



TALKING DESIGN



The Design Foundry is a retail destination set up to inspire customers to develop their individual interior design ideas. Founder and managing director Mark Crouch and his team are there to make their customers' ideas work.



Above and opposite The Design Foundry in Auckland's Grey Lynn, bordering Ponsonby, is a combination of a showroom, a retail store, a coffee bar, art gallery, a design office and a workshop.

Located in Auckland's Grey Lynn, on the border of Ponsonby, the exterior of the Design Foundry looks rather like an up-market café that sells art. One side of the entrance area features an espresso bar and the other side is taken up by huge, individual tables in all sizes with a variety of chairs. Colourful Mexican chairs with little tables clutter the footpath.

The interior is a combination of a showroom, a store, a café bar and a design office, an art gallery and a workshop. There's no one word to describe it. The concept is to combine the best of international design trends with local flair and workmanship – to offer a unique,

customised product for discerning local customers.

"We want to give people ideas," explains designer and architect Mark Crouch. While I wandered throughout the 'store', I discovered some unique items – such as antique tables with steel legs, interesting soft furnishings, benches made of planks from an old cargo vessel, samples of engineered parquet floors, modern leather couches and arm chairs, a variety of contemporary wallpapers, wardrobes in all shapes and sizes, a variety of storage systems, eye-catching clothing, a selection of gifts and old and new paintings.

"Everything is for sale in here," says Crouch.

Originally, he was on the lookout for a wardrobe showroom for his company, Innovative Interiors, which has specialised in customised wardrobe and storage design for over 18 years. However, the 340 m² premises he found in Grey Lynn was too big for him, so the idea of a collective showroom emerged. “I wanted to bring together similar brands, complementary to each other.”

Crouch has the lease on the building, subleasing it to the participating companies – including a couple of artists such as a textile artist creating individual handmade chairs and other furniture.

The brands sharing the space are:

- Annex Design;
- The Paper Room;
- The Boiler Room;
- Plateau Floors;
- Modulo and Armadi Design;
- and
- DecoGlaze.

Annex Design is a sort of a lifestyle store, owned by designer Ann Wilson. She’s ex-Christchurch after her store there was destroyed in the earthquakes. Being able to rebuild her brand in the inspiring and creative atmosphere of the Design Foundry is a relief for Wilson who has decided to start over

in Auckland. Handcrafted paper dresses from vintage printed maps are on offer as well as fancy stationery articles and other lifestyle products.

The Boiler Room brings together one of the finest collections of furniture and art sourced from New Zealand’s industrial and institutional past. These items are rendered from timber, metal and glass and steeped in the careworn patina of age. The Boiler Room offers unique, large-scale furniture – restored or redesigned with a modern aesthetic – alongside smaller pieces saved from obscurity and given fresh context for the modern home or workspace.

The Paper Room is an on-line wallpaper, fabric and accessories store established by Annabel Taylor and Sarah Sheild. The company offers access to a hand-picked collection of international designers. Complementary to the wallpapers, they also have selected fabrics and wall stickers on display. These range from bold and flamboyant, to subtle and sophisticated, to playful and quirky.

Plateau Floors imports and installs quality bamboo flooring and engineered wood flooring. On offer are products that feature industry-leading innovations, technical quality

and natural beauty matched by a design-rich range of colours and surface treatments.

DecoGlaze is one of the leaders in the glass splashback industry and can supply customised products for its customers..

Modulo and Armadi are premium brands of Innovative Interiors. The Modulo range consists of a series of modular storage pieces that combine functionality with affordability. It is described as flexible, adaptable and eminently usable. Armadi wardrobes incorporate the latest design styles and features from Europe.

Below and left A collective showroom, the 340m² space is occupied by a variety of brands under the umbrella of The Design Foundry. Discerning customers can have their own designs interpreted by specialists within this space.





Above, above right and right There's a collective concept at The Design Foundry but each brand is individualistic. To sum up the concept, 'it's all about giving people ideas'.

Below Annex Design is a lifestyle store relocated from Christchurch after the earthquakes destroyed the original.





Collective concept

Individualism is one of the key words of the collective concept. “We like to talk to people about this concept,” says Crouch. “People can come to us, tell us what they want and we can provide the design service as well as the production. To sum it up, it is all about giving people ideas.”

Sometimes, it appears that the biggest hurdle is to encourage customers to talk about their ideas and aspirations. Crouch says that customers come into the showroom and see, for example, the genuine French café chairs; they like them, but don’t fancy the colour. “It is no problem at all for us to change colours, fabrics or shapes. This is what we are here for,” he says. But occasionally, some customers need encouragement to fire their imagination and say what they really want – and others are not keen to wait for their individual coloured chair. “We try to please everybody and, hopefully, provide them with ideas,” says Crouch.

Watch this space

Coming soon is the launch of a new website, workshops and evening functions to help communicate the aim of the Design Foundry. A kitchen showroom is also in the planning.

With a nationwide network of specialist franchisees, Innovative Interiors provides a full-service offer – from design to manufacturing to installation, thus enabling Crouch to offer customised pieces of furniture. “We go to the client’s house, measure the space and come up with a quote for a shelf or wardrobe, for example. From then it will take three weeks or less to complete the order.”

So, who goes to this Grey Lynn retail destination? “Our customers are a mixture of homeowners and designers. Generally, they are people who spend money on their homes, through all classes of society.” The prices of the individually designed pieces vary; they range from expensive to affordable.

There is one strict rule at the Design Foundry: no cheap Chinese copies are on offer. “We have to

communicate the value of our work,” Crouch continues. “We don’t have a problem with overseas products and I have nothing against Chinese manufacturers if they provide us with unique products. Quality endures long after the price is forgotten,” he adds, while looking at the French chairs for \$300 which are still in good shape after 60 years.

The Design Foundry is open from 8.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on workdays and is still a work in progress. Once the model is set in concrete, Crouch has plans to open a Design Foundry in Wellington, Sydney and Melbourne. ■

□ By **Doris Evans**, a freelance retail writer based in Auckland and regular contributor to NZRetail.

Left, above and below

The Design Foundry is still a work in progress with a kitchen showroom in the planning and setting up day and evening workshops is in the pipeline.

