

Reviving classic Australian furniture by hand

Description



Take a seat: Meg Jarrett and partner Jack van Roo are the creative force behind Be Seated, in Portland, where they revive classic mid-century Australian furniture.

[box]A warning: by the end of this story, you will probably remember all of the stunning Australian-made furniture that you either threw away, saw poking out of a skip, or gave to a flatmate in the 1980s, and may end up in tears.[/box]

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] D [dropcap]espite working all day surrounded by chairs, stools and couches in various states of repair and disrepair, **Jack van Roo** and partner **Meg Jarrett** rarely have time to put their feet up.

Since opening their two-person business – Be Seated – early last year, the pair has been tapping into the huge demand for original, mid-century Australian furniture (1950s and 60s) that has been restored to its beautiful, retro glory.

Names like [Fred Lowen](#) (Tessa and Fler brands), Grant and Mary [Featherston](#), [Fred Ward](#) and [Clement Meadmore](#) have become the ultimate in collectable cool – not to mention quality – and their original furniture pieces have become hotly sought after both nationally and internationally.

It seems more than a little odd, then, to find Jack and Meg operating not from a high-profile shop in inner-suburban Melbourne, where they used to live, but a shed in the Portland industrial estate, half way between the port and the aluminium smelter.

“It started with our own house,” is how Jack explains it.

“We bought Meg’s grandparents house about 10 years ago, supposedly for holidays, and we decided we liked it so much that we would move into it,” he says.



It began with a house: the Tag Walter's designed 1960s house that Meg's grandmother owned in Portland and which she and Jack moved into 10 years ago.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] T [/dropcap]he Portland house is a 1960s original designed by legendary Warrnambool architect **"Tag" (William) Walter** with the long clean lines, large windows and open fireplaces surrounded by stone that became his hallmark.

Jack and Meg couldn't help but slowly fill the place with furniture from the era and so began their love affair with mid-century design and designers.

It wasn't until early last year, however, that they combined their skills to open a furniture restoration business that can cater for all eras, but specialises in mid-century pieces.

"There is nothing made of timber, in my view, that can't be fixed," says Jack, who has spent most of his life working in and around the furnishing and upholstery industry.

"We had one lady who brought a chair in and an arm dropped off in transit, so we replaced the arm and it was impossible to tell the original from the replacement," he says by way of example.

Meg has a background in interior design and fashion retail and uses her skills and contacts to source and select top quality, natural fabrics from around Australia to use for re-covering.

Between them, they have created a slice of *Mad Men* heaven, with a shed full of classic pieces that have been either found in their travels, or brought in by others to be reupholstered, re-stitched, re-stained, or whatever other painstaking method is required to bring it back to life.



Jack with a work in progress – an early colonial chair – which, like with all of his work, is painstakingly restored by hand.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] T[/dropcap]heir clients, similarly, come from far and wide, and include some of Melbourne's top architecture and design academics, but also local graziers.

"We have seen some very, very tired furniture that has been dragged out of the shearing shed or wherever and brought in here, sometimes literally in pieces," Meg says.

"And it is not just about how much a piece might be worth, but how much people love it. If they love it, they want to see it brought back to life."

All of Jack and Meg's work is done by hand – they don't use acid dips or harsh machinery to take shortcuts – and one piece can take many, many hours to complete.

"It can be very dirty and it is very time consuming, but it is also incredibly rewarding," Meg says.



Meg comes from a background in interior design during which she developed a knowledge and love of quality fabrics.



A pile of ugly wooden school chairs – destined for the tip – have been given a new splash of colourful life.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] J[/dropcap]ack has handled hundreds of pieces of furniture, but admires the simplicity of the classic Australian designs – Clement Meadmore and Featherston are among his favourites.

Unfortunately to own an original, pristine Featherston lounge suite could cost around \$20,000 compared to several hundred pounds when they were first sold.

Perhaps Jack and Meg might stumble across a wad of cash hidden in the springs of a secondhand chair picked up at an auction?

“I’ve never come across anything like that so far,” Jack says with a laugh.

“The best I can offer are two rings that look like they come from a member of a bikie gang.”

[box type="bio"] **Be Seated is at 22 George St, Portland. Ph: Meg 0419 579 896. Follow them on [Facebook here](#).** [/box]

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