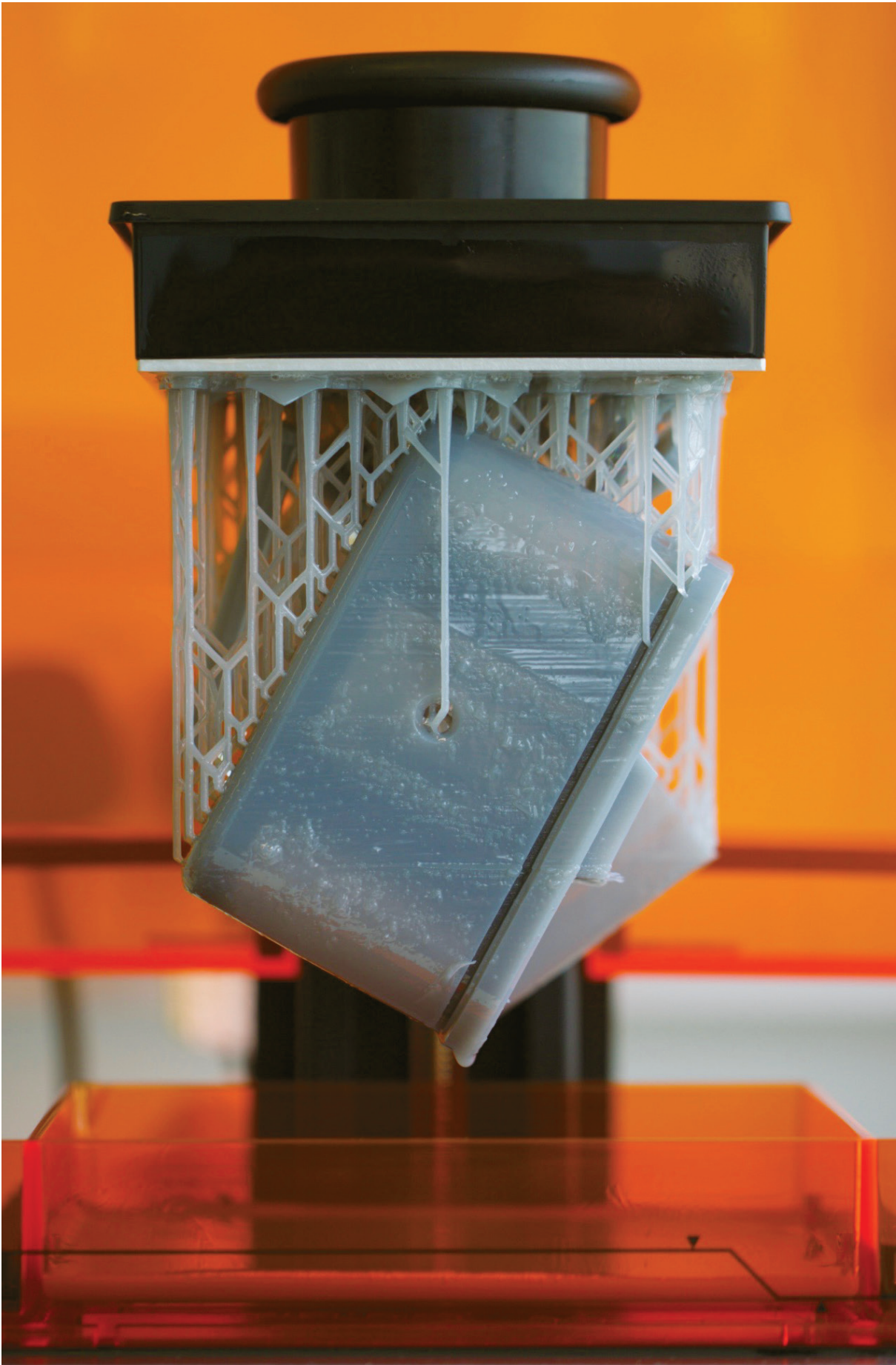


The Northern Tool



Tools for Everyday Life at the Great Exhibition of the North

words: Rickard Whittingham
photography: Josh South
illustration: Neil Conley

The role of the Northern Tool is to report on the activities surrounding the Tools for Everyday Life products and the community of design practice that surrounds the 3D Design undergraduate programme and the post-graduate Designers in Residence scheme at Northumbria University.

This newspaper's distribution from its part in the Great Exhibition of the North is an opportunity to offer glimpses of and insights made by designers at work.

The intention of the Tools for Everyday Life endeavor is to study the language of task focused objects and to be inspired by the materials and processes that don't just constitute the things we consume but shape the nature of our relationship with our environments.

Continues page 2



continued from
page 1...

The Tools for Everyday Life products are exhibited at trade fairs alongside the product launches from the world’s most prestigious brands to firmly place the ‘tools’ in a commercial, as opposed to a rarefied gallery, context.

The tabloid format of the Northern Tool has been chosen and a rather casual tone adopted to give an accessible account of what is involved in, and what is revealed by engaging with the designing and making of useful things.

As a way of explaining just what the project aims to do this issue of the newspaper includes an interview (page 4) conducted by the influential online design magazine Core77 (www.core77.com) with the Tools for Everyday life co-ordinator, Rickard Whittingham. In a similar vein the review of one of the Tools for Everyday Life exhibitions by Sight Unseen’s Jill Singer (page 6) places the products that make up the project in a wider context of design practice.

There is a ‘piece’ that first appeared in issue 3 of the Northern Tool that ponders the role of sketching in the design process (page 8).

Over the last 6 years The Tools for Everyday Life designers have been exhibited across Europe, U.S.A. and China creating a network of manufacturers and retail partners across the globe (more details on page 10 and 11).

And then littered liberally throughout this newspaper are images of products being made and the ‘tools’ themselves.



BA(hons)
3D Design at
Northumbria

The 3d Design undergraduate programme at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne (UK) is a 3 year full time education. Its intention is to educate designers that go on to make directional contributions to the practice of product and furniture design.

At the core of the programme is the philosophy that designers are better prepared to make meaningful impact within professional design practice with a contextually sensitive materials and processes knowledge. This awareness of making and manufacture in the design process places a designer at the center of debates about skill and technology and how these factors relate to the human experience.

Graduates from the 3d programme include: Max Lamb, Deadgood and David Irwin.



Designers in
Residence

The Designers in Residence scheme is a post-graduate initiative designed to support Northumbria alumnae wishing to develop their own professional design practice. It is run within Northumbria University’s faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences for BA (Hons) Three Dimensional Design graduates with its professional practice centered around the activities of furniture and product design. The signature of the scheme is its particular engagement with the design of products that both celebrate the value of traditional craft manufacturing and are contemporary, rich in narrative and market ready.

Residents are given enterprise start-up support to encourage them to view their practice not simply as a creative activity but also as a commercial enterprise capable of generating income and employment for themselves and others.

British design education is often bemoaned by the creative industries for failing to properly equip graduates for the ins and outs of the business of design; whilst at the same time it has become a truism of British industry that it innovates but does not make and sell. Northumbria University’s Designer in Residence scheme was developed with a view to addressing both of these issues.

The success of the scheme over the last 15 years is easy to measure, one looks to the many businesses/ careers/ jobs created. The international reputation of the scheme has grown by showcasing products at the most prestigious trade fairs around the globe.

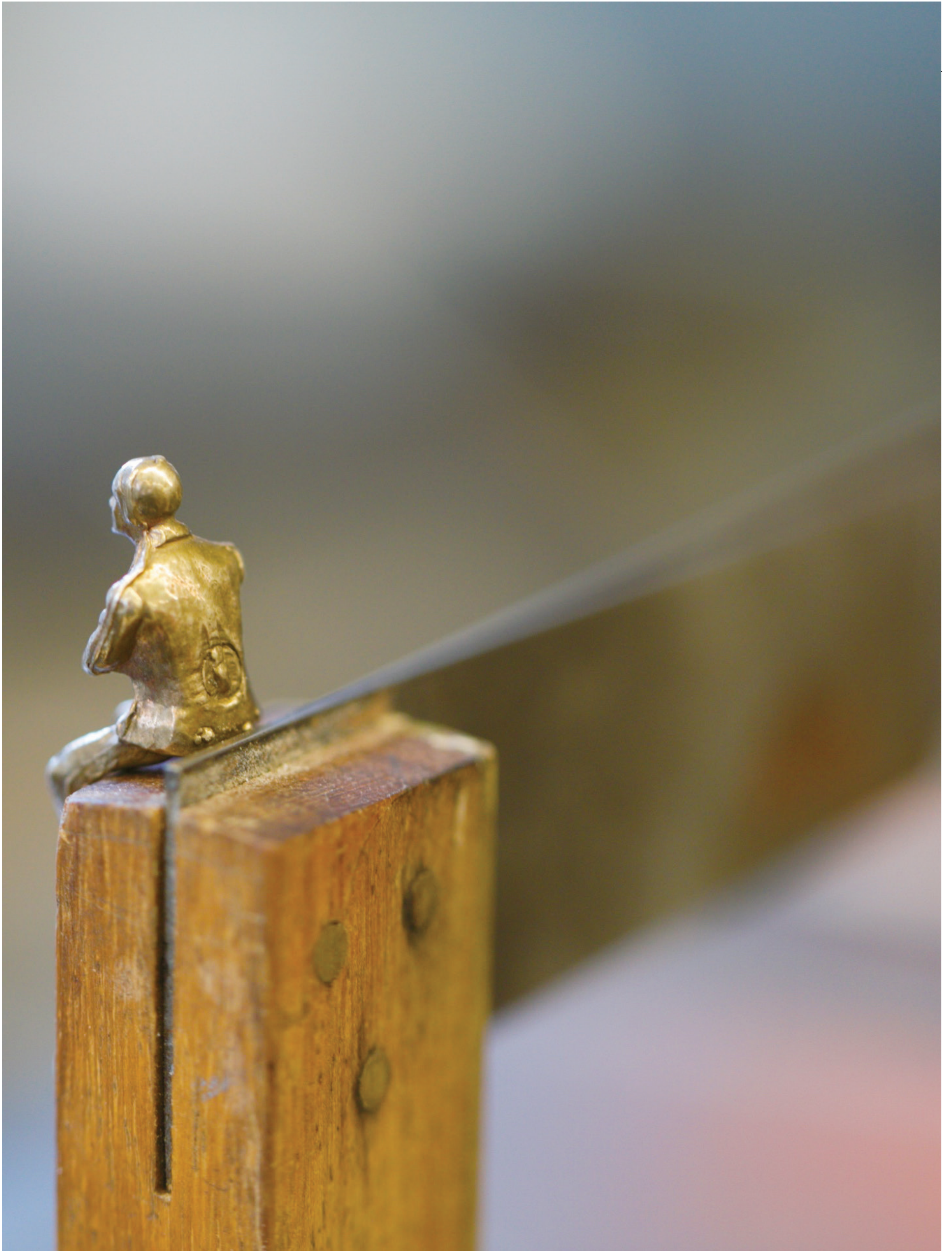
Equally noteworthy, but more complex to quantify is the community of design practice that has sprung up around the scheme. Designers that are learning the business of design by ‘doing it’ stay connected to each other, to Northumbria University and the North East of England.

Current residents are: Alexander Hay and Alex (Felix) Smith. Past Residents include: John Reeves, Neil Conley, Ellen Thomas and James Harrison.

01. Max Lamb has just cast this pewter stool in a beach in Cornwall

02. James Harrison- Wingback chairs

03. David Irwin- M-lamps



Who are the Designers in Residence and what is the Tools for Everyday Life project?

photo: Josh South



Influential online design journal, Core 77, interviewed Northumbria University's Rickard Whittingham following an exhibition of the Tools for Everyday Life

Core77: What is the Designers in Residence scheme at Northumbria and how did it come about?

Rickard Whittingham (RW): The Designers in Residence scheme is a post-graduate platform that provides access to workspace, equipment and on-site mentoring for selected graduates of BA 3D Design at Northumbria University. Residents use the scheme to develop and grow their professional practice.

It came about because of an identified need to support graduates, not with a prescribed academic curriculum of business start-up but with a system of support that responds to their individual ideas for commercial enterprise. The model is 'learning by doing'. It means the scheme can support furniture and product designers working across all sorts of contexts. The benefit to the resident in basic terms is access to facilities and advice to start their professional practice. The benefit to the 3D undergraduate program is having exciting professional work happening alongside their study. The benefit to the North East region (Northumbria University is based Newcastle upon Tyne) is retaining the very best of its

graduates many of whom stay in the city to continue their work.

Core77: How is the "Tools for Everyday Life" project incorporated into the curriculum? What worked, and what, if anything, will you change in the future?

RW: The "Tools for Everyday Life" brief was set to the network/community of practice that now surrounds the Residency as a way of illustrating the fact that residents after they have 'flown the nest' of the scheme stay connected to it. The intention of the brief was to show how staff and residents continue to support each other. The idea of investigating "tools" was seen as a way of exploring a common thread amongst this community of designers. That thread is an attention to detail and craftsmanship, careful choosing of materials and processes for both functional and expressive goals.

I think it succeeds in being an enjoyable process for the designers involved and a welcome pursuit that nourishes our day jobs as designers and educators. The results show a deftness of touch, strokes of humor and a deep appreciation of materials.

Core77: Tools are obviously made to be used, and some would say that much of their beauty comes from signs of such: dings, dents, patina, etc. all constitute the 'character' of the object. Do the designers consider this notion of history during the design process?

RW: The 'character' of tools is at the forefront of our minds and indeed exploring the connection between the operator and the tool was the thrust of our way of

working. 'Use' in all cases is the defining issue. References to traditional hand-tools and utilitarian objects are clear not in a postmodern ironic way but with a genuine appreciation of the benefits an object gains from the scars of use. Material choices are, without exception, informed by a concern for longevity.

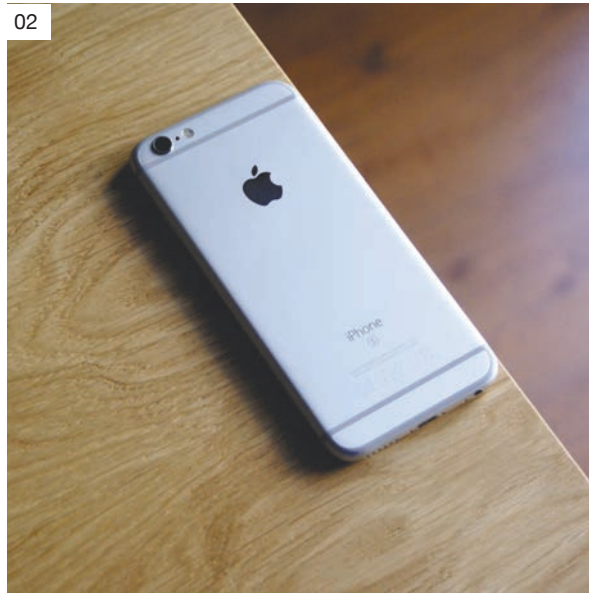
I think all the designers represented by in the Tools for Everyday Life consider the notion of history in their work. None of us explore novelty for novelty's sake and are very aware of that which has gone before. The intention is never one of retro styling but one of acknowledging details and forms that communicate longevity and careful deliberation.

Core77: Do the 'Tools' provide clues as to a given designer's aesthetic, practical interests or future needs?

RW: On an individual level it is clear how what the designers came up with reflects their broader practice. For example, the wedges by Colin Wilson illustrates his deep interest in the properties of materials and a boundless enthusiasm for searching out and working with experts on the projects he tackles. The Silver Jugs by Trevor Duncan reflect clearly both his skill as a craftsman and as a product designer.



Putting Tools for Everyday Life in context



An exhibition of products and furniture in New York City was reviewed by Sight Unseen's Jill Singer.

It seems ironic that the design school at Northumbria University's two most famous graduates would be Max Lamb and Jonathan Ive. At one end of the spectrum is Lamb, a designer so consumed with the act of making and the transparency of process that he films himself fabricating each piece from start to finish and posts the results on his website. On the other is Ive, who's responsible for an object that's more of a cipher, one that conceals its mechanics within and successfully erases any questions about the way it works or the context in which it was made. But perhaps the difference between the two designers is as simple as the difference between their concentrations at university: Ive graduated from a Northumbria program known as Design for Industry, which focuses on consumer experience, while Lamb finished a course called Three-Dimensional Design, where the act of making is as paramount as the artifact itself.

It's the latter program that's yielded the Designers in Residence who have exhibited at ICFF (International Contemporary Furniture Fair) in New York City, for two years running, a collection of products known as Tools for Everyday Life, and it's in Lamb's foot-

steps that those designers follow. The residency program offers resources and workshop space to design school graduates who stay in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne region, and the pieces in the collection use the utilitarian language of those workshop tools as a jumping-off point. This year, the collection — which ranges from spun-copper lamps to cabinet pulls reminiscent of things like wing nuts — picked up an ICFF Editor's Award for best products and accessories, and the booth's elegant offerings set the blogosphere salivating. But few fairgoers seemed to have noticed a small newsprint takeaway at the booth called The Northern Tool, which documented the process behind each of the objects in question. Luckily your eagle-eyed editors spotted it...

Sight Unseen is an online magazine that uncovers what's new and next in design and the visual arts, with a focus on independent makers working outside traditional disciplinary boundaries. Since its founding in 2009, the site has served as a destination for companies and individuals interested in scouting new talent as well as an inspiration for those working in creative pursuits.

01: Northumbria 3D Design graduate Max Lamb is back on a beach in Cornwall casting pewter furniture

02: Northumbria DfI graduate Sir Jonathan Ive is the Chief Design Officer at Apple and therefore instrumental in the design of the iPhone

03: The Tools for Everyday Life collection of products presented at the ICFF (International Contemporary Furniture Fair) won the editors award for best products and accessories in 2012

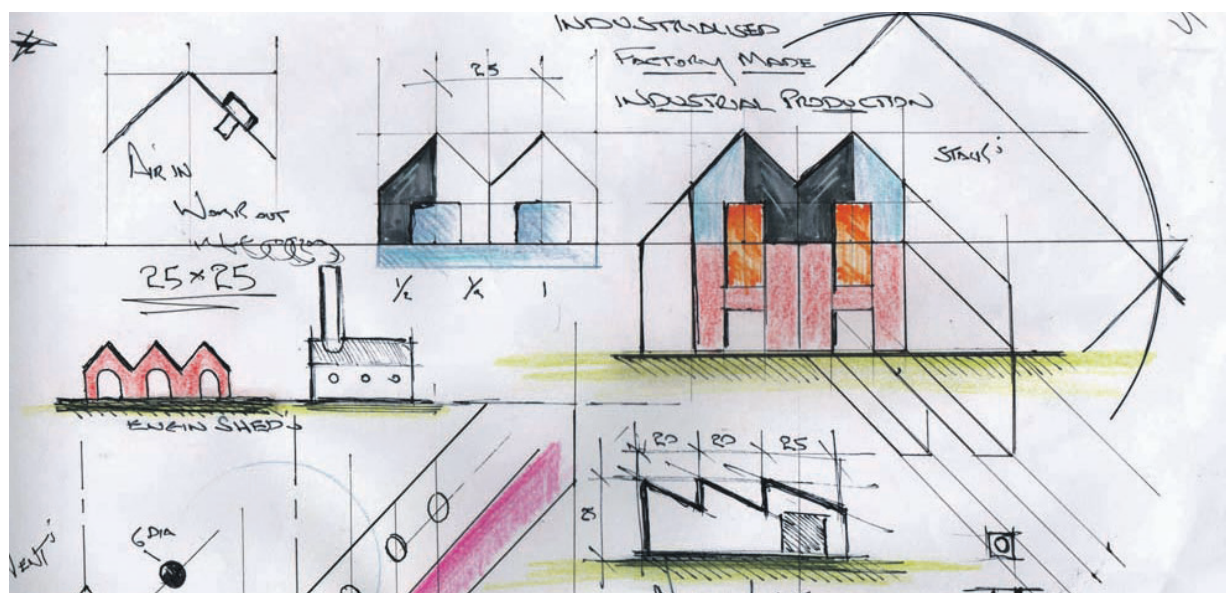
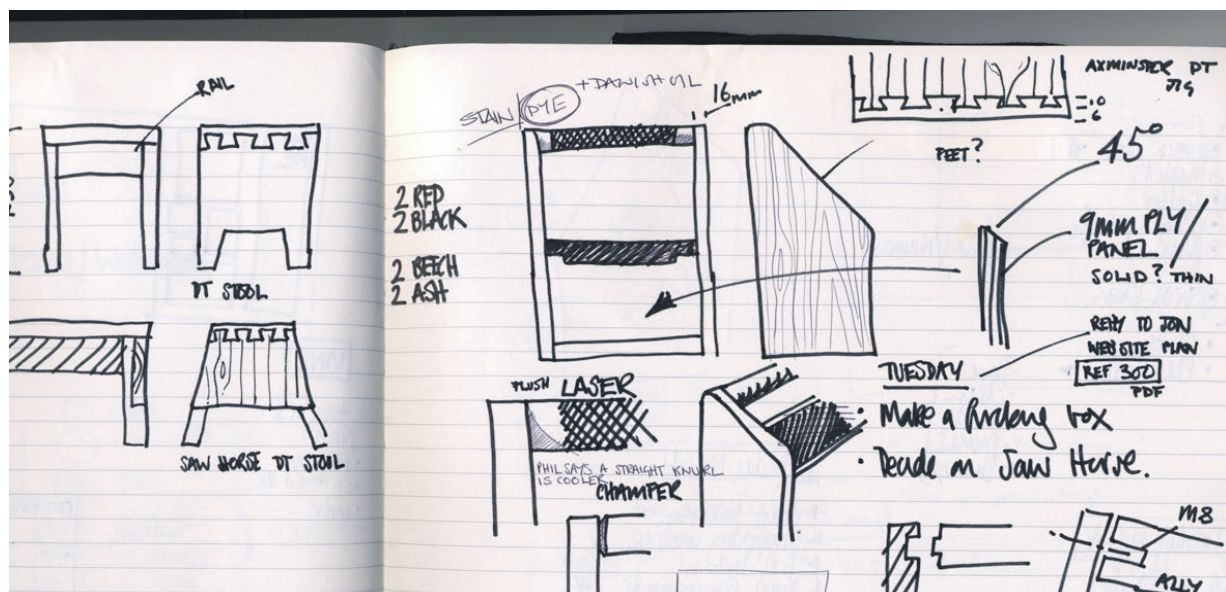
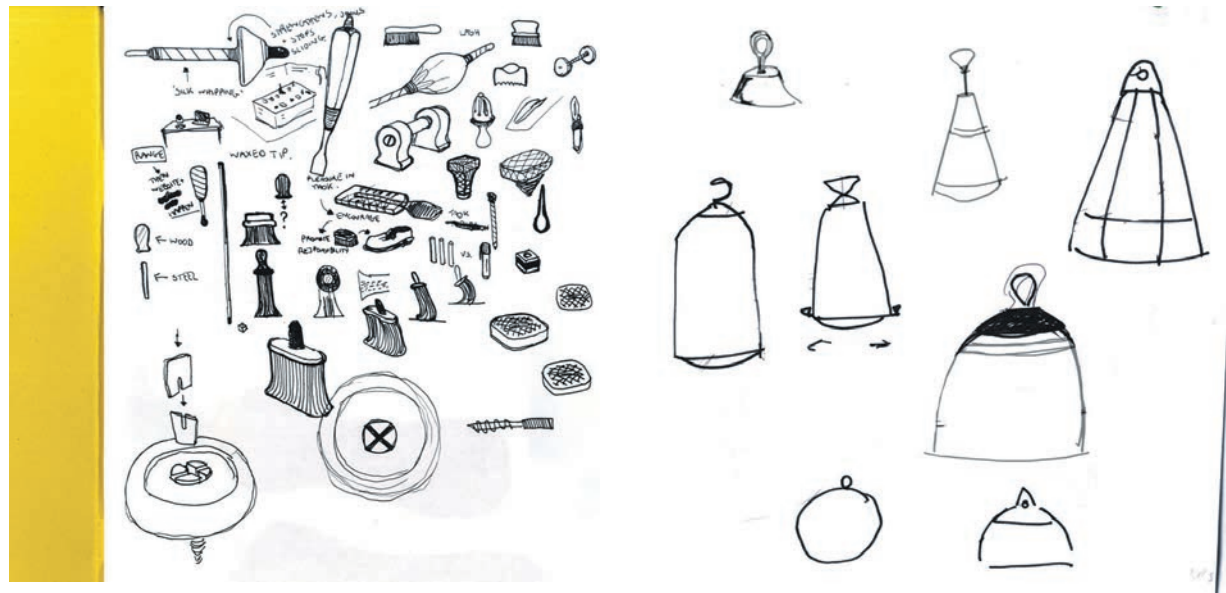
“A decline in tool use would seem to betoken a shift in our relationship to our own stuff; more passive and more dependant”

Matthew B. Crawford (Shopclass as Soulcraft :An Inquiry into the Value of Work

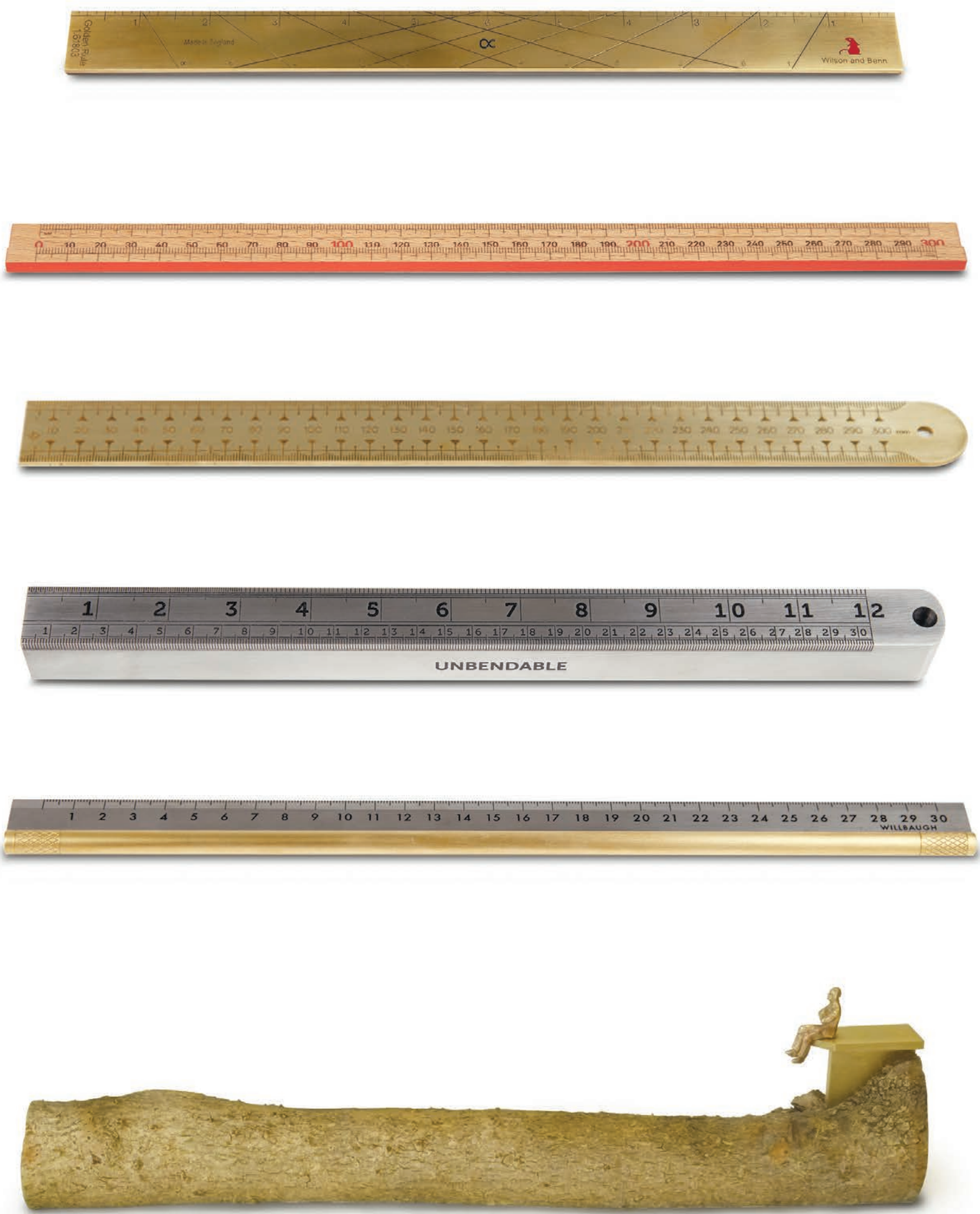
sketches: various

Once a designer gets past the self-consciousness of showing a rough idea quickly drawn or even physically drawing in front of others he/she often finds it can be the only way of expediently resolving, confirming or raising an important issue. One thing that was talked about a lot by the designers getting ready for an exhibition of the latest ‘Tools for Everyday Life’ products was the idea of the genuine pre-sketch (‘pre’ in the sense it was done before it’s content was resolved) versus the ‘post-sketch’ done after the object has been designed but passed off as a preliminary musing. Monographs, blogs and promotional websites often include a designer’s drawings to help illustrate the background and inspiration to a project. Many of these are post-sketches. The content of such after the fact material is useful as a process summary and may well impress a client paying for the privilege of the designer’s time but also helps aid the myths that surround the creative process. The myth of a lone genius being struck by a moment of inspiration, jotting down an idea almost fully formed is ably reinforced with a nice annotated post-sketch. The post-sketch edits out the angst of hours spent mulling over what might be discarded. And to be honest the true design process illustrated in quickly drawn ‘roughs’ never intended to be shown anywhere might not be that attractive.

8



Tools for Everyday Life: Rulers



Designed and developed in Newcastle then exhibited around the world

The Tools for Everyday Life have been exhibited widely. Indeed the aim of reaching a rich and varied audience for the products and furniture has meant trade show participation around the globe.

Exhibiting in the USA has raised the profile of the both Northumbria University and its design graduates on an international stage. For example, products such as the M-Lamp by David Irwin are now manufactured by Brooklyn based Juniper. Will Baugh’s rulers are sold through the Museum of Modern Art’s (MOMA) store in New York City.

Participation at the Stockholm Furniture fair has meant partnerships with European retailers and manufacturers.

Being a regular part of Design Event’s ‘Northern Design Festival’ in Newcastle and showing work during the London Design Festival through ‘Design Junction’ has developed a regional and national audience for the Tools for Everyday Life.

The intention is always to promote the excellence of a Northern (Northumbria) design education and provide a great platform for designers looking to sustain their professional practice in the North-East. There is no reason why being based in the North is a barrier to international design activity.

As part of a BEDG (British European Trade Group) led trade mission to China Designer in Residence Danny duquemin-Shiel and senior lecturer Colin Wilson from the Northumbria University’s school of Design were invited to present The Tools for Everyday Life at China Creative Design week at the Design Nova exhibition and Fair in Beijing.

The main focus of ‘China Creative Design Week’ held in Qingdao and Beijing was to examine definitions of green design and sustainable development for a developing consumer culture. The Tools project was presented as a case study that addresses issues of longevity and a provides a place for the celebration of quality production in the ‘eco’ debate.

Colin and Danny were two of thirty international speakers from leading American, European, Asian and Chinese design organisations, associations and companies addressing a select audience of more than 500 professional delegates at the high profile Forums in Qingdao and Beijing.

The Tools for Everyday Life contribution to debates

surrounding environmental issues were published in the in the BEDG published catalogue:

TITLE: “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.” From Hopes and Fears for Art. William Morris

The design profession was borne of an industrialised world where the ideas and plans for a product were separated from the modes of its manufacture. Indeed, ‘Design’ as enthusiastic young servant to and a stoker of insatiable demand for goods and services produced on an almost unimaginable scale is partly to blame for the environmental problems the world faces today and the predicted catastrophes in the future.

In the face of global warming and a harmful loss of biodiversity from what are now clearly unsustainable methods of manufacture and consumption, logic demands that ‘Design’ grows up and moves from pleasing the status quo with ever more products and services to taking the lead in integrating technological advances with an awareness of ecology. However, on a planet with many conflicting interests and massive disparities in standards of living, the biggest challenge is creating a political and social will for real change across the globe. A daunting task

By creating functional objects that are cherished rather than seasonally replaced, the human relationship with the material world is explored.

Against this backdrop, defining let alone measuring meaningful environmentally sustainable design practice is complex if at all possible. Both purely techno centric and eco centric approaches to working out how best to meet the wants and needs of the world whilst not doing irreparable damage have their limits. The former tends to ignore the complexity of the interrelated nature of the world we inhabit while the latter disregards the potential of manmade solutions. Whilst there is a clear need for practical and economically viable solutions/ alternatives to be employed on an epic scale to deal with issues related to fossil fuel use, realistically there needs also to be a change in patterns of consumption and attitudes amongst affluent nations to the props, products and patterns of daily life.

The ‘Tools for Everyday Life’ project at Northumbria University is an investigation of the interactions between product concept, manufacture and end user. Whilst the project doesn’t directly set out to tackle issues of sustainable design and in some ways aims to transcend the temporary feel good factor offered by supposedly ‘green’/‘eco’/‘environmentally friendly’ products, the intention is to look at the connections with the ‘stuff’ that surrounds us. By creating functional objects that are cherished rather than seasonally replaced, the human relationship with the material world is explored. The products in the ‘Tools for Everyday Life’ collection exists as a celebration of a designer’s appreciation of the things people do everyday and the meaningful value of the thoughtful craft/ manufacture. William Morris has been here before.



01. Tools for Everyday Life as shown at The Design Junction during the London Design Festival

Tools for Everyday Life.

A detailed black and white illustration of a globe surrounded by various tools and objects, framed by ornate scrollwork. The globe shows the Americas. Tools include a hammer, saw, wrench, and screwdriver. Other objects include a lightbulb, a magnifying glass, a compass, and a small house. The entire scene is enclosed in a decorative border of leaves and vines.

Process



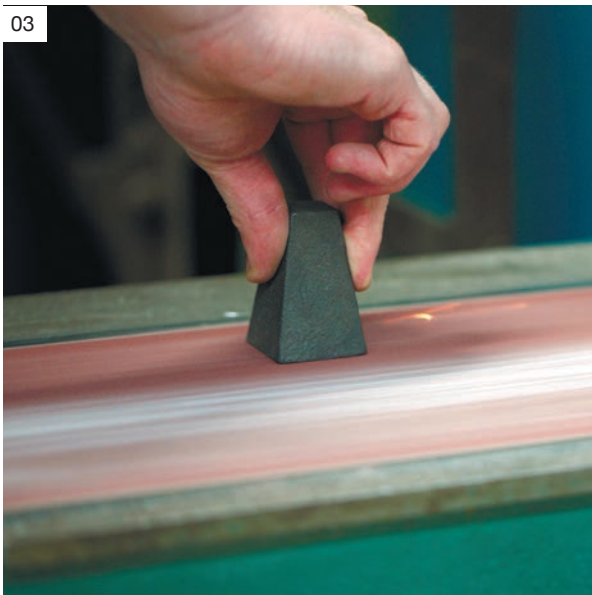
Products in the making

No self respecting examination of the value of making in the design process would be complete without some attractive shallow depth of field photographs of products being manufactured. Glimpses of the skills, techniques, equipment and raw materials that make up the creation of a ‘thing’ are reassuring in an age of touch screen beguilement and unrepairable boxes of technology. The images here show the tools of various trades, materials, mock-ups and ‘Tools for Everyday Life” in progress.

01. Photo taken at RC Dey and Son (upholsterers). Photo by Mark Slater

02. Lathe action

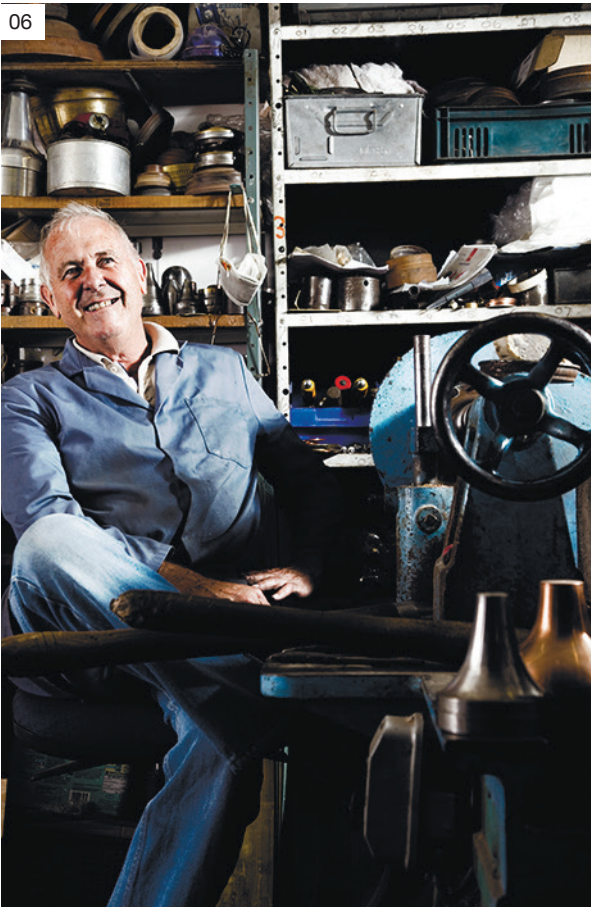
03. Finishing of the ‘Beacon’ paper weight



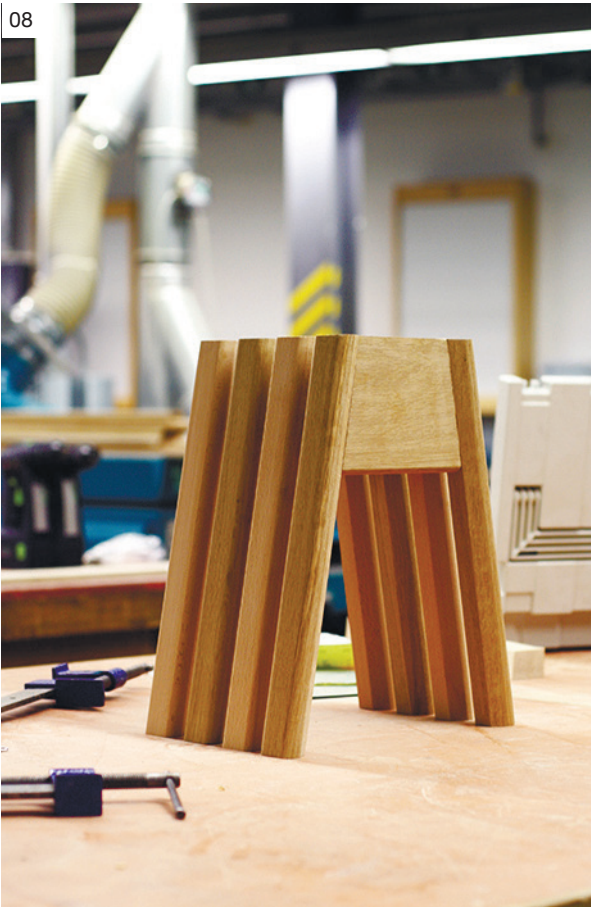
Process



04. Soldering of a silver jug



06. Friend of the the Tools for Everyday Life project, John taking a well deserved break from metal spinning



08. Oak and beech woodwork in progress



05. Working out the details of the pinhole camera



07. 3d printing a prototype pinhole camera



09. The burning of timber as part of the ancient Japanese Shousugi -ban to make the 'Tanso' outdoor bench.

Focus: A pinhole camera

interview with Josh South (JS) and James Benham (JB)
pinhole photography and process photography by the designers.
instagram: @pinholedevelopment



What is pinhole photography?

JB: Pinhole cameras are generally pretty simple. You have a tiny hole a fixed distance from some camera film. when you uncover the hole, light streams in and exposes an image on to the film. You get to control the exposure time and the film type however the focal length (zoom) is fixed.

What does pinhole photography do that digital image capture cannot?

JB: It commands your attention. With no view finder, you really have to focus on your surroundings, what you want to capture, it isn't instantaneous. Exposing an image ranges from a few seconds to several minutes depending on the conditions. Its pretty straightforward, you can produce some really nice photographs if you invest the time in it.

JS: I like that you have a finite amount of shots and the inability to delete. Enjoying a coffee while waiting for your photos to be developed is also nice if not a little nerve wracking.

How did you go about developing the camera?

JS: We wanted to make a lot of prototypes by hand from modelling foam so we could play with shapes and the form really responsively; however, relatively early on we realised the camera was going to be more complex than we anticipated.

JB: There were several quite intricate features we were both sure we wanted to incorporate so we started 3d printing a lot of parts and then tweaking and finishing them by hand. It was important to not allow ourselves to get too tied up with just developing on the computer.







Maker goes to market

words: anon

“The results of my craft are unique, one-of-a-kind, and therein lies their value. Are you sensitive to such variance? Roll up, roll up’...”



Ian was struggling to rewire the lamp when he first spotted the couple, steadily moving from one exhibit to the next, working their way towards him. They spent ten seconds looking at the fruit bowl, ten seconds on the stool, ten seconds on the vessel... ten seconds on the next thing. Carefully allocated, regular spans of contemplation. How could they be equally interested in each object on display? Or take the same amount of time to understand the intricacies of each? To Ian, it always gave them away, that feigned interest, the apparent understanding of everything: casual customers. The cable of Ian's light had been pulled from its switch. Whilst this was most likely the result of clumsy unfamiliarity with the touch-sensitive mechanism, rather than a malicious attack, he still wasn't happy about it. Within just two hours of first being exposed to the public, one of his creations was already broken. These people could not be trusted. Ian glanced up to see the couple getting closer, exactly 30 seconds away if they maintained their pace. The wiring was going to take longer than that to fix. He braced himself, fumbled with the switch housing, swore under his breath. And then they arrived.

‘Hi there,’ the couple said.

‘Hi,’ replied Ian, still concentrating on his screwdriver.

‘Are these your pieces?’ She asked.

‘Yeah.’

‘They’re beautiful, really great.’

... ‘Are you sure’, thought Ian, ‘don’t you want to give it ten seconds, just to be certain?’...

‘Oh, thanks very much,’ said Ian.

‘Is it plastic?’ The gentleman asked, touching the surface of Ian's largest lamp.

‘No, it's blown glass,’ Ian replied, finally looking up towards them.

‘Oh cool, so you’re a glass blower. I saw some videos of that a couple of weeks ago on the internet, really cool stuff,’ the man enthused.

‘Well, you’re stood in front of a furnace all day, so it’s not that cool.’

‘Ha ha ha’

‘Ha ha ha’

... “not that cool”? What? Am I a salesman now?’...

‘I love how different they are,’ She said, ‘so unusual.’

‘Thanks...’ Ian responded, ‘every one’s different, unique... because of the way they’re blown.’

... ‘Yep, I’m a salesman. And my story’s the same as all the others, the same as all those blurry videos he’s been watching, the story we’ve been sticking to for years. The results of my craft are unique, one-of-a-kind, and therein lies their value. Are you sensitive to such variance? Roll up, roll up’...

‘I see.’ She said, turning briefly to smile at her husband before looking back and pointing to ask, ‘How much is it for this one?’

... ‘Here we go... We all know my mode of production has been superseded, improved upon; many finer things will cost a fraction of what I’m asking. I mean, the switch on this lamp can only withstand two hours of actual use, but these objects are the result of honed skill and personal expression, not market demographics and product testing; what do you expect? Each lamp here takes me six hours to make. Actually, it’s six hours and twenty years of practice. And have you any idea how much it costs to heat a furnace all day? Okay, so it’s because I like blowing glass that I’m good at it. And maybe it’s asking too much to be paid for the pleasure, but can you really begrudge me enjoying what I do? Shouldn’t this be a model of human work, not an exception to the rule?’...

‘It’s two thousand for each lamp,’ said Ian, with a well-rehearsed confidence.

The lady’s expression froze, ‘And,’ with a big, slow nod, her face unchanging, locked and straining not to reveal a hint of the surprise, the disappointment ... I mean, it’s a lovely lamp and no doubt it takes a lot of skill to bend glass like that; I know I wouldn’t have the patience. But that’s a lot of money, it takes me three weeks to earn that much and that lamp hasn’t taken him three whole weeks, surely. I know it would look great in the living room, like something out of the magazines, but how can it be so expensive? Glass can’t cost that much, I recycle it every week, they can melt it down, make new stuff out of it, it must be virtually free. I don’t mind paying for a one-off, I love the things at these shows, but

that’s a holiday, a year of dining out, Christmas...

‘And,’ with a big, slow nod, her face unchanging, ‘how much for the smaller ones?’

Further Reading:

Gowlland, G. (2009) ‘Learning to See Value: Exchange and the Politics of Vision in a Chinese Craft’, *Ethnos*, 74:2, pp. 229–250

Dilley, R. (2004) ‘The Visibility and Invisibility of Production Among Senegalese Craftsmen’, *Journal of The Royal Anthropological Institute*, 10(4), pp. 797–813

Terrio, S.J. (1996) ‘Crafting Grand Cru Chocolates in Contemporary France’, *American Anthropologist*, 98(1), pp. 67–79.

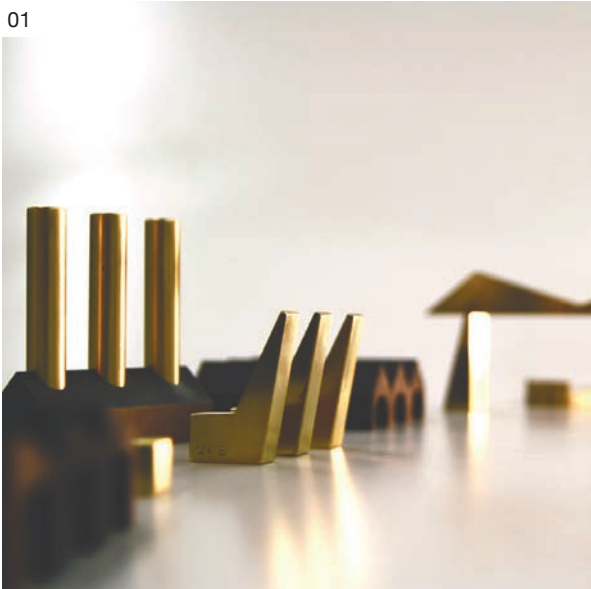
Products in the collection

There are now quite a number of products that have been created under the banner of Tools for Everyday Life. They are united by the designers’ exploration of a utilitarian aesthetic and finding delight in objects that do something well. The following extract from the first brief given to the designers explains the “tools” reference:

“Whilst the definition of a tool can just as easily refer to an object of complexity or simplicity harnessing new or old technology, there is elegance to functional tools that connect users with a task. This connection might achieve reverence by requiring the skill acquired by many hours of craft practice. Or the bond between operative and result is made ‘sweet’ because the tool takes all the pain out of a task. Either way tools that

transcend being a means to an end and are an end in themselves are one of life’s joys”

These two pages contain just some of the products that the project has generated.



01. 'Desktop Empires'- Colin Wilson
Blackened steel and brass

02. 'Nairn' folding Chair - David Irwin
Ash. Solid and laminated



03. Spirit Level- Trevor Duncan
Brass

04. Jug 01- Trevor Duncan
Silver



05. 'Beacon' (paper weight)- Josh South
Cast iron

06. 'Hand and Eye' - Trevor Duncan
Titanium

Tools for Everyday Life

07



10



13



08



11



14



09



12



15



07. 'Fire' (tea light)- Rickard Whittingham
Cast and machined brass, oak.

08. 'Fossil'- Neil Conley
Amberised glass

09. A stool- Rickard Whittingham
Oak and wool blend upholstery

10. 'The original grid'- Neil Conley
limited edition self healing cutting mat

11. 'No half measures'- Neil Conley
Illustration featured on Tools for Everyday Life beer mats

12. Folding stool- Trevor Duncan (leather by Leon Maurice)
Oak, ash, poplar and leather

13. 'Tanso' bench - David Irwin
Shousugi-ban treated oak

14. 'Northern Tool box'- Rickard Whittingham
Black dyed and laser knurled ash

15. 'Tradesman's (pivot) Wedge'- Colin Wilson
Phosphor Bronze



“If you know how to make something, you understand everything about it. You appreciate its logic, its beauty and its meaning. And its value. And you can pass on these pleasures and benefits.”

Stephen Bayley

