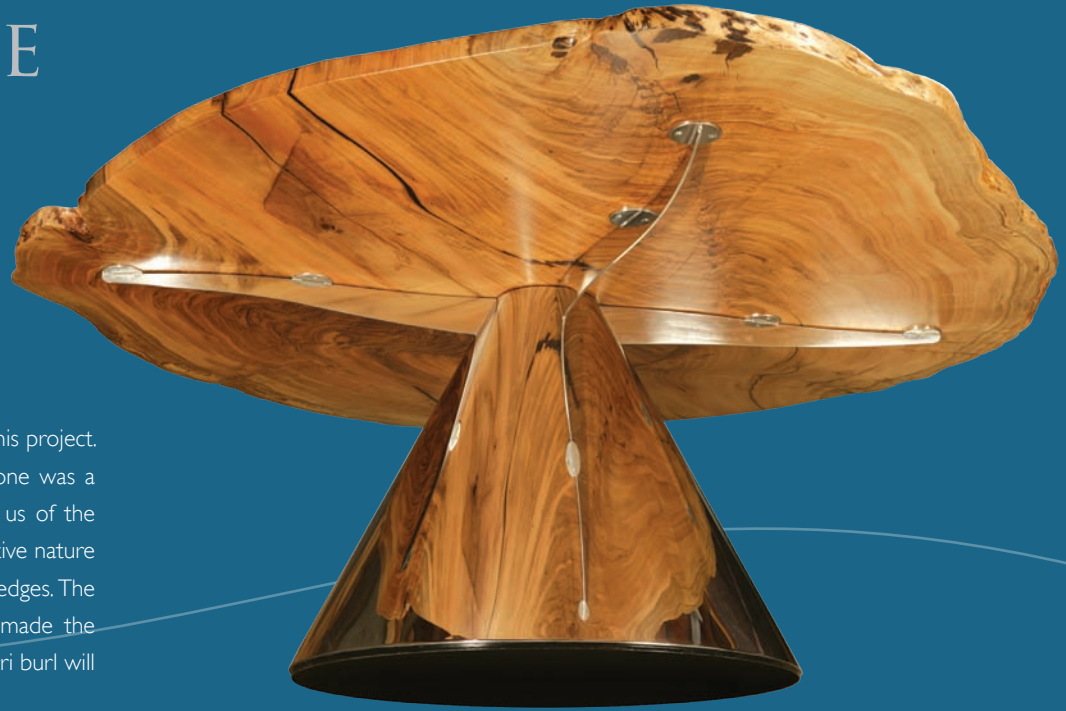
## Dining Table

**Size** aprox 1900 diameter x 750 high

**Materials** Single Marri slab, Stainless steel (mirror finish)

**Finish** Catalysed Lacquer

**Description** I've had this slab for 3 years and it must have been waiting for this project. Not wanting to go down the “tree stump base” (argh!) the cone was a perfect solution. When viewed as a front elevation it reminds us of the angular island edges while the polished steel base has the reflective nature of the water as it shimmers and throws light under the rock ledges. The craggy burl edges and almost tidal movements of the grain made the material section very simple. The rare scale and grain of this Marri burl will make it very hard to part with.







"Burnett Island" Oil on Canvas 3000 x 900mm









# “CRAY” LOUNGE CHAIR

## Lounge Chair

**Size** 800 wide x 700 deep x 900 high

**Materials** Black Butt, Australian wool fabric (Flora- Desert Pea)

**Finish** Tongue oil and waxes

**Description** Started in the Mangrove but morphed into a Crayfish









"Evening on the Reef" Oil on Canvas 2100 x 900mm





"Morning Glass-out Davis Island" Oil on Canvas 2400 x 1200mm



# “WINDOWS TO THE LAGOON”

Low Table

**Size** 1500 long x 850 deep x 400 high

**Materials** Black Butt, Ebony; Pink Marble (wood), Mother of Pearl

**Finish** Tongue oil and waxes

**Description** This piece was inspired by a lagoon with a small inlet. Black Butt was chosen for it's minimal grain pattern with scattered the mother of pearl (windows) inlay offering the viewer an insight to the beauty that lies below. Suspended on "Urchin" like spikes of solid Ebony with inlayed Black Butt and pink marble that give a hint of coral colours, this piece has a curvaceous spine which is best viewed by lying on the floor.





"Post Office Lagoon - Outside"  
Oil on Canvas 2400 x 900mm









# “LAGOON DESK”

## Executive Desk

**Size** 2800 long x 1300 deep x 760 high

**Materials** Twin slab Marri, Stainless steel

**Finish** Catalysed lacquer

**Description** This piece was also inspired by the lagoon with a small inlet. The Marri was chosen for its natural curve and for the swirled grain offering a feeling of tidal movement. The pyramid support has an angular connection to the rock overhangs with its stainless steel inlay also offering a window to beauty hidden below. The brushed stainless steel has a soft reflective nature and adds a nautical feel.







"Little Rat Island"  
Oil on Canvas 2400 x 900mm









# “JETTY” DINING TABLE

Dining Table (extension)

**Size** 2000 long x 1000 wide x 740 high (extends to 3200 long)

**Materials** Bleached recycled Oregon

**Finish** Tongue oil and waxes

**Description** The Jetty's at the Abrolhos deserved our attention. The length of the jetties give them a disappearing taper which I have used in the base. The planking and the simplicity of the structure makes them seem almost to be suspended hence the central support beam and floating edges. Having walked the beaches and handled the driftwood with its beautiful soft texture from being washed, rubbed and bleached by the elements Oregon was the obvious choice of material. Being that the Oregon I've used almost definitely would have come to Australia as ships ballast in the late 1800's I thought it was a nice connection. The finishing process involved bleaching and fine rubbing the Oregon to give it an almost driftwood like appearance and feel. This took a very long time!







# “JETTY” BENCH SEAT X2

Bench Seat

**Size** 1950 × 350 × 430high

**Materials** Bleached recycled Oregon

**Finish** Tongue oil and waxes







# “JETTY 2” SIDE TABLE

Side Table

**Size** 2000 long x 500 deep x 800 high

**Materials** Bleached recycled Oregon

**Finish** Tongue oil and waxes







# LARRY MITCHELL

<b>Date of Birth</b>	10 October 1953
<b>Place of Birth</b>	Northampton, Western Australia
<b>Art Education</b>	Self-taught
<b>Personal Development</b>	1976-1987 Art Teacher at St Patricks College, Geraldton 1989-1992 Lecturer at various TAFE Colleges in Perth district 1989 Artist-in-Residence at All Saints College, Bullcreek 1997 Full Time Artist
<b>Travel</b>	1977-1978 Pacific Islands 1987-1988 Europe and resided in UK for one year 1990 Europe & UK 1994 UK 1999 Europe & UK 2001 USA & UK 2002 Europe & UK 2003 Europe & UK 2004 Asia, Europe & UK 2005 Hong Kong 2006 UK, New Zealand, Papua New Guine

## Awards and Prizes

1975	Geraldton Art Award
1977	Cultural Trust Landscape Prize
1979	Sunshine Festival Oil Award
1980	Sunshine Festival Oil Award Sunshine Festival Watercolour Award
1981	Melville Purchase Award Canning Art Award Commendation Wynne Prize, New South Wales
1982	Sunshine Festival Watercolour Award
1985	WA Cultural Trust Prize for Oil Painting
1990	Melville Art Award
2000	Finalist Wynne Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales Finalist Fleurieu Prize, Art Gallery of South Australia

## Exhibitions

1979	Signature Gallery, WA Way '79 Anniversary Exhibition
1983	One man exhibition, Fremantle Art Centre Fremantle Drawing Survey Exhibition WA Week Exhibition
1984	WA Arts Council Touring Exhibition Canberra Times Exhibition, Canberra
1985	One man exhibition, Fremantle Art Centre
1988	One man exhibition, Fremantle Art Centre Royal Society Touring Exhibition
1990	Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London Agnews Gallery, London One man exhibition, Fremantle Art Centre
1991	Fremantle Art Centre



## Exhibitions (continued)

1991	One man exhibition, Geraldton Art Gallery
1992	One man exhibition, Perth Gallery Fremantle Art Centre 20th Birthday Exhibition
1994	"Best of Australia" Exhibition, Hong Kong
1995	"Best of Australia" Exhibition, Hong Kong
1996	One man exhibition, Stafford Gallery, WA
1997	One man exhibition, Stafford Gallery, WA
1998	One man exhibition, Stafford Gallery, WA
2000	Festival of Perth – Ballet on Show, Stafford Gallery, WA Archibald, Wynne & Sulman Prize, Art Gallery of NSW Catanachs Gallery, Broome Solo Exhibition Stafford Gallery, WA Finalist Fleurieu Prize, Adelaide, SA – Touring Exhibition
2002	Represented by Hespe Gallery, San Francisco Solo Exhibition Stafford Gallery, WA
2003	Fremantle 30th Anniversary Exhibition, Fremantle Art Centre "Fires On" Festival of Perth Exhibition, Stafford Gallery, WA Solo Exhibition Yallingup Gallery, WA WA Contemporary Art Fair, Perth, WA
2004	"On the Wall" Art Fair, London, UK Business Design Centre, London Exhibition Yallingup Gallery, WA
2005	Exhibition Yallingup Gallery, WA
2006	Exhibition Yallingup Gallery, WA Represented James Corliss, London
2007	Represented vessel "True North" "Project Abrolhos" Jahroc Gallery, Margaret River, WA Proposed exhibition Blackheath Gallery, London

## Collections

Barings Bank, London  
R & I Bank (Bankwest)  
Weld Club Collection  
Rupert Murdoch  
Fremantle Art Centre  
Art Gallery of WA – Geraldton  
Private collections in Australia, UK, USA, Europe and Japan

## Publications

1999 "Abrolhos Island Conversations" – Fremantle Art Centre Press  
(1999 WA Premiers Award)

## Publicity and Reviews

1990 Saturday Observer / London  
1991 ABC Radio/ Perth  
Art and Australia  
2000 Weekend Australian  
2002 Art Scene WA  
2003 Scoop Magazine  
2004 Icon Magazine/ London  
Time Out Magazine/ London  
The West Australian/ numerous times since 1982  
2006 Insite Magazine Artist's Profile

## Acknowledgements

*Special thanks to Greg and Rhonda Davis, Jimmy and Bronte Younger, Dale Wheatley, Josephine Archer, Gary and Lara Bennett, David and Jo Paris, Paul Dowe. We could not have done this without your help.*

# GARY JAMES BENNETT

**Date of Birth** 1961

**Place of Birth** Busselton, Western Australia

**Education** 1973-1976 City Beach High School  
1977 Leederville Technical College

**Personal Development** 1981-87 Building projects around Australia  
1987 Founded Jahroc Furniture in Scarborough  
1989 Study tour of Los Angeles (invited to exhibit in Pacific Design Centre in West Hollywood)  
1993 Moved Jahroc Furniture to the "Old York Flour Mill" commenced renovation project to create Workshops and "The Mill Gallery"  
1995 Embarked on a 3 trip study tour of Japan as part of a "Noel Hearn Fellowship" where I learned about traditional Japanese wood working techniques and was enchanted with Japanese artistic design particularly balance, form and placement.  
2000 Study tour of Northern Italy from Florence-Venice-Udine-Milan. Attended Milan Fair and visited the Mandini Design House. An inspirational tour that continues to shape my current work  
2001 Moved from York to Margaret River and built my new studio and home which is set amongst coastal heath and overlooks the ocean.  
2002 Set up a Gallery in Margaret River  
2003 Collaboration with Ian Bailey B.ARCH(Syd)FRAIA(Lond) to explore and formalize early concepts and relate my current landscapes and environs funded by Form. The result was the Silhouette Series  
2004 Invited to exhibit Silhouette Series as part of a state representation of 10 artists in Florence Italy  
2006 Designed and had built a major addition to our Margaret River Gallery to provide a coteremporary space for large exhibitions

## Exhibitions

1988 York Art awards York  
1990 York Art awards York  
1991 Milan Furniture Fair (By invitation W.A. Government) Italy  
1992 Pacific Design Centre Los Angeles  
1992 Gunyulgup Gallery Yallingup  
1993 FIAA Furniture Exhibition Claremont  
1994 "Out of the Woods" R&I Tower Perth  
1995 "Out of the Woods" R&I Tower Perth  
1995 York Art awards York  
1996 Furnitex Melbourne  
1997 FIAA Furniture Exhibition Perth  
1998 Cabernet Chairs Perth (WA Art Gallery)  
1999 "Out of the Woods" Perth (Bank West)  
2000 New Work (solo) Holmes` a Court Gallery East Perth  
2003 Silhouettes Form Gallery  
2004 Silhouette Series Florence (Italy)  
2005 Artisans Cape to Cape Vasse Felix  
2007 Project Abrolhos Jahroc Gallery Margaret River

## Awards

1988 York Art Awards "Best Contemporary Entry"  
1990 York Art Awards "Award for Excellence"  
1991 Furniture Industry Association "Best New Design" Award  
1991 West Australian Stand Milan Fair Italy "Best Design"  
1992 Furniture Industry Association "Excellence in Design & Manufacture of a new product 'Occasional Furniture'  
1993 FIAA Furniture Fair "Excellence in the use of Jarrah"  
1993 FIAA Furniture Fair "Excellence in Occasional Furniture"  
1993 FIAA Furniture Fair "Excellence in Western Australian Manufactured Furniture"