



**CONTEMPORARY ARTISANAL FURNITURE DESIGN: A CASE OF  
PRACTITIONERS IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA.**

**by**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**Master of Technology: Design**

**in the Faculty of Informatics and Design**

**at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

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**Cape Town**

September 2019

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study aims to describe the practice and nature of contemporary artisanal furniture design in Cape Town. This description focuses on: the design and production processes utilised, the shared principles and perceptions among the practitioners, the challenges experienced in the practice, and the role that artisanal furniture design fulfils within the industry today. The research problem that the study investigates, is the lack of understanding of what the practice of artisanal furniture design involves today. Being a resurgence of craftsmanship, the shared challenges of the contemporary practice are not clearly defined. The additional benefits of this practice to the city of Cape Town are also not identified.

Taking the form of an exploratory investigation, a case study was used as research strategy to observe and examine four contemporary artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town. Multimethod qualitative research was applied to gather data, employed in a cross-sectional time horizon. The qualitative methods included direct observation, semi-structured interviews, research exercises, photo documentation and field notes.

David Pye's Theory of Making was used as conceptual framework for the study, determining the level of risk involved with the various stages of artisanal production, and evaluating the grade of workmanship used by the practitioners to create the artisanal furniture pieces. The study's findings were analysed according the dimensions of Pye's book, and applied as themes for discussion in the document.

The limitations of this study are the danger of personal involvement of the researcher, and thus the influence of subjectivity. The study is also limited to its scope of product design, and further limited to the focus area of furniture design. Based on four artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town, the findings are related to these specific cases, not representing the complete practice.

The result of the study is an in-depth synopsis describing the nature and approach that contemporary artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town share. This description of the practice is a valuable contribution for the role that these designers fulfil, while establishing a defined community of practice. The study also contributes towards the documentation of South African furniture design, being of high value to the limited existing pool of research.

## **KEYWORDS**

Artisanal, Craft, Contemporary, Furniture, Design, Local, Product Design, Traditional.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### I wish to thank:

- Laurie Wiid van Heerden, Louw Roets, James Mudge and Carla Erasmus for their time and participation in the study. Your input was an immense contribution.
- Ashleigh Lloyd Wedlake for participating in the trial interview.
- Willemien Klinger for copy editing and proof reading of the document.
- Vikki Eriksson and Veronica Barnes for supervising this study with a great amount of encouragement, knowledge and enthusiasm. Your guidance meant much more than I can ever express.
- My family for their constant support, motivation and endless love throughout this journey.
- The mighty Man above for making this, and everything else, possible.



## GLOSSARY

<b>Acronyms/Abbreviations</b>	<b>Definition</b>
BEE	black economic empowerment
BOP	bottom of pyramid
CAD	computer-aided design
CCDI	Cape Craft and Design Institute
CNC	computer numerical control
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DEDAT	The Department of Economic Development and Tourism
DEFSA	Design Education Forum of South Africa
DI	Design Institute
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IdeaSA	Industrial Design Association of South Africa
IDESO	Industrial Design Solutions
IID	Institute of Interior Design Professionals
IPAP	Industrial Policy Action Plan
NGO	non-government organisation
NGZ	National Galleries of Zimbabwe
PDI	previously disadvantaged individual
SAFI	South Africa Furniture Initiative
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro-sized Enterprise
SPV	Special Purpose Vehicle
THINK	South African Communication Design Council
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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# CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

In an age of mass manufacturing, advanced technology and consumerism, a global revival of handmade products and practices is underway (Luckman, 2015:1). Increasingly more people are in favour of handcrafted products from independent crafters. While each apply their own unique approach and materials, these creators value traditional craftsmanship techniques (McGuirk, 2011). Although an increase in artisanal products is experienced today, artisanal designers are, however, still faced with various challenges (Klamer, 2012:1; Harvard University, 2017). Focussing on the scope of artisanal furniture design in Cape Town, there exists a lack of research and consequent understanding of the practice. The processes, principles and perceptions of the designers have not been established. The role of artisanal designers within the field of product design is thus unclear.

## 1.2 Statement of the research problem

The research problem that this study investigated, is the lack of understanding of what the contemporary practice of artisanal furniture design in Cape Town involves today. This includes the processes, principles and perceptions of the designers. The role that these designers fulfil within the field of product design has not been established. Although there appears to be a resurgence of craftsmanship, the shared challenges of the contemporary practice are not clearly defined. The additional benefits of this practice to the city of Cape Town are also not identified.

## 1.3 Background to the research problem

The relationship between mass-manufactured products and those created by artisans has been evolving for many years. The emergence of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century drastically changed the handcrafted methods of production to that of mechanised, mass manufacturing (Grübler, 2003:26; Chudasri, Walker & Evans, 2011:4). With mass manufacturing came the rise of consumerism, causing a decline in craft as being costly and time-consuming to produce (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:4). The vast expansion of industrialised production soon caused environmental and socio-economic effects of major concern (ibid). In resistance to the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, the Arts and Crafts Movement aimed to protect and restore the traditional techniques of handmade production (Taggart, 2018).

Similar to how the Arts and Crafts Movement strived to sustain the survival of handmade production, a movement of the same kind is experienced today (Taggart, 2018). This resurgence is in response to the growth of automation, aiming to return to traditional techniques of making (Klamer, 2012:1; Kneese, Rosenblat & Boyd, 2014:6). The movement is not only found in product design, but is an overall response to the current way of living and manufacturing. The creative economy increasingly calls for skills that are characteristic of craftsmanship, indicating a trend in consumer culture that stresses authenticity and quality (Klamer, 2012:1). This demand is visible in the form of new, small-scale companies focusing on local craftsmanship. Designers conceptualise and produce their own products, merging their creative ideas and manufacturing skills in the small-batch or serial production of their designs. The designer is thus usually part of the complete design process from start to finish (LCD Depot, 2012).

Creators are therefore starting to re-evaluate the craft in their work (Klamer, 2012:1). This artisanal turn also marks a new era where futurism and techno-utopian combine with a sense of nostalgia for pre-industrial manufacturing methods (Kneese *et al.*, 2014:5). Craft is an integral part of any culture or tradition around the world and has played a significant role within the discipline of industrial design, as taking part in its evolution and, in some cases, being still in force (Panda, 2013:1; Rodríguez *et al.*, 2016:198). Current trend books and catalogues by design companies emphasise this relationship and make reference to neo-artisanal products or the recovery of craft in the industrial processes (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2016:189). People are attempting to remember and recognise the lost craft that used to define the meaning of their cultural values.

The issue of addressing the need for artisanal designers and their skills and techniques is, however, so vast and complex that it has not been addressed in complete form (Kapur & Mittar, 2014:2). Today artisanal designers still experience major challenges whilst persevering in an age of mass production and consumerism, especially with the constant development of new technology.



## **1.4 Research questions**

### **Main Question**

How can the practice and nature of contemporary artisanal furniture design within Cape Town be described?

### **Sub-questions**

1. What are the design and production processes used by artisanal furniture design practitioners?
2. What are the shared principles and perceptions among artisanal furniture designers?
3. What are the challenges that artisanal furniture designers experience within the industry and market today?
4. What role does artisanal furniture designers fulfil within the product design industry today?

## **1.5 Objectives of the research**

The study explores and observes four contemporary artisanal product design practitioners in their working environment. These artisanal designers are based in Cape Town and work specifically in the focus area of furniture design. The aim of the study is to describe the phenomenon of contemporary artisanal furniture design in Cape Town, with the attempt of achieving an improved understanding of the practice and the designers' approach to their work. The description takes the form of in-depth narratives, including aspects such as the designers' principles and perceptions, design and production processes, techniques and materials, business practice and structure, and personal satisfactions and challenges of the practice. The study aspires to also describe the role of artisanal furniture designers within the contemporary field of product design.

## **1.6 Conceptual framework**

A conceptual framework can be described as the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs the research (Maxwell, 1996:25). It can be defined as a visual or written conception or model that explains the key factors, concepts or variables to be studied, and the presumed relationships among them. The conceptual framework, therefore, acts as a tentative theory of the phenomena being investigated (Miles & Huberman, 1994:18).

David Pye's Theory of Making was used as conceptual framework for the study. In 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' (1968), Pye sought a definition of craft, proposing a new theory of making based on the concept of good workmanship and technique. As it is difficult to determine where craftsmanship ends and ordinary manufacture starts, Pye stated the following to define craft:

[S]imply any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends on judgement, dexterity and care which the maker exercises as he works. The essential idea is that the quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making; and so I shall call this kind of workmanship 'The workmanship of risk': an uncouth phrase, but at least descriptive (Pye, 1968:20).

Pye outlines 'the workmanship of risk' to be what one would call craft, where the final product being made is in danger throughout the process of making. In contrast, 'the workmanship of certainty' defines any production process where the quality of the result is predetermined before production starts. Each operation is preset and found in its pure state in full automation, thus describing mass manufacturing (ibid). These terms, although set up in contrast, are intended as a 'sliding scale' model, where the level of risk changes depending on the stage of work (Loh, Burry & Wagenfeld, 2016:190).

According to Pye's writing, a relationship exists between the tools, materials and techniques used in the production process. The relationship between tools and techniques raises the question of appropriateness, while the relationship between tools and materials raises the question of establishment of control. The relationship between materials and techniques is based on care, dexterity and judgment (Loh *et al.*, 2016:191). These three aspects of making can be used to determine the level of risk at various stages of production.

Within workmanship lies a relationship between the intent of the designer and the execution of the work, described by Pye as another sliding scale relationship (Loh *et al.*, 2016:190). Good workmanship is where the physical object is aligned with the design, whereas bad workmanship is where the executed object is removed from the intent. What might previously have been a subjective reading of workmanship therefore becomes a model that is nearly quantifiable.

Pye's 'workmanship of risk' and 'workmanship of certainty' were used as sliding scale model for the practice of the artisanal product designers investigated, determining the level of risk at the various stages of production. Furthermore, Pye's framework was used to evaluate the grade of workmanship used by the practitioners to create the artisanal furniture pieces. The findings of the study was also analysed according the structure of 'The Nature and Art of

Workmanship', by applying these dimensions as themes according to which the *Discussion* chapter is organised.

### **1.7 Delineation of the research**

A common pitfall associated with case studies is an excess amount of information, consequently fostering an unfocused approach. Several authors, including Yin (2003:10), have suggested placing boundaries on cases to ensure that it remains reasonable in scope (Baxter & Jack, 2008:546). The delineations therefore indicate the specific range of research that the study will focus on.

The research for this study is solely aimed at product design, specifically in the focus area of furniture design. The study therefore does not revolve around other design disciplines where artisanal designers are at practice. The phenomenon of contemporary artisanal designers in other design disciplines might, however, be expected to be similar to those in the scope of this study.

The study focuses specifically on the practice of contemporary artisanal furniture design, being centred around the designers and their practice. The research does not place the specific products created, the market for whom the work is intended, or the industry of product design at the core of the study, but aims to be of main significance to the practice of artisanal furniture design.

The case studies were conducted with four artisanal furniture designers in the context of Cape Town. The designers were selected according to the description<sup>1</sup> used to preliminarily describe the contemporary artisanal product designer and their practice. The selection of the artisanal designers was based on the focus area of furniture design, but not confined by a specific material or production method. A limited number of case studies were performed to ensure thorough data collection from each case.

As the study is based on four artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town, the findings are related to these *specific* cases. The study therefore does not represent the practice of all artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town.

The case studies were based in Cape Town, being an 'up-and-coming' global city, with most of the infrastructure similar to that of a city in the developed world (Gibb, 2007:537). The study reflects the practice of artisanal furniture designers within this specific context. The

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<sup>1</sup> See 2.2: *The practice of contemporary artisanal production.*

study can therefore not be applied or compared directly to artisanal furniture designers based in other contexts, as the area's level of development ultimately influences the producers' practice when taking social, economic and technological factors into consideration.

As specifically *contemporary* artisanal design is discussed, it concerns current design practices, often relevant to more urban and developed countries. This is in contrast to rural or underdeveloped areas – that more often apply to older forms of traditional crafts. The contemporary designers discussed therefore have more direct exposure to the market, as well as more access to resources – such as a variety of materials, advanced technology and manufacturing processes through the industry.

### **1.7.1 The alliance of art, craft and design**

The complex of the affinities between art, craft and design have been a topic of discussion for many years. Lees-Maffei & Sandino (2004) state that this is due to art, craft and design occupying an unstable territory of constantly shifting alliances (Lees-Maffei & Sandino, 2004:207). In agreement, Kaya and Yagiz (2011) explain that although the designer and master converge toward each other, the perceptions of the terms 'design' and 'craft' are not always united. The definitions are rather often changing, frequently due to a shift of authority (Kaya & Yagiz, 2011:67).

Existing debates have centred around liaisons between these practices as prone to be affected by a conventional hierarchy. Today, however, hierarchy is seen as no longer relevant, rather viewing these practices in terms of parallel development or convergence (Lees-Maffei & Sandino, 2004:207). It is believed that the principles that define the differences and relations between art, craft and design are subject to historical change, while also varying in region and culture. The contemporary evolving nature of design practices often defies and confounds these normative categories, in a sense invalidating or complicating discourses that are dependent on conventional discrete definitions of the terms (Lees-Maffei & Sandino, 2004:207).

The aim of the study is not to define artisanal product design as label, but to rather apply the term to explore the same occurrences amongst this emerging contemporary practice. Thus, the term is not intended to exclude, or aim to replace, the terms of art, craft and design. Due to the converging nature of art, craft and design, the term 'artisanal product design' is used to explore and describe a phenomenon of furniture producers in Cape Town that might identify with one, or all, of these terms.

### 1.7.2 Inclusion of sample

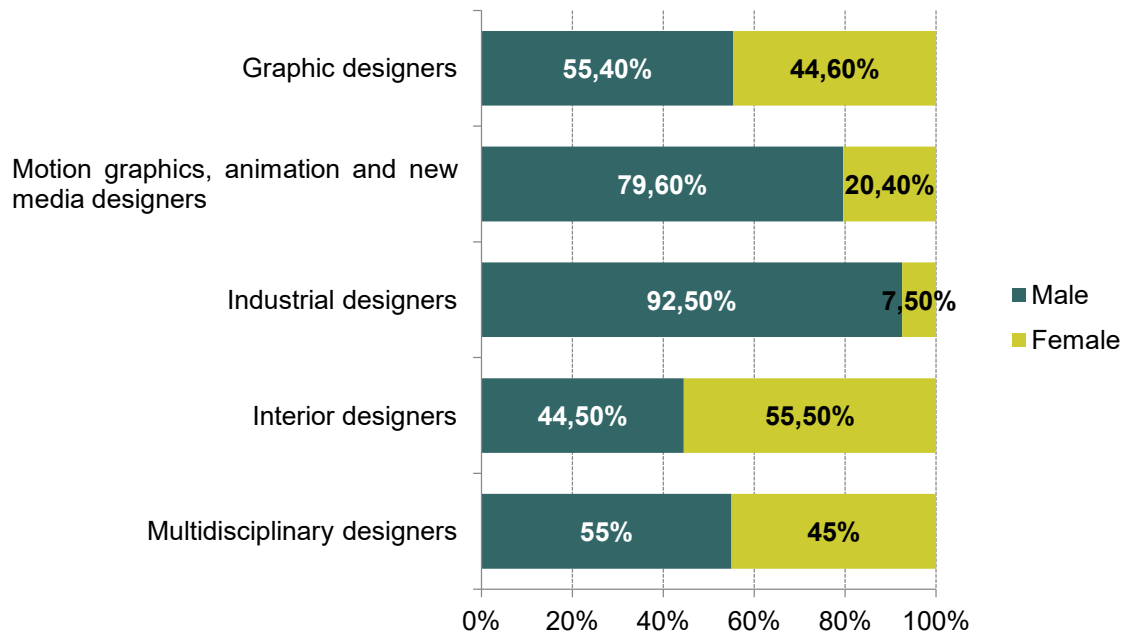
The scope of the study did not focus on a specific gender. However, due to the demographics of Industrial Design in South Africa, it was more likely that the participating business owners and employees would be male.

The IDA World Design Survey pilot project, as lead by the SABS Design Institute (DI), facilitates the understanding of the magnitude, impact, characteristics and unique cultural differences of the design economy in an international context (SABS Design Institute, 2010). For South Africa's participation, the DI collaborated with professional design associations representing design education, industrial and interior design, and communication: Design Education Forum of South Africa (DEFSA), Industrial Design Association of South Africa (IdeaSA), Institute of Interior Design Professionals (IID) and the South African Communication Design Council (THINK) (SABS Design Institute, 2010).

Included in the survey was the comparison of design business ownership according to gender for different design disciplines in South Africa. Respondents were asked to provide percentage ownership for the following categories: male ownership, female ownership, previously disadvantaged individual (PDI) male ownership and PDI female ownership. Due to the South African focus on black economic empowerment (BEE), the researchers were urged to simultaneously gather an idea of the movement towards BEE (SABS Design Institute, 2010). The findings were as follows:

**Table 1.1: Design business ownership by gender  
(adapted from SABS Design Institute, 2010)**

Discipline	% Male Ownership	% Female Ownership	% PDI Male Ownership	% PDI Female Ownership
Graphic designers	49,2%	41,4%	6,3%	3,1%
Motion graphics, animation and new media designers	79,6%	9,9%	0,0%	10,5%
Industrial designers	84,6%	7,5%	7,9%	0,0%
Interior designers	38,2%	47,4%	6,3%	8,1%
Multidisciplinary designers	42,3%	37,3%	12,7%	7,7%



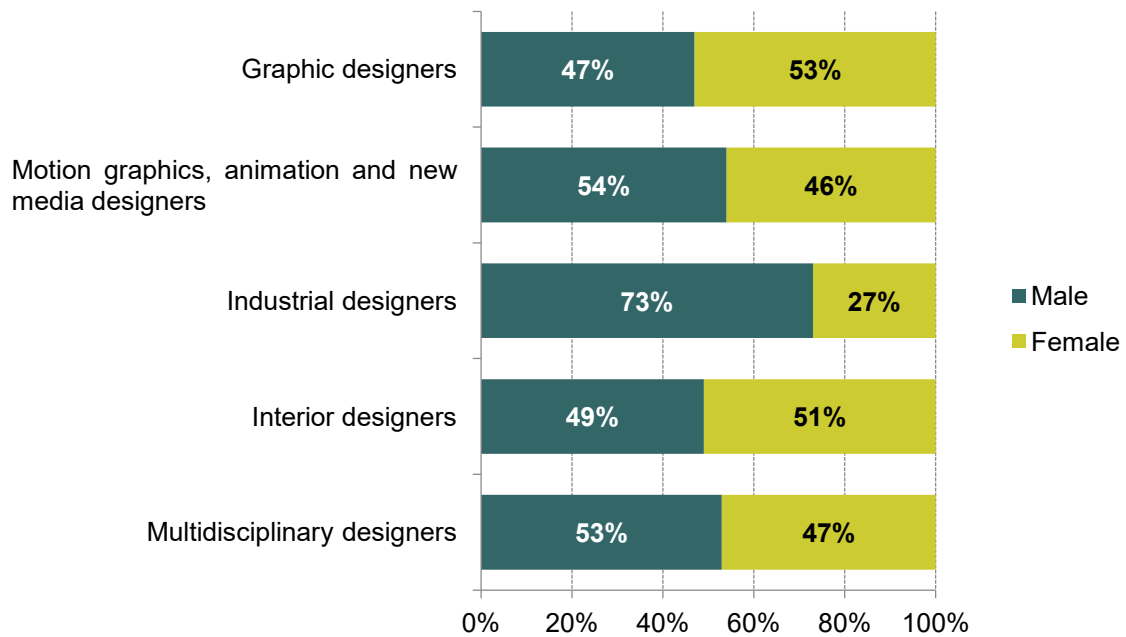
**Figure 1.1: Total percentage business ownership by gender (adapted from SABS Design Institute, 2010)**

As indicated in Table 1.1, it is evident that the ownership of design companies is still predominantly a male-dominated sector of the economy. A rare 7,5% of South African Industrial Design companies are owned by females (SABS Design Institute, 2010).

The IDA World Design Survey pilot project also analysed the gender of designers employed per discipline. As can be seen in Table 1.2 and Figure 1.2, Industrial Design is the only discipline in which there is a vast difference between employment by gender. A high 73% of Industrial Design employees are male (SABS Design Institute, 2010).

**Table 1.2: Employment by gender in design companies (adapted from SABS Design Institute, 2010)**

Discipline	Males (Sample)	Females (Sample)	Males (Population)	Females (Population)	TOTAL
Graphic designers	208	235	360	407	767
Motion graphics, animation and new media designers	51	44	86	73	159
Industrial designers	290	107	481	177	659
Interior designers	101	107	180	191	371
Multidisciplinary designers	58	52	91	82	173
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>1197</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>2127</b>
<b>PERCENTAGE</b>			<b>56,3%</b>	<b>43,7%</b>	



**Figure 1.2: Percentage split between genders employed (adapted from SABS Design Institute, 2010)**

Although the statistics stated in the IDA World Design Survey pilot project was published in 2010, it can be estimated that Industrial Design in South Africa is still dominated by male ownership and employment today. Due to the fact that the study focuses on various scope specifics – Cape Town as context, furniture design as specific field within product design, and the practice of artisanal design – it further reduces the number of appropriate participants. The researcher was also restricted to the designers that were willing and available to participate in the study. According to these delineations and the demographics of Industrial Design in South Africa, the number of female participants available to the researcher was thus exceptionally limited. As indicated in Table 1.3, one female-owned artisanal furniture design business participated in the study, however the other three participating practices are male-owned. As can be seen in Table 1.4, the majority of the employees of the participating companies are male, while there are no female workshop employees.

**Table 1.3: Participating businesses' ownership by gender (Van Schalkwyk, 2019)**

Business name	Owner/s	Gender
Wiid Design	Laurie Wiid van Heerden	Male
Louw Roets Design	Louw Roets	Male
James Mudge Furniture Studio	James Mudge	Male
Bofred	Carla Erasmus	Female
	Christa Botha	Female

**Table 1.4: Employment by gender in participating businesses  
(Van Schalkwyk, 2019)**

<b>Business name</b>	<b>Number and position of employees</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Wiid Design	4 workshop employees	4	0
	1 design assistant	1	0
	1 personal assistant/administrator	0	1
Louw Roets Design	1 workshop employee	1	0
James Mudge Furniture Studio	13 workshop employees	13	0
	2 administration and production assistants	0	2
Bofred	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22 employees</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>

### 1.7.3 Constraints

Case studies are often labour-intensive, difficult to conduct and require a fair amount of time to be carried out properly (Saunders & Tosey, 2013:59). A large amount of documentation is often produced, which can easily run the danger of not being managed and organised properly (Zainal, 2007:5). Due to the limited availability of time of the artisanal designers, the researcher ensured that the methods used were concise and focused on the research questions. This facilitated the gathering of the required data to be documented and managed more easily.

Another disadvantage of case studies is the possibility that the outcomes of the study might differ slightly depending on the role, distance, views and beliefs of the researcher (Saunders & Tosey, 2013:59). As the researcher is effectively the point of view, he/she might lose his/her objectivity and include biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 1984:21). It was therefore vital for the researcher to remain as objective as possible to avoid subjectively influencing the data portrayed.

A common criticism of case study research is its dependence on singular cases, making it difficult to reach a generalising conclusion. The delineations and objectives of the research have, however, been identified as being of more importance in case studies than a big sample size (Zainal, 2007:5). As a multiple case study was conducted, it minimised the generalising of data from only one source. The aim of the study is, however, not to reach a defining conclusion of the practice of artisanal furniture design, but to rather use the data from the cases to describe the nature of the phenomenon. The research aims to provide qualitative data through in-depth narratives of the phenomena being studied, rather than quantitative data.



The availability and compliance of the artisanal furniture designers to participate in the study was experienced as a major constraint. The limited time of the designers made it challenging to arrange the case studies, which caused slight delays with the research timeline. The designers had limited time available to participate in the case study, especially as they are responsible for the majority of the business operations. As the case studies had to take place in the specific working environments of the artisanal designers, all forms of data collection had to be thoroughly completed in the time available.

The research exercise used as data gathering method proved to involve communication constraints. Being a self-administered exercise, the researcher was not able to explain questions that might be unclear, or probe answers provided by participants. A slight language barrier emerged, as English is not the first language of the majority of the workshop employees. Upon collection, the researcher therefore had to ensure that the booklets were thoroughly completed by the employees. Clarification was provided where questions were possibly omitted or misunderstood, where after the booklets were completed accordingly. Alternatively the researcher explained the questions to participants prior to completion of the exercise, ensuring that it is understood.

The privacy of the artisanal designers' working environments was experienced as a constraint for the gathering of data, as certain techniques and processes used are trade secrets and thus confidential. The researcher agreed to sign a non-disclosure agreement, if required by the designer. If requested, all data reflected on the artisanal designers and their practice could also be reviewed and approved by the designer before being used in the final paper.

### **1.8 Role of the researcher**

The researcher completed the BTech course in Industrial Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), prior to starting with her MTech degree in Design. During her studies, the researcher gained knowledge on the various design movements and historical influences that lead to the design industry of today. The course also exposed the researcher to the diverse focus areas of Industrial Design which can be pursued as profession. Living in the creative city of Cape Town, the researcher is afforded further insight into the field of design. The researcher is also exposed to the craft practices that fulfil a vital role as means of income in South Africa as developing country.

The researcher is particularly fond of items produced by craftsmanship techniques for the quality that it embodies. As practicing product designer, the work and principles of artisanal

designers act as great inspiration to the researcher. Considered as more educated in the field of design, the researcher experiences a lack of value and understanding of design among the market and industry in South Africa. This is found to be true for the practice of artisanal product design in particular. As the benefits that the practice provides are not established, the role that artisanal design fulfils is perceived as being undervalued. The researcher's knowledge on the topic of the study is formed through her own subjective interpretations assigned to the phenomena being studied. The researcher is aware that her subjective stance and her perception of the practice of artisanal product design can possibly have an impact on the research. This concern has been clearly discussed in the *Ethical considerations* section and the *Research Methodology* chapter.

### **1.9 Ethical considerations**

The research conducted followed certain ethical considerations, to ensure that participants were treated ethically, for the academic integrity of the researcher, and to uphold the reliability of the research. The ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, fabrication and falsification of data, non-publication of data, and researcher bias (Write Consent Solutions, 2017).

All participants of the case studies were informed of the background and the purpose of the research and what their role in the research would entail, after which they could provide their voluntary permission to be involved in the study<sup>2</sup>. The participants had the rights to: be under no obligation to participate, choose to withdraw from the study at any time, refuse to answer any of the questions and could request not to be photographed or recorded. They could also request that no photographs should be taken or published of their work or working environment. The participants were assured that neither they nor their working environment, in which the case study took place, would be harmed in any way (Driscoll, 2011:4).

The research ethics of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of all participants were maintained by ensuring that participants' identities were kept anonymous when research results were reported, if they would prefer not to be identified by their real names (Driscoll, 2011:5). All participants agreed that their personal identification could be used in the study, for which a written consent form was obtained from each participant<sup>3</sup>.

The fabrication and falsification of any data were avoided throughout the study. Regardless of the results of the primary research, only truthful and accurate data are revealed. No false

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C for participants' consent forms to participate in the study.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D for participants' written consent forms.

data were therefore fabricated to reflect the researcher's anticipated outcomes (Write Consent Solutions, 2017).

The non-publication of data involves the violation of research ethics when certain information is omitted, as it does not support the expectations of the researcher (Write Consent Solutions, 2017). Data contrasting the anticipated outcomes of the researcher were therefore included in the findings and discussed as significant contribution.

The researcher avoided being biased towards the expected results at all times. The subjective view, beliefs and expectations of the researcher were therefore not reflected in the structuring of questions for the semi-structured interviews and research exercises, in the conducting of field notes, in the analysis of findings, or in conclusions being drawn from collected data (Driscoll, 2011:5).

### **1.10 Significance of the research**

The aim of the study was to explore and consequently describe the practice of contemporary artisanal furniture design in Cape Town. The study is of major importance to the practice of artisanal furniture design, intended to achieve an improved understanding of these designers and the approach to their work. By determining the role of artisanal furniture designers within the field of product design, a defined community of practice can be established. Product designers will have the ability to understand diverse alternatives in practice and gain inspiration from a different perspective of their field.

#### **1.10.1 Expected outcomes, results and contributions of the research**

By exploring and analysing contemporary artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town, the study aimed to provide a description of the nature of this specific practice. This description provides a synopsis of some of the processes, principles, perceptions and challenges that these practitioners share. As an increase in, and demand for, artisanal products is currently experienced on a global scale, the description provided by the research is a valuable contribution for the role that artisanal furniture designers fulfil today and will fulfil in the future. As there are no current studies on the dissertation databases, as found through the CPUT databases, that explore the current practice of artisanal furniture design in Cape Town, the study adds value to the limited existing documentation of South African design. If a reasonable description of artisanal furniture design becomes part of product design curricula, the study could also contribute to the educational field of design.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

To gain a thorough understanding of the research problem and to identify the existing pool of expert knowledge, currently available literature was examined and critiqued. The emergence of the Arts and Crafts is firstly discussed, analysing the movement's origin and influence on product design. The literature subsequently explains how a similar movement is experienced in product design and practice today. In an attempt to provide a description of the practice of contemporary artisanal product design, a discussion of craft and artisanal products focuses on the main aspects of: artisanal designers and their philosophies, skills and techniques, products, materials and trade. These provide a better insight into the practice and phenomenon being studied. The theme of sustainable development is analysed, examining the practice of artisanal design in terms of environmental, social and economical sustainability. The challenges experienced by artisanal product designers, as originating from both industry and consumers, are discussed. These challenges include: globalisation; loss of skilled labour; and lack of value in product and practice. To gain a better insight into the focus area of furniture, the South African furniture manufacturing industry is examined. Lastly, the Western Cape's design strategy is analysed, looking into the impact and purpose, classification and maturity of design in the province, as well as the position of artisanal product design within the strategy. Through analysis of the literature, the researcher intended to identify an area of knowledge to contribute towards through the study.

### **2.1 The emergence of the Arts and Crafts**

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, which began in Britain and later spread to other parts of the world, the handcraft economy changed to being dominated by industry and machine production (Grübler, 2003:26; Chudasri, Walker & Evans, 2011:4). Some of the main technological features of the Revolution included: the use of new basic materials, mainly iron and steel; the use of new energy sources, including both fuels and steam power; the invention of new machines that permitted increased production and required less human energy; and a new organisation of work known as the factory system, entailing increased division of labour and specialisation of function (Grübler, 2003:26).

The Industrial Revolution influenced the structures of manufacturing to change drastically and rapidly towards a movement of mass manufacturing in the 19th century (Grübler, 2003:26; Adamson, 2007:14). Domestic handwork for the family changed to that for the community and others, handwork became mechanised manufacture, small-scale production transformed to large-scale production for greater quantities, and a new emphasis was placed

on producing goods for export and trade (Adamson, 2007:14; Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:4). Mass production stimulated the rise of consumerism, deliberately going beyond the basic needs for survival. Factory-made products became abundant in the market and consequently craft, being more time-consuming and costly to produce, declined rapidly (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:4). Artists thus embraced serial and industrial production and adopted the roles of managers rather than makers.

The old-fashioned studio was formerly characterised by artisanal rather than mass production, a limited number of workers, and the presence of one creative individual as the author of goods made in the studio. As a result of mass production, a decline was experienced in the studio as the normative concept applied to places of artistic production, being a singular and confined space. This environment changed to multiple and open spaces where production is done in situ (Adamson, 2007:14).

During the 20th century the expansion of industrialised production became problematic in terms of its social and environmental effects, including unemployment, urban migration, the excessive use of natural resources, consumerism and disposal by means of landfill (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:4). Achieving socio-economic justice and environmental responsibility became major concerns by the late 20th century. After the Industrial Revolution, several artists and craftspeople therefore decried the use of machines in the manufacturing process (Kneese, Rosenblat, & Boyd, 2014:2).

The Arts and Crafts Movement consequently formed as one of the most influential and profound international design movements. While originating in Britain in 1880, it quickly flourished in Europe and North America between 1880 and 1910, emerging in Japan in the 1920s (Kneese *et al.*, 2014:1; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017). William Morris was a typographer, poet, novelist and political theorist, and arguably the most celebrated designer of the Arts and Crafts Movement. His creative activities included the development of individual design objects such as stained glass, textiles, wallpaper, tiles and furniture (Gailuma & Īle, 2014:25). Disenchanted with the impact and consequences of the Industrial Revolution on design and traditional craft, Morris strived to protect and revive the traditional techniques of handmade production that were being replaced by machines (Taggart, 2018). "Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization" (Morris, 1912:279).

The Arts and Crafts Movement was united by its pioneering spirit of reform, where advocates sought social and economical reform (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016). The worker was seen as not simply one factor in the recovery of the arts and the just society, but the central

figure and key to recovery. New guilds and societies of architects, designers, craftsmen and artists were formed, uniting to protect their processes of production. In response, the guilds returned to earlier ways of living and working, developing new approaches to create decorative arts and presenting for the first time a unified approach among these individuals (Kneese *et al.*, 2014:2; Taggart, 2018). There were guilds for almost every trade, who maintained standards of quality, regulated trade and competition, and protected the secrets of their trade. Few could practise a craft without membership of a local guild. Two of the most influential guilds were the Century Guild and the Art Workers' Guild. The Century Guild believed that every aspect of a house should fit together and that good design should be available less costly. This guild also helped craftsmen to affirm their significance and independence. The Art Workers' Guild gave members a sense of identity and solidarity, and was crucial in spreading Morris's ideas (Krugh, 2014:285).

The guilds of the Arts and Crafts Movement aimed to recreate the dignified working environment that existed in the craft guilds of the Middle Ages. This included the apprenticeship-driven training of artisans, as originating in the medieval period. The guilds operated on a master, journeyman and apprentice system, where the master trained the apprentice in the skill of a specific trade (Gautier, 2013; Perrin, 2017). Apprentices were taught in a workshop or studio rather than an academy. After completing the training period, apprentices worked free of charge for their master for a number of years. Until graduating as journeymen, the master ensured the apprentices' welfare and education in the skill of the craft. As journeymen, the artisans were paid for their work and could be employed by other masters. If a journeyman demonstrated outstanding skill in his craft, he could advance in the guild to the position of master and train his own apprentices (MacTaggart, 2018).

The Arts and Crafts Movement was influenced by three principle ideas. The first was 'the unity of art', opposing the hierarchy in which the arts were arranged in late-Victorian Britain. Painting and sculptural art were at the top as fine arts; followed by architecture in the middle, less artistic but still containing high professional status; and the decorative arts at the bottom, having a low artistic and professional status (Crawford, 1997:17). The Arts and Crafts Movement aimed to improve the standard of decorative arts, as well as the artist and craftsman working together in unity (Gailuma & Īle, 2014:25).

The second idea was 'joy in labour', following the idea that the ordinary experience of work can become a source of pleasure to improve people's everyday lives. It called for an end to the division of labour causing mindless standardisation and dull, degrading work (Crawford, 1997:17). Morris would reunite the head and the hand, a union that industrial production had separated (King, 2008:7). The practitioners of the movement strongly believed that the

connection forged between the artist and his work through handcraft was the key to producing both human fulfilment and beautiful items that would be useful on an everyday basis (The Art Story, 2018). The Arts and Crafts Movement was therefore equated with preserving craft skills, embracing creative freedom and advancing the idea of the designer as craftsman and manufacturer (University of Maryland, 2018).

'Design reform' was the third idea, aimed at improving the standard of the design of objects consumed by the public. It was in reaction to the commercial taste by the unregulated market, aiming to promote good taste. Morris believed that people should be surrounded by beautiful, well-made objects (University of Maryland, 2018). Morris noted in 1880 that: "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."<sup>4</sup> The Arts and Crafts designers' work embodied the inherent beauty of materials, the importance of nature as inspiration, and the value of simplicity, honesty and utility (Crawford, 1997:19; University of Maryland, 2018).

Crawford (1997:20) explains that the main initiative of the Arts and Crafts Movement was the idea that creativity can be part of the daily experience of ordinary people at work, that it is not something special, not the preserve of fine artists and geniuses. The hope of the movement was that this experience might become general. The Arts and Crafts Movement marks itself off, underlining its separateness from the world about it. Furthermore, Crawford (1997:25) states that the movement embodied a sense of social responsibility, a sense of designing and creating items in a spirit which did not take profit as its motive.

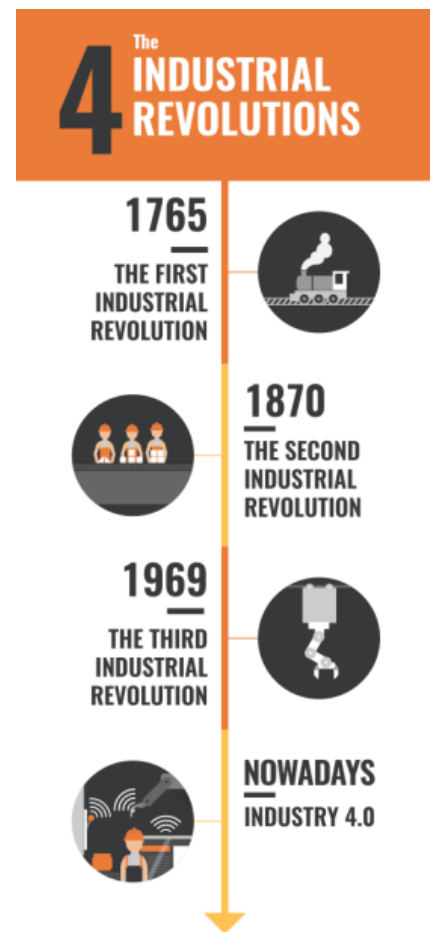
The faith in the ability of art to reshape society exerted a powerful influence on its many successor movements in all branches of the arts (The Art Story, 2018). Morris was an icon not necessarily for the style of his furnishings, but for the ideas that it represented. Arts and Crafts spanned many countries and many styles, but furniture makers across the spectrum drew inspiration from the English designer, to whom many paid tribute by interpreting the original Morris chair (Binzen, 2014:50). The vast majority of furniture made during the movement's prime time were solid, rectilinear pieces. Believing that mass-produced furniture was poorly constructed, designers created minimalist pieces from quality materials, emphasising the crafted details. Many of today's contemporary furniture makers still follow these design ethics, while focussing on providing high-quality pieces that will last a lifetime (Taggart, 2018).

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<sup>4</sup> Stated at "The Beauty of Life", a lecture before the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design (19 February 1880), and published in 1882 in *Hopes and Fears for Art: Five Lectures Delivered in Birmingham, London, and Nottingham, 1878 - 1881* (Crawford, 1997:19).

### 2.1.1 Arts and Crafts into the present

The advancements of industry leading up to the 21st century have profoundly influenced the production processes utilised today (Royal Geographical Society, 2014). The first Industrial Revolution of the 18th century mechanised production with the development of steam power. The second revolution, emerging around 1870, led to rapid mass manufacturing driven by electricity. The automation of production was brought about by the third revolution of the late 20th century, with the growth of computers and electronics. This period saw the emergence of global supply chains enabled by the growth of the Internet, and witnessed the rise of China as the manufacturing powerhouse to the world (Stanford School of Engineering, 2018). Today, Industry 4.0 is the fourth manufacturing revolution that will redefine production of the 21st century through digitisation (see Figure 2.1 for visual summary). This new paradigm is fast emerging, being a collection of nine cyber physical systems and data technologies transforming the manufacturing of products. These advancements include the fields of artificial intelligence, digital integration, advanced robotics, computing power and advanced analytics (ibid). Manufacturing is changing from the assembly line to the use of collaborative robots, and is expected to function similar to software, where machines will operate according to digital files. Industry executives explain that today's manufacturing is about collaborating with innovation, and learning to work hand in hand with robots (Chmurak, 2017).



**Figure 2.1: The four industrial revolutions (Sentryo, 2018)**

The increasingly refined mass production methods of the past few decades have led to an abundance of choices for consumers. Globalisation has increased competition and opened up new markets, while new technology has increased manufacturing efficiency. These manufacturing developments, however, often cause a decline in the individuality and quality of products, while increasing consumerism (Taggart, 2018). Automation contributes to the diminishing of manufacturing jobs, a decline in human skills and consequences on the sustainability of products (Royal Geographical Society, 2014; Chmurak, 2017).

As a result, increasingly more people are in favour of handmade items from independent crafters and artists, seen as a valuable counterpoint to machine-made products. A making



renaissance is underway, with handmade products and practices in global demand (Luckman, 2015:1). In a culture with an excess of cheap mass-produced goods, users romanticise the handmade as they yearn for quality over quantity; a post-industrial nostalgia for the pre-industrial (McGuirk, 2011). This social trend reflects the philosophies and values of the Arts and Crafts Movement, rising against the effects of the Industrial Revolution. In opposition to globalisation, mass production and consumerism, many communities of craftspeople work to create unique, handcrafted products in small scale. Each utilising their own unique approach and materials, these creators value traditional crafts while adding a contemporary aesthetic to their work. There exists a desire to reveal the production process and not only the finished object, reasserting the value of the handmade over the machine-made (McGuirk, 2011). Handmade objects are imbued with touch and offer a sense of the 'authentic' in an 'inauthentic' world (Luckman, 2015:2). Furniture maker Daniel Michalik argues that people are currently producing craft products due to the reason that:

[m]ass production needs to be rethought, and craft is the springboard that will put this into motion... because the objects and production systems around us now need to be better. New and better ways of making things are waiting to emerge (Hampton, 2010).

The rise of the artisanal designer is also due to the fact that while design is an ever more popular career choice, the opportunities to work with manufacturers are not growing at the same pace. Product designers that once aspired to have their work mass-produced are subsequently compelled to fulfil the role of the manufacturer themselves (McGuirk, 2011).

Practitioners in a wide range of design disciplines follow an artisanal practice, including ceramics, textile, jewellery, fashion and furniture design (Taggart, 2018). The demand for handmade design can be witnessed in the number of makers' fairs being organised globally (Luckman, 2015:2). Further influences include movements for organic food, fair trade goods and environmentally friendly products. The effect of craft can also be witnessed in a number of food and beverage products, such as craft beer, coffee, bread and cheese. These developments reveal an overall concern with, and response to, the production and consumption of goods (Krugh, 2014:282).

The origin of the products that we consume has become a central ethical concern. Shop-local movements encourage consumers to recognise the importance of small businesses for job creation in local economies. Since craft focuses not only on the aesthetic appearance of objects, but on the conditions under which they were produced, it fits well within contemporary ethical consumption movements (Krugh, 2014:290).

While machine technology was a concern for many during the Arts and Crafts Movement, contemporary craftspeople can use technology to make new kinds of products, although still valuing traditional skills and tools (Krugh, 2014:290). The contemporary handmade economy

is enabled by a very different intersection of the local with the global in the form of online marketing and distribution pathways (Luckman, 2015:1). There is currently an exponential growth in online marketplaces for handmade production (Luckman, 2015:2). Furthermore, many online communities exist where creatives are provided with the opportunity to share ideas and learn new skills by following online workshops on traditional craft (Taggart, 2018).

## **2.2 The practice of contemporary artisanal production**

As referred to in this study, the term 'artisanal product design' was researched to identify what role the practice fulfils today and where it fits in an industrial society. Existing literature relating to terms such as 'artisan', 'craft' and 'craftsmanship' were consulted to preliminarily describe the artisanal designer and his/her practice.

### **2.2.1 Artisanal designers and their philosophies**

Crafts developed out of the necessity to fulfil the everyday needs of people, producing products for personal use. It aided the development of an aesthetic sensibility, while allowing the self-expression of craftsmen to be conveyed (Kapur & Mittar, 2014:2). Craft focuses on the individual labour involved in creation, emphasising the personality of the maker. As stated by Sennett, the craftsman represents the special human condition of being engaged (Sennett, 2009:20). All craftsmanship is dedicated to good work for its own sake; practical activity, but the labour is not simply a means to another end (Sennett, 2009:20). Craftspeople create themselves into a brand and sell their selves, their politics and their interests in order to sell their crafts. The practice therefore comprises of an intersubjective performance that enables the creator to enact and assert his/her unique individualism on the crafted objects (Krugh, 2014:293). Sennett explains "obsessional energy"; when exploited appropriately, it is important in craftsmanship for executing good work. It is, however, dangerous when "obsessing about quality is a way of subjecting the work itself to relentless generic pressure" (Sennett, 2009:245). He thus illustrates that the end result of work is not as valuable as the process of participating in craft itself (Sennett, 2009:245). Today's movement of artisanal production is deeply introspective and subjective to the individual, offering a sense of success, self-sufficiency and creativity to the creator (Adamson, 2007:16).

Artisans can be defined as people who make products manually with simple tools and employing the local traditional wisdom of craft processes (Panda, 2013:1; Kapur & Mittar, 2014:2). These individuals have knowledge about the entire design and production process, most often being involved throughout the complete process (Filho, 2013:65). They generally work individually, but can often be assisted by family members, friends, apprentices or a limited number of workers, with whom they are constantly in close personal contact. This

contact generates a sense of community and attachment to the craft. In general, artisans perceive themselves as business people, being mainly successful in economic terms, although several artisans achieve fame (ITC/WIPO, 2003:6). To include all business initiatives which contribute to the development of the sector, the use of the term 'artisan' also covers the craft entrepreneurs who:

- although not actively participating in production, specialise in research, market negotiations or product design and conception;
- use machine tools or even machinery, without affecting the essentially handmade nature of the work and the production process;
- beyond the usual cottage or artisan unit, have associated in cooperatives or any other form of organisation, formal or informal; and
- manage or belong to micro-, small or medium-sized enterprises concerned with artisanal production (ITC/WIPO, 2003:6).



**Figure 2.2: Artisan producing leather products by hand (Bostino Italia, 2017)**

### **2.2.2 Skills and techniques**

In 'The Craftsman', Richard Sennett states that all craftsmanship is quality-driven; the skills and techniques being developed to a high degree. Plato<sup>5</sup> formulated this standard of excellence embedded in any act: the aim for quality driving a craftsman to improve rather than get by (Sennett, 2009:20). Artisans often learn their skills and techniques in the family or community in which they live, being passed on through generations (Kapur & Mittar, 2014:1). As every context comprises of knowledge and processes that are part of the environment

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<sup>5</sup> Plato was an ancient Greek philosopher who had an immense impact on the development of Western thought, understanding of nature and the impact of knowledge.

and its indigenous people, the products frequently carry unique expressions rooted in the specific environment, being ritualistic, cultural, traditional, or of a specific lifestyle (Panda, 2013:4; Kapur & Mittar, 2014:1). In an attempt to emphasise the importance of the artisan and his/her skills, Balaram (2011:132) stated that:

Most artisans are highly skilled and well 'educated' in terms of the long and rich experience... It is aptly said that in oral cultures where an artisan dies, 100 libraries are burnt down.

As the forefathers of today's artisans have passed away and are no longer able to facilitate the imparting of traditional knowledge and skills, artisans can receive skills training under government craft development initiatives (ITC/WIPO, 2003:6). In developed communities, artisans have the ability to make career choices, enabling them to study degree courses in the craft and visual arts departments at universities and colleges (ibid). Learning often occurs through trial and error, by which not only useful products are made, but knowledge of materials is gained (Moran, 2013:3). The skills and techniques of artisans often include the following:

**Table 2.1: Common skills and techniques applied by artisans**  
(adapted from Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:7)

Skills & Techniques	Application
Sketching	Drawing, pattern-making
Forming	Casting, modelling, moulding, pottery, sculpting, turning
Decorating	Carving, embossing, engraving, etching, printing, weaving, yarn colouring
Finishing	Gilding, lacquering, painting, surface inlaying

With regards to the techniques applied to production, Sennett (2009:152) establishes the importance of "the physical", stating that the eye and hand which execute habituated forms of coordination develop heightened sensitivity through craft. This forms an "extended rhythm" between the eye and hand, allowing the craftsman to develop skills and rituals (Sennett, 2009:177).

### **2.2.3 Products**

Craft products include a vast variety of goods made of a diversity of materials, which makes it difficult to provide a satisfactory definition of the material content, technique of production, and functional use of craft products (ITC/WIPO, 2003:5). A working definition of such products is, however, sought by importers, exporters, customs, and implementing departments and trade development agencies. Although no universally agreed definition of

artisanal products exists, the following characteristics broadly apply to a wide range of the world's crafts, based on the definition<sup>6</sup> adopted by UNESCO:

- They are produced by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand-tools and even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product;
- There is no particular restriction in terms of production quantity;
- When artisans make quantities of the same design, no two pieces are ever exactly alike;
- They are made from sustainably produced raw materials;
- Their special nature derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, and religiously and socially symbolic and significant (ITC/WIPO, 2003:5).

This definition emphasises manual input as the most significant and value-adding component. The imperfections caused by handmade work through traditional skills and tools impart the work, making artisanal products unique, as opposed to industrial, serial commodities (Filho, 2013:65; Kapur & Mittar, 2014:2). This leads to specific characteristics for products that become local representations of craft tradition itself, with their own criteria of quality that are intrinsic to the product. With this type of production, value is therefore still supported by, and dependent on, technique (Adamson, 2007:17). In a Western perspective, craft is expressed by means of skilled manipulation of materials, often made with the aid of technological tools. The tools therefore not only include traditional craft tools, but also more high-tech devices such as 3D printers and computers. These devices are, however, mainly used to only ease the production process, not dominating the manual role of the artisan (Panda, 2013:2).

Artisanal products comprise of an extensive variety of objects, including clothing items, household items, interior and exterior decoration, furniture, gifts, jewellery, stationery and toys (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:7; Klamer, 2012:7).

#### **2.2.4 Materials**

Artisanal products can be classified under broad divisions, being primarily based on the materials used, or a combination of the materials and the technique. The six main categories, as adopted by UNESCO, are basket/wicker/vegetable fibre-works, leather, metal, pottery (ceramic and earthenware), textiles, and wood (ITC/WIPO, 2003:5). Further categories could correspond to various additional animal, mineral or vegetable materials. These involve other materials used in craft production that are specific to a given country or region, are rare, or are difficult to work, such as: stone, glass, ivory, bone, horn, shell, sea shells, or mother-of-

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<sup>3</sup> Definition adopted by the 44 countries participating in the UNESCO/ITC International Symposium on Crafts and International Markets: Trade and Customs Codification held in Manila, Philippines in October 1997 (ITC/WIPO, 2003:5).

pearl. Finally, extra categories could be considered when different materials and techniques are applied simultaneously. This is, for example, applied with some decorative items, fashion accessories, jewellery, musical instruments, toys, or works of art, as well as synthetic materials such as recycled plastic (ITC/WIPO, 2003:5; Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:7). Similar to the indigenous knowledge and processes often rooted in specific contexts, the environments frequently have cultural materials belonging to the land and its native people (Kapur & Mittar, 2014:1).

### 2.2.5 Trade

Artisanal products are usually commercial, utilitarian objects intended for a diverse variety of purposes. Artisans' prices are generally based on material and labour costs, although established artisans may command premium prices, as associated with their reputation (ITC/WIPO, 2003:6). Artisans promote their work through advertising and catalogues, while online platforms are increasingly being used for marketing purposes. Most artisanal production is market-led; therefore production is guided through observing market needs and niches (*ibid.*).

Appearance, production and quality are key to justifying the value and types of crafts in the marketplace. The relationship between markets and products are identified as follows:

**Table 2.2: The relationships between markets and products  
(adapted from Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:8)**

<b>'High-end Market' and 'Traditional Fine Crafts'</b>	Fine crafts demonstrate ethnic, traditional and cultural heritage and are considered to be works of art. They are often produced as unique or one-off pieces and may be exhibited in museums or galleries, or purchased by collectors. In short, high-end crafts have high value, but are produced in low numbers.
<b>'Medium-High Market' and 'Artisanal Crafts'</b>	In producing artisanal crafts, artisans may work with design consultants to adapt their work to meet market requirements. Historical background and ethnic appearance are retained through the use of traditional elements. Large-volume production may be possible if planned. Outlets include speciality stores, exhibitions and design centres.
<b>'Low-Medium Market' and 'Commercial Crafts'</b>	Commercial crafts are made in traditional ways, but adapted to suit buyers' preferences with support from mainstream buyers or designers. Large volumes can be produced for mass markets. Outlets include speciality stores, exhibitions, design centres, lifestyle shops, importers, tourist shops and mainstream buyers.
<b>'Low Market' and 'Manufactured/Mass production Crafts'</b>	At the lower end, commercial so-called 'crafts' are mass-produced in large quantities, using machines or large networks of artisans. These products reflect trends, not traditions, though retaining some ethnic appearance. They are designed specifically to be distributed through outlets such as tourist shops, mainstream buyers and global chains.

### **2.3 Sustainable development of the practice**

In the early stages of the 21st century, the concept of sustainability; a way of living responsibly in terms of environmental issues, social justice and economic equity, has become generally and positively recognised by governments, businesses and society as a whole (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:4). The most widely accepted and used definition of sustainable development is development that "meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Commission, 1987:47).

The relationship between craft and sustainability has been extensively discussed in recent decades. Craft practices usually have a strong local identity through its application of holistic making practices, context-based knowledge, culturally specific responses and community-centred production (Zhan, Walker, Hernandez-Pardo & Evans, 2017:S2919). This form of local, customisable and responsive production and its relationship to sustainability is seen as a promising direction for future manufacturing. As a consequence, a global revival of interest in traditional craft practices is currently experienced. Consumers are increasingly interested in local products that are produced in a sustainable manner (*ibid*). In order to approach the complex challenges of the current and future world, design is moving its focus from product and manufacturing issues towards strategies, services and systems, addressing social and environmental problems. Artisanry is considered as a resilient response to the increasing demand for flexible, customised and redistributed manufacturing, reconnecting communities to their local material culture and reaching global markets (Mazzarella, Escobar-Tello & Mitchell, 2016:1). The revival of developing countries could be in localising production, aiding in the survival of cultural heritage and empowering communities for local development (Mazzarella, Escobar-Tello & Mitchell, 2015:2).

Chudasri *et al.* (2011:2) explain that in an age of globalised mass manufacturing and product distribution, traditional crafts offer an example of enduring local approaches to material culture that often exemplifies environmental, social and economic sustainability. In industrial production processes sustainability is more challenging to achieve, as the focus is most often on achieving the best quality product at the lowest possible price and within the fastest production time, which is not always achievable in a local context. Artisanal production is therefore identified as a key strategy to sustainable development, having the ability to provide opportunities for social employment, enhancing environmental management and contributing to local economic growth (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:2; Mazzarella, Escobar-Tello & Mitchell, 2016:2). While Morris envisioned using craft as part of a socialist future, contemporary reformers envisage craft as part of the more sustainable future that will result from improving both environmental and business practices (Krugh, 2014:292).

Investing in the crafts sector offers significant opportunities to improve the social, environmental and economic conditions of communities. Crafts production represents an opportunity to provide a source of employment, income, skills development and satisfaction to many local individuals of a specific region (Scrase, 2003:449). In certain developing countries, these workers often include women who are otherwise home-based and low-skilled. Craft employment therefore improves their status within the household, enabling social empowerment within communities (Dasra, 2017).

Dasra (2017) describes that production processes applied in crafts typically have a low carbon footprint and promote the use of locally available materials, being natural and organic where possible. The designer plays an important role to facilitate sustainable development, as his/her decisions at the outset can immensely improve the environmental performances of products (Mazzarella *et al.*, 2015:2). When considering the complete life cycle of products, including the extraction of raw materials, production, distribution, use and disposal of the goods, craft products can often achieve environmental sustainability more easily than industrial mass-manufactured products (Dasra, 2017). As craft products are primarily made with natural materials, utilising manual labour and traditional tools, many harmful environmental effects often caused by the production and disposal of synthetic materials and mass manufacturing factories are eliminated (ITC/WIPO, 2003:5; Dasra, 2017). Furthermore, the extraction of materials, production and distribution of the products most often occur locally, adding to the sustainable development of these goods. As handcraft processes deliver products of quality, the lifespan of these items can often be expected to be of longer duration than that of mass-manufactured goods, therefore reducing the amount of products used and disposed by the individual (Taggart, 2018).

In many countries around the world, artisanal production is a major field of employment, contributing to a significant part of the export economy. By producing small quantities of artisanal products in an environmentally friendly manner, the overall economy becomes more sustainable (Scrase, 2003:449). Observers of the craft sector predict that the number of small businesses turning to craft production will continue to grow, as artisans have been identified as the second largest sector of rural employment in many regions of the world. Craft production encompasses all of the modern global economy; from pre-industrial to industrial, and post-industrial (*ibid*). This type of production has thrived as it often offers distinct advantages to more formalised businesses, including flexible working hours, the ability to work from home and the freedom to manage one's own business. Unlike many other forms of labour, artisanal production enables a degree of self-sufficiency with minimal start-up capital, being an ideal form of employment for creative, independent entrepreneurs (Scrase, 2003:449; CHF International, 2010:1). Craft production also offers the opportunity



for seasonal employment and small production runs. Craft has therefore been identified as a feasible focal point for business ideas, market competition and innovation, as the world market for craft continues to grow and expand into different niche markets that demand an assortment of unique handmade products (CHF International, 2010:1; Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:2).

Traditional crafts are, however, in global decline. Design researchers examining the relationship between sustainable development and product design are therefore increasingly looking towards traditional crafts and its revitalisation (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:2). Literature suggests that designers should enhance a systemic cultural change, shifting the worldviews from a focus on quantity to one on quality as key driver for sustainable consumption (Mazzarella *et al.*, 2015:3).

## **2.4 Challenges within the practice of artisanal design**

### **2.4.1 Globalisation**

Today many craftsmen still depend on indigenous modes of production and traditional skills and techniques to produce handmade products (Kapur & Mittar, 2014:2). Kapur & Mittar (2014:2) explain that artisans were traditionally an essential part of the village economy, producing everyday utilitarian objects catered towards local markets. The artisans utilised designs and motifs that were of significance to their community (ibid). However, through the advent of industrialisation, increased globalisation caused products to become increasingly commoditised, competing with goods from all over the world (Scrase, 2003:449). Crafts consequently underwent many changes as the market required improved materials, techniques and quality. Later the interference of the market with the activities and sensibility of craftsmen became dominant, acquiring more changes with new inputs and demands. This resulted in decontextualisation and confusion for craftsmen, so as to follow which norm – cultural or the market's demand (ibid). Expressing the dismay of many authors about the future of crafts, Meetha Lal Mehta<sup>7</sup> stated:

As we get more rootless, we crave more to discover our roots. Crafts, in many ways connect us to our roots. As we become more nomadic due to globalization, cultural products and practices will become more and more important in our lives (Panda, 2013:4).

As the great demand and speed with which products can be altered are key characteristics of today's global market, it offers an immense threat to craft production (CHF International, 2010:1). This results in disrupting the artisan-consumer relationship, replacing traditional handmade products with mass factory-made, standardised and cheap products provided by traders (Scrase, 2003:449; Kapur & Mittar, 2014:3). As the machine has in the course of time

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<sup>7</sup> Founder of the Indian Institute of Crafts and Design (IICD) and former Chief Secretary, Government of Rajasthan.

satisfied human needs regarding the useful and functional, the craftsman was denied his role as maker of the necessary. The craftsman therefore developed into the maker of the excessive, the costly, the elitist and the non-essential, while carrying the stigma of inferiority and having a lack of development. When attempting to reinstate their role as creators of useful everyday goods, craftsmen are defeated by the relentless logic of industrial economy (Scrase, 2003:453).

The effects of globalisation can be seen in the fact that the craft market is consistently tightly controlled by a few agents, is highly exploitative and earns relatively little for the individual artisan (Scrase, 2003:453). This market is also subject to liberalising forces, and dominated by large monopoly retail businesses, often shifting fashion styles (*ibid*). Exclusionary policies, poor infrastructure, lack of investment and rapid urbanisation cause an overall decrease in the number of artisans. As the working condition of artisans is precarious, craftsmanship itself is under threat. Production is often outsourced to developing countries, where artisans are at the "bottom of pyramid" (BOP). These artisans have little opportunities to overcome their poverty due to the lack of long-term market access, regular wages and opportunities to learn new skills (Mazzarella *et al.*, 2016:2).

Furthermore, essential raw craft materials have either become too expensive for artisans, or have been diverted to mass production (Scrase, 2003:453). Attempts for survival by artisans competing in the marketplace, such as subcontracting their products, rarely offer long-term achievement, as subcontractors prefer to invest in fast-moving, high-yielding ventures that are more secure and predictable. Although government and non-government organisations (NGOs) implement policies to preserve traditional artisanship, such top-down support often fails in setting labour conditions and rights, competitive prices and quality standards for craft products, as well as in recognising artisans' needs and translating them into a strategic agenda (Mazzarella *et al.*, 2016:2). While fair-trade bodies focus on fair prices, the artisans' labour is often undervalued with most of the income provided to charities and NGOs without reaching the producer (*ibid*). Consequently, artisans that do survive regularly produce for a capitalist world market, facing the peculiarity of this specific market (Scrase, 2003:449).

#### **2.4.2 Loss of skilled labour**

Sennett (2009:52) explains that skill is a trained practice. Today, modern technology deprives its users of the repetitive, concrete, hands-on training required. When the head and the hand are separated, the result is mental impairment of the worker (Sennett, 2009:52).

Machines gradually threaten the standing of the most skilled workers and increases the number of semi- or unskilled workers (Sennett, 2009:106). Similarly, Kapur & Mittar (2014:2) describe that catering to the mainstream market often demands a decline in quality and/or

workmanship, leading to the eventual loss of skills over a few generations of craftsmen. Craftsmanship's focus on achieving quality and executing good work, being the craftsman's mark of identity, was traditionally set by the community as skills were passed down from one generation to the next (Sennett, 2009:25). This unity between skill and community



**Figure 2.3: Traditional carpentry tools used for artisanal production (SEO, 2016)**

Unfortunately weakened due to mass manufacturing (Sennett, 2009:26).

Driven by loss of markets, declining skills and difficulty catering to new markets, a large number of artisans have moved to urban areas where they join the ranks of casual wage, unskilled labourers and the

informal economy (Scrase, 2003:449; Kapur & Mittar, 2014:1). According to the United Nations, the number of Indian artisans has decreased by 30% from 1973 to 2003. Both governmental and non-governmental efforts are therefore criticised for providing limited and ineffectual policies and programmes to support artisans (Scrase, 2003:449). As craft enterprises face a lack of skilled labour, there exists a need to re-invest in artisans to preserve history, culture and an important source of employment (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:9; Kapur & Mittar, 2014:1). Greater capacity building will, however, be essential to maintain the level of skills required to compete in globalised markets, specifically in terms of technology (Chudasri *et al.*, 2011:9).

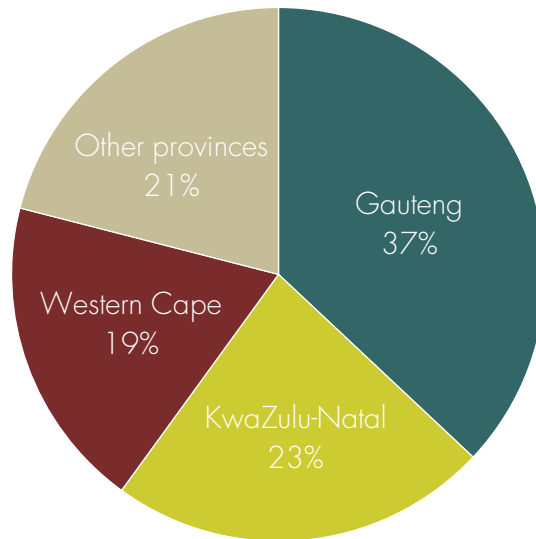
### **2.4.3 Lack of value in product and practice**

Sennett (2009:21) explains that craftsmanship contains two emotional rewards for attaining skill: workers are anchored in a tangible reality and can take pride in their work. However, society has obstructed these rewards in the past and continues to do so today. The practical activity of craftsmen has been degraded, separating it from its supposedly higher pursuits (Sennett, 2009:21).

A problem that arises with the increased use of mass production, is the inability of the market to recognise the true value of artisanal products (Klamer, 2012:1). With the advance of the industrial age and the consequent emergence of the knowledge economy, crafts became undervalued in the economy, rendering the knowledge and skills of artisans to be virtually useless (Kapur & Mittar, 2014:2). Traditional crafts were only seen as a part of history and cultural heritage, as the educational systems in developed countries sanctified academic



establishments are mainly located in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape (South Africa, DTI, 2008:8). However, approximately 50 000 workers were employed in about 3 500 factories in the early 2000s (South Africa, DTI, 2013:11). The furniture manufacturing industry contributes 0,95% to South Africa's GDP and 1,6% to manufacturing employment, indicating the potential to play an important role in job creation and economic development (South Africa, DTI, 2008:8; Phakathi, 2019).



**Figure 2.5: Province location of furniture manufacturing industries (adapted from FP&M SETA, 2014:4)**

Due to South Africa's economic circumstances and consequent rising living costs, the local demand for household products has decreased. This results in more reliance on low-cost imported goods from the East, including furniture. The department of trade and industry (DTI) reported that the local furniture industry has lost its share of the international furniture manufacturing market due to not keeping up with this growth in global furniture trade (South Africa, DTI, 2008:11). A decline in investing in skills development and technological innovation, and insufficient research and development funding followed, further reducing the industry's levels competitiveness (ibid). Disruptive industrial action, skills shortages, and lack of investment in capital machinery and equipment are additional challenges that the furniture manufacturing industry is faced with (FP&M SETA, 2014:4).

Furniture is one of the most labour-intensive industries, including both craft-based firms and large-volume producers. It can thus aid in the development of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), particularly as manufacturing can be executed with minimum capital requirements in rural areas. DTI states that South Africa has a pool of labour that has the potential of skilled craftsmen (South Africa, DTI, 2008:12).

The industry requires the government to enforce procurement guidelines intended to prioritise local suppliers (FP&M SETA, 2014:4). As part of the government's efforts to support and stimulate the industry, the DTI is planning to work with the industry to create the Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) (FP&M SETA, 2014:4; Phakathi, 2019). This master plan combines policy instruments and government incentives available to a manufacturer with manufacturing targets and timelines, aiming to improve furniture producers' competitiveness and market access (Phakathi, 2019). SAFI, the DTI and *Proudly South African*<sup>8</sup> are also intended to combine their resources and initiatives to advance local government procurement towards South African furniture manufacturers, translating the 'buy local' commitments into tangible orders (ibid).

Rather than competing at a low quality and low price level, it is said that the furniture manufacturing industry should aim to compete on quality, reliability and unique designs. This approach could cause a considerable growth in the industry seeing that the export market will provide higher prices and volumes as opposed to the domestic market (FP&M SETA, 2014:4).

## **2.6 The Western Cape's design strategy**

The Western Cape's design industry is showing encouraging indications of growth. It is estimated that nearly 80 000 people in the province work in design-related businesses. In 2012 South Africa's design industry as a whole contributed 2,82% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to which the Western Cape contribute approximately R14 billion a year (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:6). Internationally, creative industries grew at a rate of 14% during the period of 2000 to 2005 (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:10). Global trends indicate that design-led innovation has a strong role to play in new product development and/or service provision, whether for the private, public or civil society sectors. The Department of Economic Development and Tourism (DEDAT) has recognised the importance of design as adding value to products, originating from craft producers. Consequently, DEDAT has identified design as an important catalyst for economic growth (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:4).

One of the assumptions from which the process of the design strategy unfolded, was that there is a lack of appreciation for the value that design offers, for its integral role as a tool for innovation and how this can be actualised, and there is thus limited support by the main stakeholders for design and design thinking as a key enabler to driving economic growth (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:8). Developed and implemented in 2013, the

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<sup>8</sup> An organisation which seeks to influence local procurement in the public and private sectors

purpose of the design strategy is to unlock the potential of design to play a more active role in supporting innovation and competitiveness necessary for economic growth in the Western Cape. The strategy aims to apply this design-driven development by embedding design processes and design thinking in business and organisational practices across sectors (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:5). This is required for the Western Cape to be a recognised leader in providing design-led products, services and solutions to the global marketplace (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:10). Design is seen as the bridge between creativity and innovation, between technology and the user, between scientific and commercial disciplines and economic benefit (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:11). As stated:

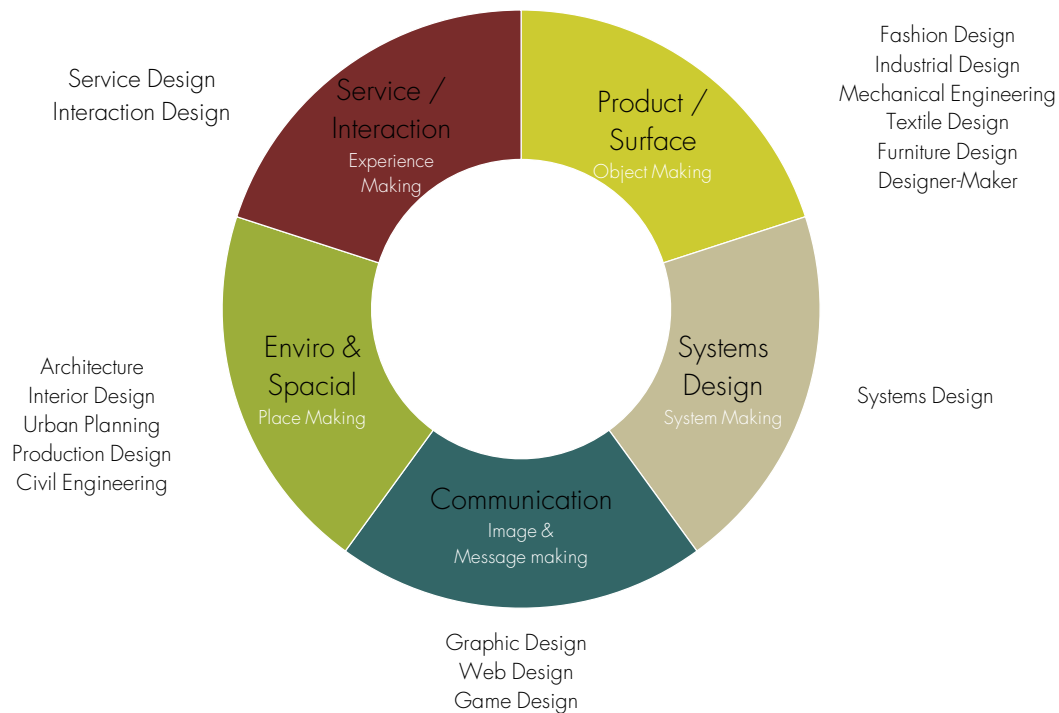
The underlying conceptual framework from which the strategy is developed is therefore that design is an essential tool for innovation to take place; that innovation is a driver of competitive advantage; and in turn competitive advantage drives socio-economic growth and development. As this takes hold, so the demand for design will increase (by virtue of an increase in demand for goods and services), thus creating a positive reinforcing system. This strategy proposes that the development of an interconnected design ecosystem will stimulate the usage of design across sectors, generate more competitive products and services (both commercial and public) and drive socioeconomic growth (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:6).

The strategy broadly intends to achieve development in four areas. In design-ready businesses, the strategy aims to ensure that sectors of the economy and civil society incorporate design into their business and organisational practices to unlock innovation, competitiveness and progress. With business-ready design practitioners, it aspires to establish an enabling environment that supports a thriving design ecosystem and a competitive design industry. Regarding design in the public sector, the strategy intends to ensure transformation that embraces design and design thinking methodology in policy formation and practical implementation across all spheres and tiers of government. With involved citizens, the aim is to create public awareness and appreciation of the value of design in every aspect of people's lives, focussing in particular on socio-economic upliftment and a better quality of life for all (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:14).

The Cape Craft and Design Institute (CCDI)<sup>9</sup> created a framework (Figure 2.6) to categorise design disciplines into the five most prevalent types of design in the Western Cape economy.

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<sup>9</sup> DEDAT supported the establishment of the CCDI as a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to guide the development of the design strategy.



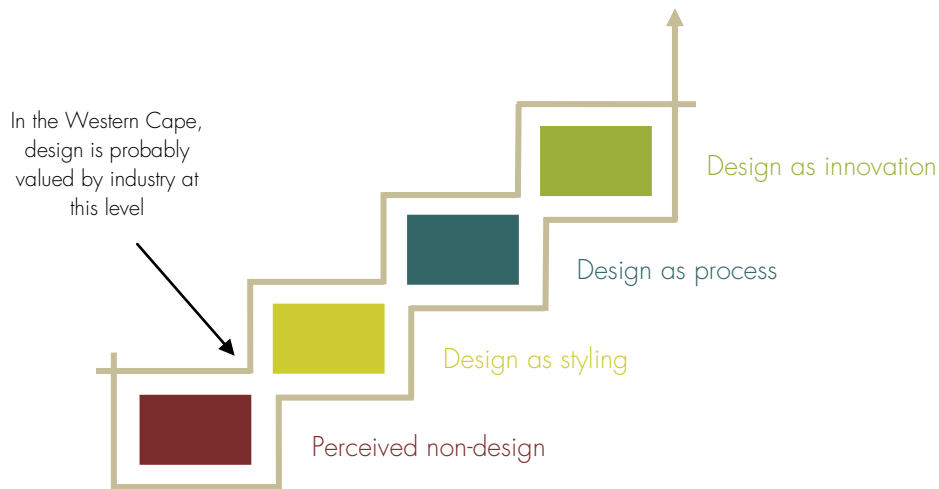
**Figure 2.6: Design types and related disciplines**  
(adapted from Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:6)

Similar to 'designer-maker', artisanal product design is categorised as 'product/service' type, grouped as design that delivers the making of objects, while furniture design falls under this same category. The classification of design disciplines allows for an all-embracing approach to design and the function it serves across all sectors of the economy. It emphasises that design is not limited to the aesthetics of product design and the development of new functional products, but also includes the design of services, systems and solutions to social issues. Design process and design thinking fulfil an important role across different value chains. If appropriately supported, it should result in cross-sectoral collaborations and sustainable outcomes that deliver value in the economy (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:9).

The 'design ladder'<sup>10</sup> (Figure 2.7) offers a tool with which to measure and position the relative maturity of design in an organisation.

<sup>10</sup> Based on the Danish Design Ladder by the Danish Design Centre, which aims to determine if there is a connection between greater investment and/or use of design by firms and improved company performance. The maturity of design is categorised according to design employees and external purchases of design. Across these categories it compares company performance in terms of gross revenue performance, and change in employment and export share of turnover (South Africa, DEDAT, 2013:6).





**Figure 2.7: The design ladder**  
(adapted from Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:6)

- **Perceived non-design:** No special attention is paid to design, with product development being done by company staff who usually lack expertise in the field of design. The opinions and views of the end-user also only play a negligible role in the composition of the product.
- **Design as styling:** Companies at this stage are slightly more aware of the role of design in business, but only on a very superficial level, with design being considered only as part of the aesthetics of the final product. Companies have some engagement with professional designers.
- **Design as process:** Design of the product is adapted to the task at hand and is more focused on the needs of the end-user. It will also typically require a multi-disciplinary approach and therefore more resources.
- **Design as innovation:** The final and most advanced stage of the ladder, where designers work with senior management to develop innovative approaches within significant parts, if not all of the company (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:12).

Based on the various measurements in the local design survey and other stakeholder engagements during this process, Western Cape organisations are positioned relatively low on the design ladder. Design is valued by industry between the levels of perceived non-design and design as styling (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:12).

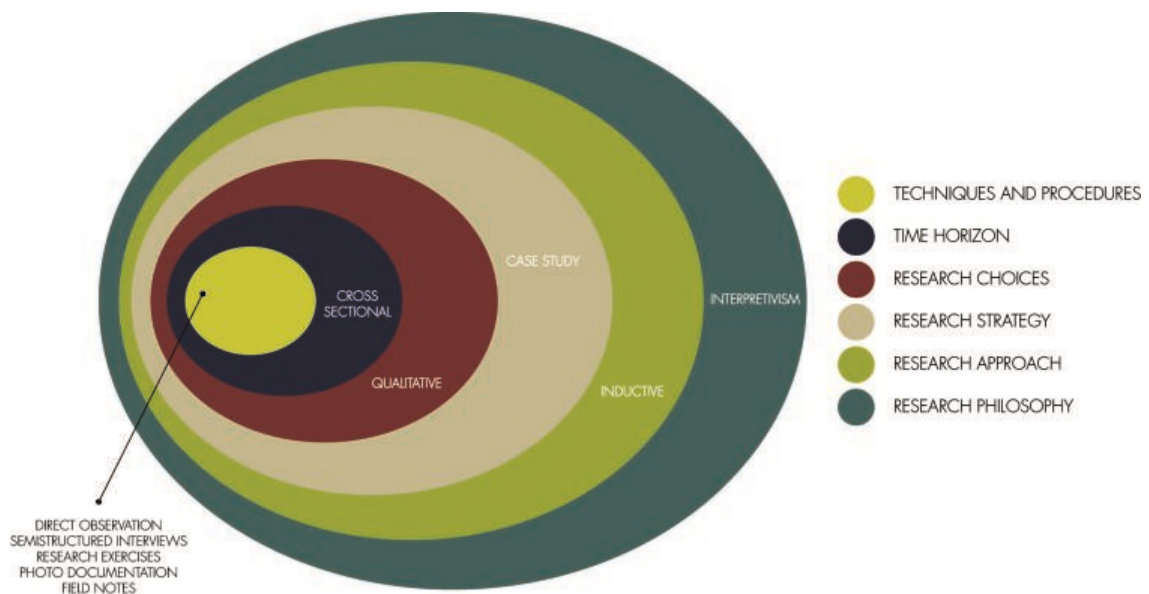
The impact and purpose of design was identified as aiding in the innovation and competitive advantage of businesses and practices, contributing to socio-economic growth. Design processes and design thinking are especially encouraged in the strategy. Although assisting in classifying artisanal product design as 'product/service' type, the role of this specific practice in the strategy is unclear. As there is a lack of value for design and the role it serves

across all sectors of the economy, the strategy can, however, be expected to only be effectively implemented in an extended period of time.

Through analysis of currently available literature, it became clear that the contemporary practice of artisanal design originate back to the Arts and Crafts Movement. As relating terms were used to provide an insight into the practice, primary research will have to investigate the furniture producers' response to the term 'artisanal product design', and their description of the contemporary practice. The design and production processes were analysed through literature, however, requiring primary research into how these relate to the current processes used. The literature review recognised various challenges experienced in the practice, although a limited amount of data is available on furniture design, and in particular craft furniture production, in South Africa. Literature was gathered on the contemporary manufacturing industry and the challenges experienced in this domain, but further primary research is required to compare how it relates to the artisanal practice. The study should also compare the shared global challenges identified with the challenges experienced in a local context. Contribution to the discussion of the challenges, research is required on the future of the practice of artisanal design. The Western Cape's design strategy identified that the maturity of design is fairly low in the province, not being sufficiently valued by industry. Artisanal product design was classified as design type, although the role and benefits of this specific practice is unclear.

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To explain the appropriate methods that were utilised to approach the research problem, the research onion (Figure 3.1) of Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill was used as reference. The different layers of the onion serve as a basis from which to consider the research methodology employed by the researcher, including the philosophical orientation of the researcher, the research approach, appropriate research strategies, the research choices, the research time horizon, and the data collection techniques and procedures that were used (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003:83). Finally, the data analysis and the conceptual framework that were applied were also described as part of the research methodology.



**Figure 3.1: The research onion (adapted from Saunders *et al.*, 2003:83)**

### 3.1 Research philosophy

The research philosophy describes the fundamental approach of the researcher for the gathering of knowledge (Aczel, 2016:16). It is the researcher's personal view of what constitutes acceptable knowledge and the process and methods through which it is developed (Saunders & Tosey, 2013:56). The research philosophy for this study took the form of interpretivism, being concerned with gathering rich insights and developing subjective meanings from research experiences. No objective reality can be discovered by the researcher and replicated by others. An interpretive philosophy often relates to complex and unique social phenomena in their natural environments, attempting to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings that participants assign to them (Mafuwane, 2012:81; Aczel, 2016:16). Interpretivism was therefore ideal to gain a better understanding of

artisanal furniture designers and their practice. Data collection and analysis involved qualitative data from in-depth investigations with the small sample of four artisanal designers, being high in validity to be used in generalising theories (Mafuwane, 2012:81; Saunders & Tosey, 2013:58).

### **3.2 Research approach**

The selection of the research approach is determined by the clarity of an applied theory with the start of the research process. An inductive research approach was applied to the study, requiring initially available empirical data of the problem on artisanal product design to be collected and analysed in order to derive new hypotheses (Saunders & Tosey, 2013:56). The objective of the approach is to better understand the problem and its influencing factors, contributing to the development of new theories (Aczel, 2016:16). An inductive research approach was therefore used to form a better understanding of the practice of artisanal furniture design and the challenges that these designers face today, as well as the main identifying processes, principles and perceptions that describe this phenomenon.

### **3.3 Research strategy**

Case studies were used as a robust research strategy for the study, offering a holistic, in-depth investigation of social behaviour and the understanding of complex issues (Zainal, 2007:1). The use of case studies enabled the close examination of data within the realistic context of each artisanal product designer to understand the behavioural conditions, subsequently forming a narrative (Baxter & Jack, 2008:544). Yin (1984:23) defines the case study as:

An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984:23).

Case studies focus on a limited number of cases, from which the researcher seeks mainly qualitative research (Zainal, 2007:1; Harvard University, 2017). Case studies can be either single or multiple case design. For this specific study a multiple case study was used through observing four cases, following a replication logic. As the context varies for each case, a multiple case study allowed the researcher to analyse the similarities and differences between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008:550; Gustafsson, 2017:11). By replicating the case through pattern-matching, a technique which links several pieces of data from the same case to a theoretical proposition, multiple case design enhanced and supported the previous results. Data that is strong in validity is therefore provided, creating a more convincing theory (Zainal, 2007:2; Gustafsson, 2017:11).

According to Yin (2003:3), a case study should be used as strategy when:

- the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions;
- one cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study;
- one wants to cover contextual conditions as they are relevant to the phenomenon being studied;
- the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear.

Yin (2003:4) explains that the focus and purpose of the case study can be to explore, describe, explain, and/or develop/solve (Harvard University, 2017). Exploratory and descriptive research were used for this specific study. Exploratory research generally starts with questions of what or how, aimed at identifying key issues and aiding the researcher in gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. This type of research was, therefore, ideal to examine the practitioners of artisanal product design in their specific working environments. Exploratory research often requires a more in-depth study, including other methods such as interviews or surveys, as it is broad in focus and has no clear, single set of outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008:548). Descriptive research was applicable to the study, as it generally answers questions of what, who, when and/or where, tracing a sequence of interpersonal events. It aims to describe an intervention, specific culture or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it was observed, often taking the form of a narrative (Yin, 2003:6; Baxter & Jack, 2008:548).

The artisanal furniture designers were contacted via e-mail, through which all information of the case study was communicated. A visual summary (Appendix A) of the study was provided, which introduced the researcher, described the details of the study, provided a preliminary description of the practice of artisanal product design, and included the methods, participants and time required. If needed, a further explanation of the study was provided, presenting a more in-depth explanation (Appendix B) of what the case study would entail per day, the details of the research method, and the amount of man-hours required for the study.

Four artisanal product designers working specifically in the focus area of furniture design were required. A number of this type of designers were therefore approached. The artisanal furniture designers and their workshop employees who agreed to participate in the study are as follows:

**Table 3.1: Case study participants and businesses  
(Van Schalkwyk, 2019)**

<b>Business name</b>	<b>Artisanal product designer</b>	<b>Workshop employees</b>
Wiid Design	Laurie Wiid van Heerden	Samkelo Mtoba Dumisani Chiota
Louw Roets Design	Louw Roets	Nelson Peter
James Mudge Furniture Studio	James Mudge	Jonah Tinashe Gandanga Cecil Muller
Bofred	Carla Erasmus Christa Botha	N/A

### **3.3.1 Research choices**

For the purpose of this study, qualitative methods of data collection were used. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach, studying phenomena in context-specific environments. It emphasises the qualities of entities, processes and meanings that are not found by means of statistical procedures, experimental examinations or other means of quantifications. This research method was suited to the study as it is used to define feelings, beliefs and attitudes that is found from real-world settings when the phenomena unfold naturally (Mafuwane, 2012:73; Harvard University, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research offers a descriptive narrative of the perspectives and concerns of the subject of study. This is achieved by applying direct immersion and interaction to increase insight into the behaviour, everyday patterns of action, meaning, and lived experiences of participants (Mafuwane, 2012:74; Harvard University, 2017). Qualitative research was therefore suitable to explore the phenomenon of artisanal furniture design, gathering narrative data to describe the practice and its nature within Cape Town.

### **3.3.2 Time horizon**

The time horizon is the time frame over which the researcher conducts the research. A cross-sectional time horizon was applied to the research of the study. Cross-sectional research is undertaken to answer a question or observe how conditions are at a particular time, without any sense of whether there is a trend or history that applies (Harvard University, 2017). Research is therefore gathered once during a period of days, weeks or months (Saunders & Tosey, 2013:59). The case studies were conducted over a period of six weeks, spending two working days in the context of each artisanal designer. In addition, the research exercises<sup>11</sup> were completed by the workshop employees and artisanal designers over a period of three days. Due to the limited availability of the designers, the case studies were planned according to the designers' schedules and therefore took place over an

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<sup>11</sup> See 3.4.4 *Research exercise*.

extended period of time. After the completion of the study the researcher will return to the practitioners to present the final research paper to which they contributed.

### **3.4 Techniques and procedures**

Multimethod qualitative data collection was used, applying more than one technique to gather research (Saunders & Tosey, 2013:59). The qualitative methods that were used include direct observation, semi-structured interviews, research exercises, photo documentation and field notes. An in-depth analysis (Appendix E) was completed of each method prior to the case studies, evaluating the appropriateness, expected outcomes and possible concerns, while also ensuring thorough preparation of each method.

#### **3.4.1 Direct observation**

Observation is the systematic examination, recording, analysis and description of the behaviour of the phenomena being studied in their natural environment, without alteration. Direct observation can consist of casual data collection activities, or more formal protocols can be applied to record and measure behaviours. For the purpose of this study, casual data collection activities were used during unstructured direct observation. This allowed the gathering of narrative data from the natural occurrences in the context of each artisanal product designer (Harvard University, 2017). Direct observation therefore aided in gaining a thorough insight of the designers' practice through the evaluation of the on-going behavioural processes and activities (McLeod, 2015). The direct observation consisted of approximately two hours of observation for two days. As the observation took place after the semi-structured interviews, the data obtained from the interviewees could be compared to the occurrences observed.



**Figure 3.2: Observation of workshop employees at Wiid Design (Van Schalkwyk, 2018)**

### **3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews**

A semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange between the researcher and participants, where the researcher obtains information by asking questions (Fylan, 2005:65). Although a list of predetermined questions regarding specific themes is set up, semi-structured interviews are open-ended for discussion, often varying from one interview to the next (Longhurst, 2010:103; Harvard University, 2017). Semi-structured interviews are used to gain a thorough understanding of the research question by exploring varying and contradicting answers gained from participants, where the questions are often more complex (Fylan, 2005:66). As these types of interviews are used in exploratory studies to extract qualitative information about the research area, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the four artisanal furniture designers to aid in gaining a thorough understanding of their practice (ibid). Data could be gathered in a relatively short period of time directly from the artisanal designers, being the main subject of the study.

The semi-structured interviews<sup>12</sup> were completed at the start of each case study, followed by a second interview where needed. Depending on the feedback from the participants, the interviews were up to one hour each. By completing the interviews first, it enabled the designers to gain a better understanding of the data required by the researcher from the other methods for the rest of the case study. It also provided an improved understanding to the researcher of occurrences that might be observed thereafter.

### **3.4.3 Evaluating and refining interview questions**

To evaluate and refine the interview questions, a trial semi-structured interview was completed with an artisanal product designer who would not be used as case study participant for the study. The trial interview was completed with Asheigh Lloyd Wedlake, owner of Ashlee Lloyd Design Studio, established in 2017. Wedlake completed her industrial design degree at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in 2016. Her work focuses on lighting and textile design, with her approach being tangible, artistic, functional and unique (Ashlee Lloyd Design Studio, 2017). All her pieces are handcrafted, applying traditional decorative techniques such as crochet and knot-making in an organic and experimental manner. Wedlake utilises contrasting materials such as synthetic rope, yarns, raffia grass and recycled T-yarn in her work (Ashlee Lloyd Design Studio, 2017).

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix F for semi-structured interview questions; Appendix G for semi-structured interview transcriptions.





**Figure 3.3: Wedlake in her studio prior to the trial interview  
(Van Schalkwyk, 2018)**

The trial interview with Wedlake aided the improvement and refining of the questions by identifying areas that are possibly unclear, irrelevant or lacking. The trial interview also assisted the researcher to feel more at ease with the case study interviews to follow. Although the findings of Wedlake's interview were interesting and relevant to the topic of the study, the trial interview was only used as preparation exercise. As Wedlake's work does not focus on pure furniture design, it does not fall in the scope set out for the study.

#### **3.4.4 Research exercise**

Contributing as a new research tool used in the case study, a research exercise similar to a questionnaire was created and utilised for the case study. A questionnaire is a written tool designed with the purpose of gathering specific information from study participants through a number of set questions (Sansoni, 2011). The research exercise was completed with the four artisanal designers, two of Van Heerden and Mudge's workshop employees, and Peter as Roets's only full-time employee at the moment. The research exercise consisted of a box containing booklets with the questions and exercises, instructions and a pen. Following an exploratory case study, all questions were open-ended. To make the exercises more intriguing for the participants, quotes<sup>13</sup> on subjects such as creativity, design and craftsmanship were included in the booklets.

The booklet<sup>14</sup> for the artisanal designers consisted of five questions/exercises, to be used in addition to the semi-structured interviews. The research exercise could be completed by the designers in approximately half an hour. These questions were intended for shorter and more statistical feedback, to be completed in bullet points. This data could also be used in comparison to the data gathered through the interviews and observation.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix H for clarity on the quotes included.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix I for the artisanal designers' research exercise questions; Appendix J for the artisanal designers' research exercise transcriptions.



**Figure 3.4: Research exercise boxes  
(Van Schalkwyk, 2018)**

Six booklets<sup>15</sup> consisting of a total of 20 questions and/or exercises were provided to each workshop employee, which were to be completed over a period of three days. One booklet was intended for the morning before the start of each day's work, and the other for the afternoon at the end of each work day. Each of these booklets could be completed by the employees in approximately 15 minutes, therefore requiring roughly one and a half hours in total. The aim of the research exercises was to enable a more organic and engaging gathering of data without the presence of the researcher in the researched environment. These questions were centred around the day-to-day practice and working experience of the employees regarding the main research questions of the study.



**Figure 3.5: Workshop employee's completed  
research exercise booklets  
(Van Schalkwyk, 2018)**

The research exercise therefore made use of self-administered questionnaires, where the artisanal designers and workshop employees were able to complete the exercises at their own convenience. It enabled the participants to thoroughly think their responses through without the pressure experienced with an interview or observation. This method also required less time and

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix K for the employees' research exercise questions. Transcriptions can be provided on request.



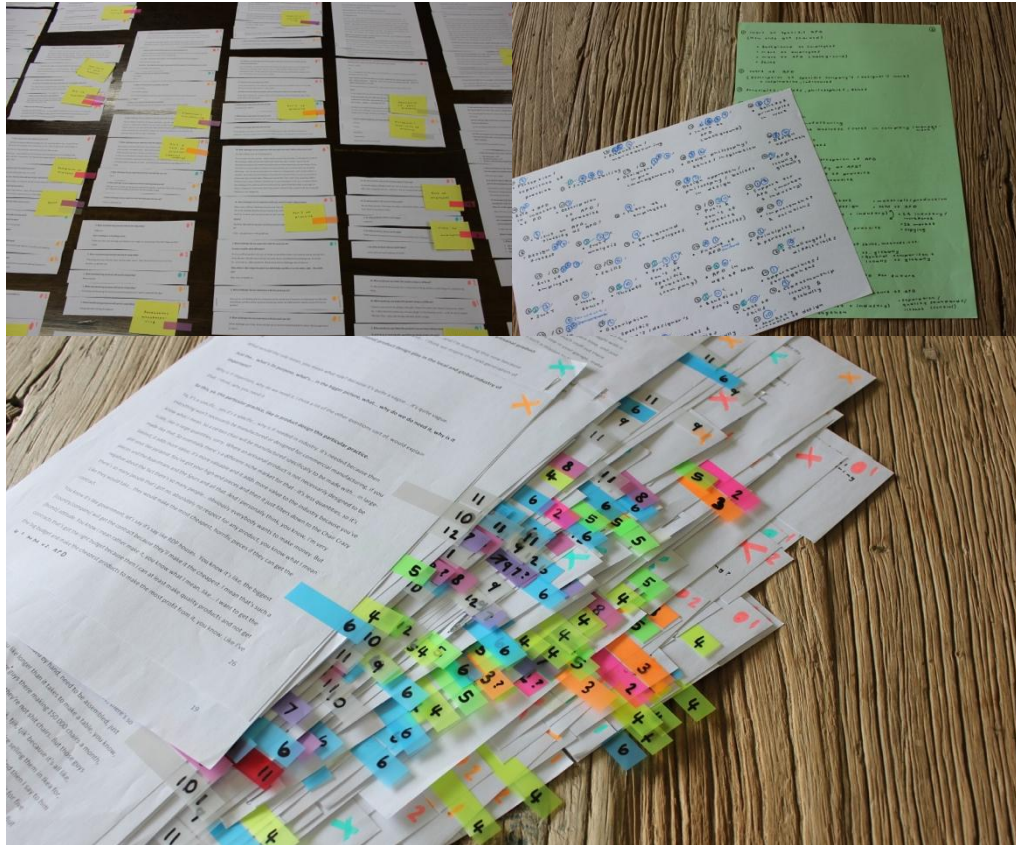
of broad data into themes that can more efficiently describe the data collected (Boyatzis, 1998:18; Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). Thematic analysis was an ideal technique to analyse the vast amount of in-depth data gathered from the four case studies. External evaluation was used to ensure accuracy and unbiased findings of the data analysis. The thematic analysis of data consisted of the following phases:

**Table 3.2: Thematic analysis phases and process description  
(adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)**

Phases of analysis	Description of the process
1. Familiarisation with data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcribing of semi-structured interview audio recordings</li> <li>• Compiling research exercise booklets data and observation and conversation field notes</li> <li>• Gathering of supplementary secondary research on designers</li> <li>• Reading of all data</li> <li>• Developing initial ideas</li> </ul>
2. Generating initial codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printing of all data</li> <li>• Coding in the form of colours, numbers and symbols to categorise data relevant to each code</li> <li>• Code<sup>16</sup> created for each participant and research method for differentiation of data, as well in-text referencing</li> </ul>
3. Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper-based pattern identification to collate codes into potential themes</li> <li>• Grouping all data relevant to each potential theme by colour and number coded post-it notes</li> </ul>
4. Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generating a thematic map to merge similar themes by grouping it together by number</li> <li>• Renaming similar themes</li> <li>• Reviewing if themes work in relation with code extracts and the entire data set</li> <li>• Reviewing data for additional themes</li> </ul>
5. Defining, naming and/or grouping themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refining specifics of themes and overall narration</li> <li>• Typing themes as headings and sub-headings for the <i>Findings</i> and <i>Discussion</i> chapters</li> <li>• Grouping themes in the <i>Discussion</i> according to the chapter headings of Pye's "The Nature and Art of Workmanship"</li> </ul>
6. Producing the findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final analysis and alterations during the reporting process</li> <li>• Selection of compelling extract examples</li> <li>• Writing of findings according to grouped themes</li> <li>• Relating back of the analysis to the research question, objectives and literature</li> </ul>

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix G and Appendix I for the codes created for each participant.





**Figure 3.7: Phases of thematic analysis of data  
(Van Schalkwyk, 2018)**

### 3.5.1.1 Data triangulation

Triangulation was used as a secondary method to evaluate the emerging themes identified through thematic analysis. Triangulation of data occurs when gathered information is addressed by three different types of data sources, investigators, theories and/or methodologies, thereby leading to the same conclusion. Triangulation assures the accuracy and validity of the research (Harvard University, 2017). Triangulation of data through the case studies was achieved by utilising multiple sources of data.

The main themes that were identified during phase 5 of the thematic analysis were:

- Background to the designer;
- Work of the designer;
- Principles and philosophies;
- Artisanal furniture design as business practice;
- Perception and experience of the designer on the practice;
- Challenges of the practice;
- Opportunities and benefits of the practice;
- Artisanal furniture design in an age of mass manufacturing;
- Artisanal furniture design locally and globally;
- The role of artisanal furniture design in the industry of product design;
- The future of the practice.

These main themes were analysed and grouped according to the chapter headings of Pye's 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship', and will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

### **3.5.2 Formal analysis**

The formal analysis conducted in the *Findings* chapter on each artisanal furniture designer's work followed the method of analysis as explained by Sylvan Barnet in 'A Short Guide to Writing about Art' (2008). Barnet states that a formal analysis is "the result of looking closely" (Barnet, 2008:113). It is described as an evaluation of a work of art, made up of elements that give it its form and meaning. This meaning is established by examining, and responding on, the relationships between the elements (Barnet, 2008:113). Barnet explains that an artwork is created with a specific purpose, according to which the evaluator can examine the piece (Barnet, 2008:114). The formal analysis on each furniture piece therefore described and discussed the elements that it consists of in an analytical way. It explained how form makes meaning, by connecting the effect of the elements with its cause (Barnet, 2008:115).

Two furniture pieces were analysed from each artisanal furniture designer's collection. As some of the designers' work also include other product design pieces that do not fit in the realm of furniture, the selection of the pieces to be analysed was firstly based on the study's scope of furniture design. The first example of each designer's work was chosen to be a seating furniture piece – either a chair or a bench. This ensured coherence and a sense of comparison among the work of the four artisanal designers. The second example selected was based on a furniture piece that is distinctive to the designer – a piece that clearly embodies their design style or philosophy as artisanal designer.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

### 4.1 The case of artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town

During the case study of each artisanal furniture designer, data was gathered on the background of the designer, how he/she attained their knowledge and experience, and the operation and structure of their business. A description of practice and analysis of product of each is included, as well as the inspiration and influences that contribute to their work. Below is a summary of the businesses of the practitioners who participated in the case study.

**Table 4.1: Summary of businesses participating in the study  
(Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019)**

	Wiid Design	Louw Roets Design	James Mudge Furniture Studio	Bofred
<b>Year of establishment</b>	2010	2014	2006	2015
<b>Location</b>	Observatory, Cape Town	Somerset West, Cape Town	Gardens, Cape Town	Vredehoek, Cape Town
<b>Number and position of employees</b>	Four workshop employees, one design assistant, one personal assistant/ administrator	One workshop employee	Thirteen workshop employees, two administration and production assistants	No employees, only directors

#### 4.1.1 Case Study 1: Wiid Design

##### 4.1.1.1 Background, knowledge acquisition and experience of the designer

Wiid Design is a Cape Town-based design studio, established by Laurie Wiid van Heerden. Van Heerden started studying Industrial Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), but after six months decided that he rather wanted to learn through more of a hands-on and direct approach (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). He then worked at Bronze Age Art Foundry for approximately three years, during which he met and worked alongside numerous creatives such as Otto du Plessis, Trevyn McGowan, Cecil and Boyd, Graham Viney, Wim Botha and William Kentridge (SA Décor, 2013; Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Van Heerden gained a lot of knowledge on bronze casting, woodwork, mould making and plaster casting during his employment at Bronze Age. Working with these different processes implied working with, and obtaining an understanding of, various materials. The work created was often for commissioned projects and consisted of a variety of products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

After his employment at Bronze Age, Van Heerden worked as apprentice for Wim Botha, who specialises in fine carpentry and sculptural elements. He assisted Botha for approximately three years with many commissions and projects, where he gained further knowledge on different ways of joinery, manufacturing and the materials involved (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). As Botha owned a lot of tools, Van Heerden was able to use and learn how to work with all the tools. Van Heerden considers Botha his mentor as he learned a substantial amount from him, specifically with regard to thought behind design and the importance of choosing the appropriate materials for a specific product (SA Décor, 2013; Tyilo, 2015).

Over weekends Van Heerden started developing his own products with the help of Botha's machinery and studio space, growing step by step, developing certain products and experimenting with materials. He promoted his products through media such as local magazines (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). He was soon approached by Southern Guild to exhibit work overseas, whereafter his brand grew further. In 2010 Van Heerden decided to work independently and take his own brand further. He rented a small studio in Woodstock with the establishment of Wiid Design. As his work developed and this space soon became too small, Van Heerden relocated to the premises in Observatory where Wiid Design has been operating since then (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

The processes that Van Heerden employs today was therefore learnt during the apprenticeship periods he worked for artists (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). He explains that he essentially learned from the raw through this process, therefore requiring a great amount of time. Van Heerden has knowledge on laser cutting and CNC (computer numerical control) cutting through his experience of trial and error with having these parts of his products made through outsourcing (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

#### **4.1.1.2 Business operation and structure**

Data was gathered on the production processes that the artisanal designers employ. Van Heerden's main manufacturing processes include a fair amount of CNC machining and laser cutting, which is finished and assembled by hand and with the help of hand tools in the studio (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Stock of mostly his more commercial products is made in advance, which is displayed in the showroom section of his studio. The majority of his collectible products are predominantly produced in-house (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Compressed air tools are often used, in the form of compressors, Dremels<sup>17</sup> and spray guns. Van Heerden's studio essentially applies woodworking processes with a substantial amount

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<sup>17</sup> Dremel is a brand of power tools mainly known for its handheld rotary tools that utilises a variety of attachments and accessories to work on different materials.



of the products, which includes band saws for the cutting of cork and timber blocks, grinders, lathes and rip saws. Other designers and artists are often approached and collaborated with if Van Heerden does not have the knowledge on a specific area of expertise which he wishes to incorporate into his work (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Van Heerden currently employs four full-time workshop employees, a personal assistant/administrator and an assistant designer. Van Heerden works in close proximity with his employees, personally overseeing the work throughout the process. From September 2017, Van Heerden appointed the full-time assistant designer to assist him with the initial design stages of the process (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Van Heerden would provide him with requirements and specifications of what he needs designed, whereafter he would review, curate and make amendments to the design where needed. Van Heerden's role as head designer is to brief the assistant designer, to obtain business interest for the products created, and to apply the final decisions on each design (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). As Wiid Design is still a small business, Van Heerden does a great amount of the design work himself, entrusting a part of it to his assistant designer. In the future, Van Heerden would like to have a team of designers to take initiative with the design of products, for which he would merely give approval for the final designs (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Data was gathered on the specific role and contribution of each designer in their business. Providing a rating on a scale of one to ten, the designers were asked how involved they are personally with each of the steps of their general product development process. Van Heerden presented the following:

- research: 8/10
- drawings/concepts: 8/10
- refinement of chosen concepts: 10/10
- prototyping: 10/10
- final manufacturing: 10/10
- marketing: 10/10
- feedback from clients/market: 10/10
- sales: 7/10 (Van Schalkwyk & WD2, 2018)

The two workshop employees that participated in the study are Samkelo Mtoba and Dumisani Chiota. Mtoba has been working for Wiid Design since 2013, being Van Heerden's first employee (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). He is currently a general worker assisting in the workshop, but usually works more on the gluing and finishing of the cork products. Mtoba gained all knowledge on his skills from his employment with Van Heerden. Mtoba only started working with cork as manufacturing material when he was appointed at Wiid Design (Van Schalkwyk & SM2, 2018).

Chiota works at Wiid Design as a carver, also describing himself as a layout artist. He carves and models sculptures in various mediums, such as hardwood and cork. He started his career in 1995, and started working for Wiid Design in 2016. Chiota regards himself as a "born talented man" (Van Schalkwyk & DC2, 2018). He furthered his schooling at the National Galleries of Zimbabwe (NGZ), and was tested and certified at the international trade test (Van Schalkwyk & DC2, 2018).

#### **4.1.1.3 Description of practice and analysis of product**

Wiid Design creates products and objects that can be seen as the interface between art and design, exploring the tension and similarities between these fields (SA Décor, 2013; Wiid Design, 2018). Van Heerden's work incorporates traditional handcrafting with specialist techniques, as he believes that the handmade elements in each product bring out its value, similar to investing in a piece of art (Wiid Design, 2018).

Van Heerden's product range includes collectable and furniture items manufactured from various materials, mainly cork, solid timber, steel, bronze and ceramics (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The furniture items include stools, side tables, dining tables and benches, as well as a range of lighting, ceramics and collectable hand-carved objects. Numerous artists have developed their own unique techniques of making products and ways of executing certain tasks (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Van Heerden states that cork as new product material and his benches were his signature creations. He aims to move more into an artistic type of collectable objects that will be more abstract pieces, similar to the style of work he executed with Wim Botha during his apprenticeship (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

The 'Cork Stool with Backrest' (Figure 4.1) is one of Wiid Design's more commercial furniture pieces. The stool is made from organic and recyclable cork, available in a light or dark colour. The backrest structure is fabricated from electro-galvanised mild steel, finished in a durable black ferro-grade powder coat (Wiid Design, 2018). A custom steel kick plate is fitted to the cork base, preventing any damage by the user's feet. The timber backrest is made from a solid hardwood, either finished in matte black or sealed in a satin varnish (Wiid Design, 2018).



**Figure 4.1: Cork stool with Backrest by Wiid Design (Wiid Design, 2018)**

The stool is manufactured through a combination of machine and handcraft, where specialist crafting techniques are developed to assemble and finish the cork base (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The design consists of minimalist forms with soft curved edges, emphasising the authenticity of the natural materials and perfected details. An interesting contrast is created between the smooth metal and the textured cork. The combination of the simplistic colours, forms and materials creates a unique, contemporary piece of furniture.

An example of a piece in Wiid Design's collectable furniture range is the 'Ironwood Bench 1' (Figure 4.2). This particular beam was sourced from the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town. Although the history of the ironwood beam is unknown, it is estimated to be over 200 years old (Wiid Design, 2018). The Ironwood Bench is carved and shaped by hand from a solid ironwood beam. No additional sealants are applied to the natural timber. The beam is fitted with Wiid Design's signature tarnished brass legs, sealed with a clear wax to prevent oxidation (Wiid Design, 2018).



**Figure 4.2: Ironwood Bench 1 by Wiid Design (Wiid Design, 2018)**

The Ironwood Bench is another example of how Van Heerden's work emphasises the beauty of the raw natural materials used. The minimalist shape of the brass legs complements the natural appearance and shape of the ironwood beam. The texture of the tarnished brass gives it a more rustic aesthetic, suited to the appearance of the aged beam. The exposed natural colour of both materials works in harmony with the overall minimalistic design. This one-off furniture piece and its history pays great honour to the tree it was originally made from.

Data was gathered on the different steps of the general product development process that the artisanal designers apply. Wiid Design's general product development process takes the form of the following steps:

1. Research;
2. Drawings/concepts;
3. Refinement of chosen concepts;
4. Prototyping;
5. Final manufacturing;
6. Marketing;
7. Feedback from clients/market;
8. Sales (Van Schalkwyk & WD2, 2018).

#### **4.1.1.4 Inspiration and influences**

Van Heerden has a great appreciation for natural materials and feels a need to make use of these materials in his designs (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). He is inspired by and enjoys design styles that portray both simplicity and complexity at the same time, as it is often more difficult to design something to appear simple (SA Décor, 2013).

As stated: "I find inspiration anywhere, everywhere" (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Van Heerden finds inspiration from collaborating with artists and designers, visiting other artist studios and antique shops, going through his reference pages of previous years, and reflecting on experiences he has had on his travels to Europe. Van Heerden always documents while he travels, specifically through photos of furniture pieces, design shops or other design elements that he liked (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). He also enjoys collecting objects, which he will often refer to for ideas and inspiration on shape and material use. Furthermore, he admires and draws inspiration from 20th century Modernism, Functionalism, the Bauhaus era and Danish design (SA Décor, 2013).

Van Heerden explains that the aesthetics of Wiid Design's products is not necessarily unique to Cape Town or Africa. Only some of the shapes and handwork techniques used in his products can be related to Africa, however not intentionally inspired by Africa. He aims to develop more products with an African aesthetic, as it is beneficial to showcase this unique

feature of origin in one's work, as well as targeting an existing market (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

#### **4.1.2 Case Study 2: Louw Roets Design**

##### **4.1.2.1 Background, knowledge acquisition and experience of the designer**

Louw Roets Design is based in Somerset West, Cape Town and has been operating for three years. Roets always knew that he would work for himself and explains that his business grew in an organic way. Returning to Cape Town in 2006 from working in England, Roets wanted to purchase a bed, which he found it to be too expensive at R3 000 (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Moreover, he could only find cheap pine beds of poor quality and a disregard for good aesthetic (Heatchcock, 2017). Roets decided to rather buy wood of the same value and built his own bed. It was through this process that he discovered his passion for woodworking. Roets started acquiring tools and equipment while working in other businesses and as one thing led to the next, he intended to start his own business. He then realised that his work was not at the same level as that of other designers, as he lacked design skills (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

After contacting the well-known furniture designer Haldane Martin, he was referred to the Industrial Design course offered at CPUT in Cape Town. In 2012 Roets sold a piece of land that he bought as investment to pay for his studies. During his third and last year as Industrial Design student in 2014, he officially started his own furniture design and manufacturing business (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Leading up to his current studio, Roets worked in various spaces to make the realisation of his business possible. While studying, Roets worked in CPUT's Industrial Design workshop's finishing room section during the evenings (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). He also worked in informal working environments with limited resources, before moving to a workshop in Epping. Thereafter Roets relocated to his current studio in Somerset West, where he has been operating since October 2017 (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Roets learned a fair amount about different manufacturing processes during his Industrial Design course. Today Roets mainly gains knowledge of the processes he applies by doing a fair amount of research through reading and experimenting on processes and materials that he finds interesting (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

#### **4.1.2.2 Business operation and structure**

Roets does not employ a main manufacturing process, but the process of making essentially consists of the following steps:

1. Obtain the wood;
2. Clean the wood and plane it to the required thickness;
3. Cut the basic shape with the table saw;
4. Complete the shaping work on the spin drill or router;
5. Create the joints, completed with a domino machine;
6. Glue the parts together;
7. Sand the complete furniture piece (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

The manufacturing process that Roets applies is therefore applies traditional craftsmanship techniques, although the technology applied is slightly advanced at times, and in combination with a small portion of CNC machining. CNC machining is a process that Roets aims to scale up to and integrate more in his manufacturing process (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

On a scale of one to ten, Roets rated himself as 100% involved with each step throughout the product development process. He currently employs only one full-time workshop employee, with whom he works in close proximity (Van Schalkwyk & LR2, 2018). Other than the design and production process, Roets is in charge of all aspects of his business, including marketing, product photography and administration. Roets plans to employ more administration and skilled workshop employees, as well as investing in new machinery to keep up with demand (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Nelson Peter participated in the study as Roets' workshop employee. Peter is a machinist who has been working at Louw Roets Design for two years, with more than 13 years of experience in the industry (Van Schalkwyk & NP2, 2018). Peter learned the skills that he applies today at a company where he worked previously, named Franco & Son Woodworks in Durbanville, Cape Town. Peter works on the machines for the majority of the day, including, for example, planing and cutting of wood for the furniture pieces (Van Schalkwyk & NP2, 2018).

#### **4.1.2.3 Description of practice and analysis of product**

Roets's designs are informed by a combination of traditional craftsmanship methods and modern technology, combined with an experimental approach (Louw Roets, 2018). Roets explains that he employs a combination of art, craft and design in his studio. He aims to create pieces that are true to the process and technique that created them, and which communicates an exploration of the boundary between design and functional art (Louw Roets, 2018). Roets does not see his practice as focussing on pure product or industrial

design, but rather employing the skills and knowledge of process and material into furniture making (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Roets creates furniture and lighting pieces made mostly out of wood, be it in the form of veneer, pulp or the solid timber itself. His furniture pieces are created by traditional handmade techniques and joints. Roets physically engages in the process, discovering new forms and translating it into furniture pieces with a contemporary aesthetic (Design Joburg, 2018). Roets's designs often take the shape of simplistic and organic forms, aiming to create contrast with materials used. He is drawn to forms that are unusual or unconventional, creating products that are conceptually and visually alluring (Cape Town Etc, 2014). Roets plans to develop his work into two categories, one being his bread-and-butter and less expensive range. The design of the second range will require more handwork skills, which Roets and skilled employees will produce (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Louw Roets Design's 'Hombre Chair' (Figure 4.3) was designed to be a strong, utilitarian and minimalist chair that is customisable and suitable for the high demands of the hospitality industry. The versatile design allows up to four chairs to be stacked (Louw Roets, 2018). The feet, seat and backrest pieces are produced in solid wood, available in ash or oak. The seat can also be upholstered in leather, vinyl or fabric if required. The framework is made from mild steel, which can be produced in black, white, yellow, cobalt, red and blue (Louw Roets, 2018).



**Figure 4.3: Hombre Chair by Louw Roets Design (Louw Roets, 2018)**

The Hombre Chair is characterised by a harmonious combination of straight and soft curved lines. The forms of the simplistic design create a timeless aesthetic. These forms are produced through a combination of machine and handcraft. An interesting contrast is created between the bright colour and gloss finish of the steel frame, in comparison with the natural

colour and more textured appearance of the wood. The addition of the colour adds a contemporary and unique feature to the design.

The 'Curved Sideboard' (Figure 4.4) is one of Roets's cabinets, made of steel legs and a solid timber body (Louw Roets, 2018). This piece is an exploration of the exceptional characteristics of wood, using the age-old method of steam bending and only traditional joinery methods. The Curved Sideboard is available in a range of two-door, three-door or four-door variations (Louw Roets, 2018).

The natural flowing lines of the curved wood on the door panels create a pattern and tranquil rhythm in the design. These curved pieces of wood and the negative spaces in between each adds texture to the door panels. The curving of the door panels is in contrast with the rest of the design consisting of clean, straight lines. The natural colour of the wood emphasises the appearance of the solid timber used. The minimalistic shape of the sideboard in combination with the perfected amount of detail contribute to an overall simplistic and striking design.



**Figure 4.4: Curved Sideboard by Louw Roets Design (Louw Roets, 2018)**

Roets's general product development process consists of the following steps:

1. Flash of inspiration;
2. Rough sketches;
3. Research;
4. Sketch and refine;
5. CAD/prototype;
6. Test;
7. Manufacture (Van Schalkwyk & LR2, 2018).



#### **4.1.2.4 Inspiration and influences**

Roets is highly and primarily inspired by the Bauhaus principles of manufacturing, aiming to apply the composition, colour and craftsmanship of this design movement to his designs. He pairs these Bauhaus principles with traditional craft and handmade elements. Roets is also fascinated by Japanese culture and often looks into the techniques they apply (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Isamu Noguchi and his philosophy of "Everything is sculpture", is an example of a Japanese American artist Roets is inspired by (Makers of Things, 2017). Shou Sugi Ban, a traditional Japanese method of preserving and finishing wood using fire, is a technique that Roets has applied to his work. Roets tries to merge these two opposites of art and Bauhaus manufacturing processes in his designs (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Organic shapes is also a fundamental source of inspiration to Roets. Although not strictly organic, soft curves are applied to the majority of his designs (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Architecture and the strong masculine lines of car designs also inspire Roets. He extrapolates from these shapes and refines it while he designs, applying it in the context that he requires it to work in (Makers of Things, 2017). Roets explains that the influence of Africa is often forced in African designs. His work reflects African aspects, but is applied appropriately and with subtlety (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

### **4.1.3 Case Study 3: James Mudge Furniture Studio**

#### **4.1.3.1 Background, knowledge acquisition and experience of the designer**

James Mudge Furniture Studio has been operating in Cape Town since 2006. Mudge grew up on a farm in Knysna, which has a long-standing history of woodcutters and woodworkers due to its abundant resources of wood (James Mudge, 2018). Mudge's family originates from a line of woodworkers, furniture makers, artists and engineers (James Mudge, 2018). His parents owned a furniture business, Knysna Forest Furniture, which employed approximately 40 artisans and used the indigenous hardwoods of the area to make furniture through traditional cabinetmaking techniques (Greenwood, 2015). Mudge thus learned to make furniture through his parents and grew into the trade his whole life, being exposed to the entire process of the industry, its craftsmen and the artistry of woodworking and traditional carpentry (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). From an early age he spent holidays making breadboards, shoes, Christmas trees and signs in the family workshop, which he sold to holidaymakers.

Mudge always knew he would be an entrepreneur (Warrington, 2015). "I always knew that I would have my own business, from the word go. There was no other option for me" (Espresso Show, 2016). His knowledge of furniture manufacturing was supplemented by his

studies, completing a Bachelor of Architectural Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT). His studies taught him the appreciation for considered spaces and well-thought-out furniture, providing him with the design element which he incorporates in his current work (ImmoAfrica, 2012; Greenwood, 2015).

After his studies, he worked at the Ralph Lauren Studios in London for two years, during which he designed and built shop fittings for their London and Paris stores. Mudge then designed and built four homes for private clients, one being in South Africa and three in Paris (ImmoAfrica, 2012). Today Mudge applies the same principles of proper joinery techniques, attention to detail and artisanal craftsmanship that he grew up with to the designs and workmanship of his studio.

#### **4.1.3.2 Business operation and structure**

The basic production process that Mudge applies to his products consists of the following steps<sup>18</sup>:

1. Select the wood, ensuring that all pieces are visually similar;
2. Machine the wood;
3. Clean the individual pieces to be straight and smooth;
4. Select individual components, such as the legs;
5. Cut the joints;
6. Glue the individual pieces together;
7. Hand-finish, oil and varnish the furniture piece;
8. Inspect the final product;
9. If satisfied with the end result, send it off to the customer (Espresso Show, 2016).

The individual pieces of Mudge's products are CNC machined, after which it is finished off and assembled by hand and with the help of hand tools.

Mudge's studio utilises a production system that is communicated between the office and the workshop on a monitor screen. A production diagram is created in the office, informing workshop employees of all product orders to be completed (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). This diagram includes details such as the product name, materials, material finish, employees assigned to the job, date and time that the product should be completed, and if the product will be collected or delivered. This production diagram is colour-coded according to the degree of urgency. As soon as a completed product is ready, the office is notified and the product is inspected (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Thereafter the product is ready for the customer and the order can be removed from the production diagram. As Mudge's studio is relatively small and situated in the centre of Cape Town, they have to work extremely efficiently. By thorough planning and having the tasks

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<sup>18</sup> The researcher asked about this subject in the research exercise booklet, but the response was deficient. A secondary source was used to include the most complete description.

working on a well-established routine, they are able to deliver products on the day of completion and consequently minimise on storage (Espresso Show, 2016).

Other than custom orders, the studio produces stock of some furniture pieces in advance, which can be viewed in the showroom. All furniture pieces are produced in-house, with minimal parts being outsourced (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

Jonah Tinashe Gandanga and Cecil Muller participated in the study as two of Mudge's workshop employees. Gandanga has been employed as finisher-maker at James Mudge Furniture Studio since 2012. Gandanga was previously employed in the movie industry's woodwork department (Van Schalkwyk & JG2, 2018). Here he was only an assistant, often not doing the woodwork himself or on a full-day basis. He therefore had the basic knowledge and skills of woodwork, learning all furthered skills that he applies today from Mudge. A substantial part of the production process is completed in Gandanga's department, machining the materials from raw to smooth (Van Schalkwyk & JG2, 2018).

Cecil Muller is a machinist who has been working for Mudge for seven years. Muller started doing woodwork when he was 15 years old, as his uncle worked in this trade. When Muller finished school and was able to work more often than only on a casual basis, he further developed his skills and knowledge of woodwork, whereafter he started working for Mudge (Van Schalkwyk & CM2, 2018). Working in the same position as Gandanga, he initiates the start of production and works on a variety of machines. When the material progresses to the next department, the wood is ready to be cut to shape (Van Schalkwyk & CM2, 2018).

Mudge rated that, as business owner, he is 100% involved in each step of the product development process. "I am it... I am all the steps" (Van Schalkwyk & JM2, 2018). Mudge currently employs two assistants who help him with administration and a number of aspects of the production process. He employs 13 full-time workshop employees, who are all hand-selected according to their required woodwork experience (Espresso Show, 2016). Mudge works in close proximity to his employees and encourages them to work on all different sections of the production process. This enables the employees to do many different jobs and prevents disinterest caused by the constant repetition of their specific job's routine (ibid).

#### **4.1.3.3 Description of practice and analysis of product**

Mudge uses solid timbers in combination with traditional construction techniques and cabinet-making joints, such as mortise and tenons, dovetail and half-lap joints, to create high-quality furniture pieces with a contemporary aesthetic. He does not use any screws or nails, as all pieces are joined using traditional joints and glue, which are extremely strong by

itself (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Mudge takes special care to get the joints perfect, as it forms an essential part in a piece of furniture. It means that the piece will be strong, will last very long, and it enables him to have fine detailing and make the piece of furniture light and beautiful (Espresso Show, 2016). As Mudge stated: "This also adds a tangible layer of history, a legacy of craftsmanship and an aura of artisanal pride to everything I make" (Basson, 2014). The pieces are produced in small quantities, while there is no limit to the scale of projects they undertake (James Mudge, 2018).

Mudge and his small team of skilled artisans aim to produce pieces that are timeless, maintaining a careful balance between function and form (ImmoAfrica, 2012). Mudge attempts to create products that will last as long as the trees that made their creation possible, and will continue to exist as a tribute to the solid wood used as valuable natural resource (James Mudge, 2018). The majority of Mudge's furniture is made from sustainable hardwoods, primarily being American white oak, American ash, American walnut and French oak, as well as iroko from Central Africa for both outdoor and indoor furniture (James Mudge, 2018). The finishes and sealants are kept understated and as natural appearing as possible, further emphasising the wood and its wear and tear being an organic part of its natural patina (James Mudge, 2018).

James Mudge Furniture Studio's 'Hardwood Chair' (Figure 4.5) is a striking contemporary dining chair. This furniture piece is available in a variety of solid timbers, being ash, oak, iroko and walnut. Different finishes and painted colours can also be ordered. The seat can also be upholstered in fabric or leather if so preferred (James Mudge, 2018). The Hardwood Chair is produced by CNC machining and handwork, assembled with traditional joinery techniques (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).



**Figure 4.5: Hardwood Chair variations by James Mudge Furniture Studio (James Mudge, 2018)**

The soft curves of the backrest and the shaped timber seat are in contrast with the crisp straight lines of the angled legs. An elegant scoop in the timber backrest piece provides comfort, as well as the characteristic attention to detail found in Mudge's pieces. This detail showcases the authenticity of the design by exposing the traditional joinery used. The natural colours further emphasise the beauty of the timber used. It can be observed how the forms of the design truly depend on its function. The prominent simplicity of the design ensures its timelessness.

The 'Log Server' (Figure 4.6) is one of Mudge's furniture pieces that reflect the essence of his work (Warrington, 2015). The front doors of the server are made from one solid piece of timber, while the sides are machined to make the server appear as a solid log. Neodymium magnets are used as closing method for the precision mitred doors/mitre joint doors, enclosing the shelves on the inside of the server. The ends of the log server are painted in options white or blue, giving the impression that the log is fresh from the lumber yard (NestedNY, 2016).



**Figure 4.6: Log Server by James Mudge Furniture Studio (James Mudge, 2018)**

The clean, straight lines and minimalist shape of the log server form a timeless design. This piece of furniture is produced through the combination of machine and handcraft, with precision in the fine details. Made out of either oak or walnut, the simplicity of the design and the material appearing in its natural form/state emphasise the beauty of the natural timber used (James Mudge, 2018). The pattern created through the consistent grain on the doors and the texture on the ends of the log further emphasise the truth to the natural material.

Mudge's general product development process is described as consisting of the steps:

1. Concept;
2. Design;
3. Prototype;
4. Assess;
5. Make;
6. Finished product (Van Schalkwyk & JM2, 2018).

#### **4.1.3.4 Inspiration and influences**

Mudge acknowledges his background in architecture with influencing his design approach, which he describes as "clean and contemporary, underscored by artisanal craftsmanship" (Design Indaba, 2014). His design is inspired and informed by the raw materials he works with, as the material often predetermines how a product is made according to its limitations. The design of a product originates through the making of it; through the understanding of how components come together and how objects are made (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

#### **4.1.4 Case Study 4: Bofred**

##### **4.1.4.1 Background, knowledge acquisition and experience of the designer**

Bofred was established in 2015 by two female directors, Christa Botha and Carla Erasmus<sup>19</sup>. Both Botha and Erasmus are self-taught product designers with a background in fine art. Botha studied Fine Art at a university in New-Zealand, while Erasmus has a honours degree in Fine Art at the University of Pretoria (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Both working as practicing artists – Botha as owner of a boutique online baby store and Erasmus as a photography assistant – they felt creative frustrated and were looking for another creative outlet (Fell, 2017; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). They made it their objective to apply their creative knowledge and skills to artefacts that are more commercial, and identified artisanal products as viable sellable items due to its functional aspect. Sharing the same design philosophy, interior taste and appreciation for beautifully crafted and designed pieces, Botha and Erasmus started the company with the aim of bringing a fresh perspective to design. Bofred started with remodelling and restoring furniture, later focussing solely on developing their own designs (Meiring, 2014).

##### **4.1.4.2 Business operation and structure**

Bofred's business model is different to that of the other three artisanal designers, as Botha and Erasmus do not execute in-house production. After designing the products, they collaborate with a selection of approximately 25 local craftsmen and organisations to produce their designs (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). As stated by Erasmus: "We dream up what we

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<sup>19</sup> The semi-structured interview was conducted with Erasmus as representative of the Bofred team.

want, we design exactly what we want, we try and figure out how, and then we try and find a supplier." As one product can have multiple material suppliers, as well as a number of manufacturers for the various components, the production process is usually quite complex (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). By supporting and promoting local crafters and organisations, Bofred aims to create a creative community where ideas and skills can be shared and exchanged (Design Indaba, 2019). Bofred also regularly collaborates with local designers, ceramicists and artists, valuing the strength of the collective mind (Bofred, 2019).

The initial stages of Bofred's product development process generally consists of formulating a concept, giving the concept a theme, deciding what influence the concept should entail, determining the number of products the collection should consist of, and forming a coherent narrative of each product's shapes and forms (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Staying true to the original concept is very important for Bofred, thus persistently integrating it throughout the development process. As stated by Erasmus: "We really try not to sway from the original concept because then you just give in to trends, or you just give in to mainstream or what you see around you all the time" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Thereafter the process includes CAD design, prototyping, sampling and finally manufacturing. Bofred has launched two product collections thus far, and is nearly complete with the development of their third collection. The product development process of each collection takes approximately eight months (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

The roles of the Botha and Erasmus are split as Botha lives in Muscat, Oman, while Erasmus operates Bofred from Cape Town, South Africa (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Due to the geographical distance, dynamic systems are put into place to aid efficient operation of the business (Fell, 2017). Botha has a long-term and administrative role, with a broader overview of the business. She executes long-term projections and planning. Erasmus has a more short-term, client-based and operational role in the business. Botha and Erasmus naturally separated into their different roles according to their personal strengths and weaknesses, complementing each other accordingly (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Erasmus does hand sketches of the concepts, focussing on the overall look and feel of the desired designs. Botha naturally has a more technical perspective, constructing the technical details. As explained by Erasmus: "Her technical brain and my 'wishy-washy' brain sometimes just collide and we come up with the right thing" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Both directors play an equal part in the company; from the development of new designs to building relationships with clients (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

Regarding the personal involvement of the designers in the product development process, Bofred stated that they are 100% involved in all stages (Van Schalkwyk & BF2, 2019). Bofred

is solely run by two directors, who operate every step of their business. Although not manufacturing in-house, they are highly involved in the production of their designs, regulating the process with close proximity and regular visits to the producers (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

#### 4.1.4.3 Description of practice and analysis of product

Bofred specialises in delivering contemporary design and curated art, seeing themselves as more an ever-evolving artistic collective than a conventional furniture manufacturer (Kavonic, 2015). They not aim to create 'affordable art', but rather aspire that everyone can have a piece of art in their homes (Fell, 2017). This is echoed in their design philosophy as explained by Erasmus: "creating works of art - sculptural, functional items - that become collector's items in the home" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Their latest collection called 'Clay Collection' strongly follows their design philosophy, as it focuses on the collaboration of artists and designers to create functional items with strong influences from ceramics and pottery. The essence of the collection is being handmade, unique, slightly deformed, and products made in multiples not being completely identical to one another (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

Minimalist shapes, vibrant colours and rich textures of natural handcrafted materials create bespoke collections of Bofred's furniture, lighting and decor items (Bofred, 2019). Bofred works closely with local craftsmen and organisations to create their designs, consisting of a vast variety of materials, including steel, wood, ceramics, fabric, marble and granite (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

The 'Moore Bench' (Figure 4.7) is part of Bofred's Clay Collection. This piece is to be used as occasional bench for the bedroom or hallway. The bench is upholstered in cotton fabric, with a detailed backrest and coated black wooden legs. The bench can also be custom made according to fabric and sizes supplied by the client (Bofred, 2019).

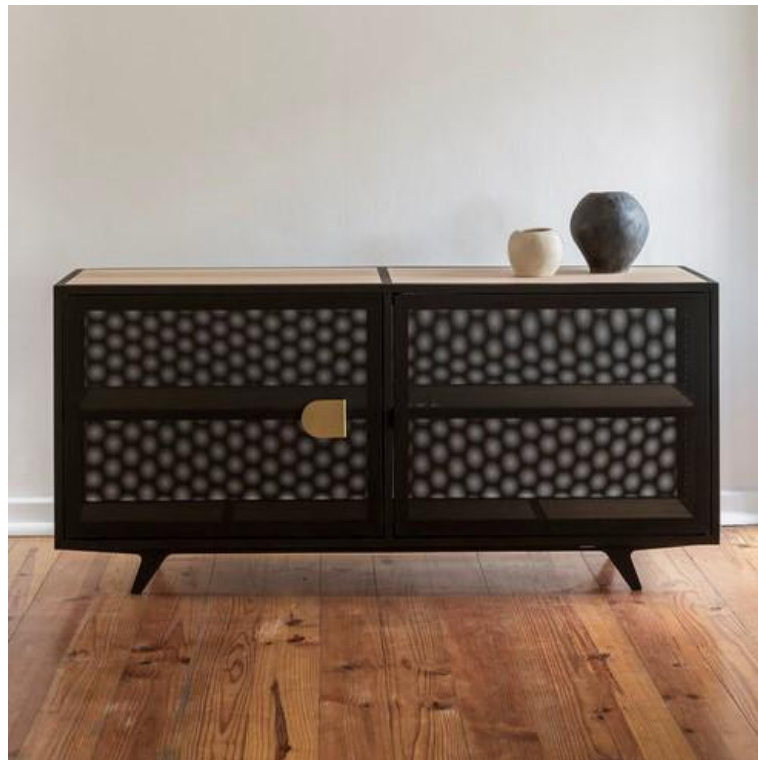


**Figure 4.7: The Moore Bench by Bofred (Bofred, 2019)**



The Moore Bench consists of minimalistic shapes that, together with the muted colour palette and symmetry of the design, forms a timeless piece. The stitch lines on the backrest adds slight detail and pattern to the bench. The soft curving lines of the upholstered area and wooden legs work in unity with the soft texture of the fabric to create an overall effect of tranquillity. Contrast can be found in the light colour and matt texture of the fabric, against the dark colour and gloss coating of the wooden legs. The proportions of the back rest, the seating area and the legs create an interesting relationship with one another, cohesively forming a unique design.

Bofred's 'The Moller Sideboard' (Figure 4.8) is a collaborative project with Composite Design. The Moller is described as a modern piece with an emphasis on minimalism. The Moller combines Bofred's linear and natural hand-crafted design style with the bold and graphic shapes that represent Composite Design's industrial aesthetic (Bofred, 2019). As seen in Figure 4.8, The Moller is constructed from a finely textured powder-coated mild steel frame, solid oak shelves, and a brushed brass handle. The shelves can be custom made in birch plywood or smoked glass, while a stainless steel handle with a brushed or polished finish is another alternative (Bofred, 2019).



**Figure 4.8: The Moller Sideboard by Bofred (Bofred, 2019)**

Simple shapes and natural colours are used to form the contemporary design of The Moller Sideboard. The rich tones of the wood shelves provide a contrasting natural touch to the black mild steel, while the brass handle creates a sense of refined elegance. The handle

becomes the focal point of the design, being the only component that is used asymmetrical. By perforating the mild steel, it allows light to travel through the sideboard panels. This creates the illusion of a fabric-like quality, adding warmth and pattern to an otherwise cold and stark material (Bofred, 2019).

The general product development process of Bofred consists of the following steps:

1. Concept;
2. Drawing;
3. Curation;
4. Visualisation;
5. Elimination;
6. Simplification;
7. Manufacturing;
8. Prototyping;
9. Sampling;
10. Production;
11. Quality control (Van Schalkwyk & BF2, 2019).

#### **4.1.4.4 Inspiration and influences**

Gathering ideas and inspiration for Bofred's new products is a collaborative process, during which Botha and Erasmus brainstorm around gaps in the market and products that they would like to own themselves (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Bofred's work is designed according to their own design style, influenced by their travels, the everyday, music and particularly art. Art has an important influence in especially Erasmus's creative approach to Bofred, drawing inspiration from the shapes, colours and textures as seen in fine art (Skinny laMinx, 2019).

#### **4.2 Challenges of the practice of artisanal product design**

During the four case studies, various challenges of the practice of artisanal product design were identified. As reflected by the practitioners, the challenges experienced<sup>20</sup> are presented in Table 4.2. These are the challenges that were noted in the semi-structured interviews and research exercise booklets. It however does not imply that the designer experiences only the challenges indicated and represented in the findings.

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<sup>20</sup> As selected in colour.

**Table 4.2: Challenges experienced by the artisanal designers  
(Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019)**

Challenges	Artisanal Product Designer			
	Wiid Design	Louw Roets Design	James Mudge Furniture Studio	Bofred
Lack of skilled craftsmen				
The market's perception of design				
Lack of support from the market and industry				
The continued existence of the practice being at risk due to mass manufacturing and imports				
Specific materials or production processes utilised for artisanal products				
The effect of mass manufacturing on the practice				
The South African industry and/or workforce				
The South African market, recession and sales strain				
Duplication of artisanal designers' original ideas and niche product offering				
The standard of education of potential employees				
The work ethic of employees				
The notion of fast-fashion and consequent lack of value for products				
The South African government not providing sufficient education opportunities for craftsmen				
Capital and cash flow				
The effect of trends on design				
The risk and pressure of creating new products				
Balancing of both the creative and business aspects				
The value of design according to the market and industry				
Authenticity of artisans				
Small product offering				
Obtaining a lasting relationship with manufacturers				
Manufacturing capabilities of competitors				
High cost of product development				
Difficult to penetrate international markets				

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

As revealed in the literature review, the practice of artisanal design is not a new phenomenon, but rather a recurring practice. Pye (1968:59) explains that most ideas of workmanship were developed by the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, launched by John Ruskin's<sup>21</sup> theories. Van Heerden stated that people are aware of machines and technology constantly evolving in today's consumerist culture, and desire to revert to pre-industrial ways of living (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The designers participating in the study are experiencing another emergence of artisanal design in Cape Town. Roets confirmed this statement during the interview: "In terms of what I do, I would say it's something that is coming back up; where you can go speak to the designer and he's also the maker" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Similarly, Van Heerden explained: "There's a movement now, especially with the local designers, where people are in fact focussing more on handcrafted techniques" (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The same movement applies to the international industry, forming a global movement similar to a trend. This is in agreement with the findings of McGuirk (2011) and Luckman (2015:1), indicating that in a market flooded with cheap mass-produced goods, handmade products and practices are in global demand.

There are a number of new emerging designers in Cape Town and the rest of South Africa. With the immediate establishment of their business, Bofred experienced that the artisanal market in Cape Town is very small and rather desperate for something new (Fell, 2017). Due to the size of the market, it more easily becomes prevalent through established designers what the practice of artisanal product design entails and how it is different from the rest of the industry of product design (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). These individuals consequently form a collective or a guild in the industry, similar to that of the Arts and Crafts movement. In the same way the Arts and Crafts movement differentiated itself and emphasised its separateness from the rest of society (Crawford, 1997:25).

Mudge stated that Cape Town has a high ratio of entrepreneurs to people (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). A vast number of people in different industries are opening their own small businesses. It is experienced as exhilarating that people are able to start a business from new handmade products, and that the market in Cape Town is able to support it (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Van Heerden explained that he feels privileged to be able to

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<sup>21</sup> John Ruskin was an influential social critic and advocate of economic change and reform, disdaining the social ills that resulted from the Industrial Revolution and initiating a return to craftsmanship (Atwood, 2008).

execute his practice and obtain sales from it (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The success of artisanal product design in South Africa as developing country is, however, remarkable. As Roets stated: "We are a very entrepreneurial country because here you have to make things work yourself" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). In comparison, the existence of these small businesses would possibly not be feasible in developed countries such as in Europe, as the market is extremely big and saturated with many other artisans following a similar practice (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). The relatively small size of Cape Town is thus beneficial to the practice of artisanal design, as the individuals gain exposure fairly quickly. Emerging designers can easily be discovered as the industry is still fairly young in South Africa, and consequently the market is not as saturated yet (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, JM1, 2018). It is experienced that Cape Town also has a considerable group of stimulated people, as well as the required market interested in the type of work produced, making it possible to pursue the practice (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). South Africa is seen as a very dynamic country, with its cultural differences and influences being of benefit to the designers. Elaborating on this subject, Roets stated: "The more people you can have involved or draw inspiration from, the more dynamic your work is, the more unique it is" (Makers of Things, 2017).

It is experienced that consumers often and progressively more purchase products from the studios of small artisanal designers instead of purchasing mass-produced products from retail stores in big shopping centres (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). As explained by Van Heerden: "They go to the upholsterers themselves or they go to the Biscuit Mill<sup>22</sup> themselves and choose artisanal objects directly from the artists, which is great" (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Luckman (2015:1) identified this same occurrence, explaining that as a valuable counterpoint to machine-made products, increasingly more people prefer handmade items from independent creatives. The artisanal designers also receive a great amount of interest from international clients, as South Africa's design industry has greatly advanced to being world-class. Furthermore, more platforms are available and accessible today for showcasing and marketing the work of designers to the rest of the world (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

The following chapters of 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' by David Pye were used as dimensions for discussion of the study's findings:

- Design proposes. Workmanship disposes
- The workmanship of risk and the workmanship of certainty
- Is anything done by hand?
- Quality in workmanship

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<sup>22</sup> The Old Biscuit Mill occupies an old factory that has been transformed into an emporium of designer stores, workshops, office spaces, restaurants and other creative service providers (Collison, 2017).

- The designer's power to communicate his intentions
- The natural order reflected in the work of man
- Diversity
- Durability
- Equivocality
- Critique of 'The Nature of Gothic'
- The aesthetic importance of workmanship, and its future

These will be applied as theme headings in the sections to follow, comparing the work of Pye with the study's findings.

### **5.1 Design proposes. Workmanship disposes**

The first chapter of 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' by David Pye is centred around the idea that Design has been a field of high interest, but no corresponding interest in workmanship is experienced, and in fact a decline is observed. Design is defined as what can be conveyed in words and by drawing, being the first stage of the process, while the quality of the final product is dependent on workmanship (Pye, 1968:1). The designer has thus only been able to exist by exploiting what workmen have evolved or invented. As quality is usually regarded in terms of material, Pye argues that 'good material' is a myth, but rather an unconscious tribute to the traditions and abilities of workmanship to exploit this characteristic of materials (Pye, 1968:2). Pye states that a great amount of workmanship in mass production is excellent. The deterioration in mass production is not due to bad workmanship or quality, but due to the restricted range of capabilities of the workmanship of certainty; each being uniform and lacking in diversity (Pye, 1968:3).

The artisanal furniture designers identified manufacturing as highly beneficial as new techniques are discovered and experience is gained through the process of production and experimenting, which can potentially aid in the development of new inventions or ideas (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Van Heerden explained that his 'Warped Lab Vase' (figure 5.1) was initially a production flaw, which became well-liked due to its handmade aesthetic (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The warping of the standard shape drastically increases the price of the product as it becomes more artisanal. The physical and experimental aspect of the production process therefore enables the opportunity for future products to be constructed. In agreement, Moran (2013:3) explained that artisanal designers often learn through the process of trial and error; creating new products and gaining knowledge of materials. In accordance with Pye's theory (1968:1), much of the Warped Lab Vase's creation is owed to workmanship, as it lead to the development of the design's unique feature.



**Figure 5.1: Wiid Design's Warped Lab Vase (Wiid Design, 2018)**

## **5.2 The workmanship of risk and the workmanship of certainty**

In the second chapter of 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship', Pye explains that the workmanship of the better sort is referred to as craftsmanship, while it is not determined where craftsmanship ends and ordinary manufacture begins. Pye describes craftsmanship as workmanship that uses any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but dependant on the judgement, dexterity and care of the maker. The quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making. In contrast, the workmanship of certainty is found in quantity production and in its pure state in full automation, with the quality of the result being predetermined before production (Pye, 1968:4). Hybrid forms of production can also be found, where some operations are performed by the workmanship of certainty and others by the workmanship of risk (Pye, 1968:6). During the preparatory stages of the workmanship of certainty, the judgement, dexterity and care of the workmanship of risk apply in the making of tools, patterns, prototypes and jigs. The workmanship of certainty will therefore always be dependent on the exacting work of the workmanship of risk in the making of the plant that executes the work during the predetermined production process (Pye, 1968:5).

Pye states that craftsmanship is seen as backward-looking and opposed to new technology by some, while others see it as the source of a valuable ingredient to civilization (Pye, 1968:4). The workmanship of risk has been long and widely valued, but is not always or necessarily valuable, as it can be a waste of time, produce low quality, or be expensive. People will however continue to demand individuality in their possessions; the danger not being the workmanship of risk dying out, but rather that due to a lack of standards, its possibilities will be neglected and inferior forms of it will be taken for granted and accepted. A





executed by master crafters, while Bofred continuously regulates the process (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

Focussing on the artisanal aspect of their practice, it was emphasised that with artisanal products there must be a focus on handmade elements (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). The contribution of handcraft therefore plays a vital role in the work of artisanal designers. Although these products are usually charged at premium prices, the handmade element is an attractive selling point (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). As elaborated on by Erasmus: "[C]lients like that, that's why they come to Bofred; because it's not just a factory-made product. You can see there's love and detailing in it" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Similarly, McGuirk (2011), Panda (2013:1) and Kapur & Mittar (2014:2) describe that artisanal designers produce products manually by applying traditional craft processes. The contemporary artisanal practice is similar to the guilds of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which formed as unified approach to preserve and revive the traditional skills and techniques of handmade production. Parallel to the aim of today's artisanal designers, the guilds returned to earlier ways of living and working and developed new approaches to create decorative arts (Kneese *et al.*, 2014:2; Taggart, 2018).

The designers often apply a combined approach to their work. The design of a new furniture piece is a very hands-on process, during which the designer spends a great amount of time prototyping and defining the design (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). As Mudge stated during the interview:

*"I love designing the work, but I also love making it and I don't think you can really separate design from making, because a lot of design comes through making... When you make it, you design it" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).*

Similarly, the Arts and Crafts Movement advanced the idea of the designer as craftsman and manufacturer (University of Maryland, 2018). Today it is especially with the initial stages of the product development process that the artisanal aspect of the practice plays a vital role. Upon completion of the finalised design, the designer's artisanal knowledge is translated into something that can be reproduced by others who are less skilled than the designer, through teaching employees how to replicate the design (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). This method of production reflects Pye's explanation of hybrid production forms, where the workmanship of risk is applied during the preparatory stages, followed by the workmanship of certainty in the production process (Pye, 1968:5). The manual contribution of the craftsman however still constitutes the greater part of the process. The method of training is similar to the apprenticeship model used by artisans during the Arts and Crafts Movement, where trade skills were taught to apprentices by masters in the studio environment (Gautier, 2013; Perrin, 2017).

Depending on the specific product designed, slightly varying product development processes are applied as found to be logical. The process differs, for example, for commissioned projects in comparison to in-house products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The product development processes generally applied by the artisanal product designers consist of fairly the same steps, although the sequence differs slightly.

**Table 5.1: Artisanal product designers' product development processes (Van Schalkwyk & WD2, LR2, JM2, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF2, 2019)**

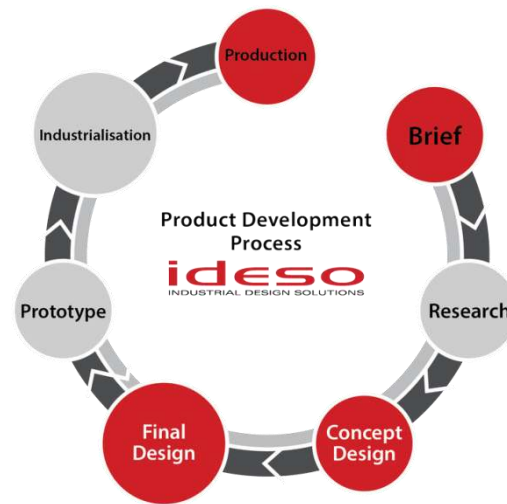
Wiid Design	Louw Roets Design	James Mudge Furniture Studio	Bofred
1. Research; 2. Drawings/ concepts; 3. Refinement of chosen concepts; 4. Prototyping; 5. Final manufacturing; 6. Marketing; 7. Feedback from clients/market; 8. Sales.	1. Flash of inspiration; 2. Rough sketches; 3. Research; 4. Sketch and refine; 5. CAD/prototype; 6. Test; 7. Manufacture.	1. Concept; 2. Design; 3. Prototype; 4. Assess; 5. Make; 6. Finished product.	1. Concept; 2. Drawing; 3. Curation; 4. Visualisation; 5. Elimination; 6. Simplification; 7. Manufacturing; 8. Prototyping; 9. Sampling; 10. Production; 11. Quality control.

As general summary that can be derived from the above, the development process applied by the four artisanal furniture designers consists of the following steps:

1. Concept ideation;
2. Research;
3. Rough sketches of concept;
4. Refinement of concept;
5. Prototype;
6. Assess/test;
7. Manufacture.

Comparing the product development process of the artisanal designers to the process used by the rest of the product design industry, the process of a traditional product/industrial design company can be used for analysis. IDESO (Industrial Design Solutions) is a specialist product design consultancy situated in Cape Town. IDESO applies the following process for product development:

1. Brief;
2. Research;
3. Concept design;
4. Final design;
5. Prototype;
6. Industrialisation;
7. Production (IDESO, 2016).



**Figure 5.3: IDESO product development process (IDEOSO, 2016)**

The production development process that the artisanal furniture designers apply is remarkably similar to the process applied by traditional product/industrial designers. The process is essentially comparable, although the manner of executing each step differs.

A prominent difference occurs with the initiating step of the process where a new product is established. With the exception of commissioned projects, the artisanal designers are in charge of the development of new products. In comparison, traditional product/industrial designers most often follow the design brief provided by the client (IDEOSO, 2016). The second distinction takes place towards the final stages of the process. With industrialisation of traditional product/industrial design, the final design for production is prepared on a CAD (computer-aided design) program (ibid). The manufacturing is most often outsourced to be executed by machine. The manufacturing suppliers can be located in South Africa, while international manufacturers are also often used (ibid). In comparison, the artisanal furniture designers produce the majority of the work themselves. Bofred's designs are produced by crafters located solely in Cape Town, ensuring that the process can constantly be monitored by the designers (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Traditional handcraft processes is the most substantial aspect of the artisanal furniture designers' work (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

Throughout the product development process, both the artisanal and traditional product/industrial designers utilise CAD software for 3D modelling, advanced visualisation of the design, prototyping and 2D technical drawings. The traditional product/industrial designer however dependants on CAD software for final production (IDEOSO, 2016). The artisanal furniture designers are in control of, and takes part in, the entire product development process, while the traditional product/industrial designer is mostly separated from the

production process of his/her work. Due to the nature of the artisanal designers' practice, and the designer also fulfilling the role of a manager, more freedom is allowed throughout the product development process. The process of the artisanal designers is also less set and linear than that of traditional product/industrial design.

By determining the level of risk involved at each stage of the product development process, it was found that the work of the artisanal furniture designers is predominantly in accordance with Pye's definition of craftsmanship, also referred to as the workmanship of risk. To determine the level of risk involved, the relationship between the tools, materials and techniques used in production were analysed (Loh *et al.*, 2016:190). Although the artisanal designers utilise a combination handcraft and machine manufacturing, the handmade element remains the most significant part of their products. The outcome of the products are thus highly dependent on the judgement, dexterity and care of the creators.

### **5.3 Is anything done by hand?**

Pye's third chapter 'Is anything done by hand' analyses the distinguishing classification of hand- and machine-work. As workmanship varies in its basis and practice in different trades, the only common factor and means of generalisation is the element of risk. The comparison can only be real and useful if an estimate can be made of the degree of risk involved to produce the quality of the result (Pye, 1968:12). The source of power is irrelevant to risk, as the use of a power tool might require more care, judgement and dexterity than a hand-driven one; handicraft thus not excluding the use of machines (Pye, 1968:9). It proves merely impossible to define the terms handicraft or hand-made, as these are not technical, but rather historical or social terms, and therefore do not refer to any definable technique (Pye, 1968:10).

Data was gathered on the rationale behind the methods of production utilised by the artisanal product designers. The manual processes that Wiid Design applies can only be executed by hand (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The cork products, for example, require a vast amount of handwork to be assembled and finished. The handcrafted effects created on a number of the products cannot be mimicked by machine. Wiid Design's 'Daybed' is completely hand-carved from timber by Chiota over a period of 23 days (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). As explained by Pye (196:12), this is one of the extreme cases of the workmanship of risk where no jig or determining system is used to guide the use of a hand-held tool. A number of Van Heerden's products are also not viable to be manufactured by machine due to its size. Although some components of his products are produced by machine, the handmade elements remain the focus of the designs, aided by hand tools for improved efficiency. Wiid

Design is currently developing a new range of furniture, where each furniture piece contains a hand-carved element (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Chiota, who executes the carving work at Wiid Design, believes that this technique allows constant new and unique products to be created (Van Schalkwyk & DC2, 2018).

Although Roets is looking into replacing some of his handcrafted work with CNC machining, he has been executing the work by hand as it is the most affordable entry point into the industry (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Supported by literature, Scrase (2003:449) and CHF International (2010:1) identified that artisanal production is an ideal form of employment for creative, self-sufficient entrepreneurs as it requires minimal start-up capital in comparison to other forms of labour. Producing products by hand requires only basic tools, while a steady capital layout is needed when starting with CNC machines as a small business owner (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Mudge explained that artisanal methods of production and manufacturing by machine work side by side; man and machine working hand in hand (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Firstly, the artisanal designer executes the more artisanal process. "That's where the creativity comes, where the piece is born" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Thereafter it progresses to being manufactured with the help of the workshop employees, applying a combination of machine and handwork. As described by Pye, the use of power tools in Mudge's production process still requires a fair amount of care, judgement and dexterity (Pye, 1968:9). Although the machines' capabilities are vast and aid in the production of products, it only executes work according to provided instructions. The machine requires the designer's knowledge to guide it through the process to produce items that people would be interested in purchasing. As stated by Mudge: "You've got to embrace technology. But at the same time, machines can't design anything, they're only slaves" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Similarly, Krugh (2014:290) explained that while machine technology was a concern for many during the Arts and Crafts Movement, contemporary artisanal designers use it to their advantage to make new kinds of products, while still valuing traditional skills and tools. In agreement, the ITC/WIPO (2003:6) also identified that craft entrepreneurs use machine tools or even machinery, without affecting the essentially handmade nature of the work and the production process. For it to be financially viable and to make it possible for artisanal product designers to pursue their practice, the assistance of machines and employees is requisite. It also enables the designers to share their practice and its products with more people.

Data was gathered on how the artisanal designers quantify and justify the time invested in products with regard to the research, design and development stages of the process required prior to manufacturing. The designers acknowledged that it is difficult to determine a price for

the product development stages (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). It was stated that the South African market is extremely young to design and undervalues the practice, and consequently the designers cannot charge premium prices for their work. It is important to first establish one's brand, and only start loading the prices slightly once the business is established and successful (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). ITC/WIPO (2003:6) stated that artisans' prices are usually based on material and labour cost, although premium prices may be asked for established artisans' work, in relation to their reputation. As the designers cannot truly charge for the time invested during the development stages, only products that the designer would want to continue making should be developed (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Instead of factoring in the product's development time when calculating its cost, the time invested will then be amortised over the years that the product is in production (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

Mudge stated that three different approaches can be used to price products: according to the market, according to how much one believes can be charged, or according to how much it will cost to make (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). A combination of these three approaches is most often used by artisanal designers to determine the price of their products. Alternatively, products can be charged according to the quantity that the designer wishes to sell. When aiming to sell a high quantity, the price should be low, and vice versa. As it is essentially the same product, the value of items is explained to become quite an abstract and arbitrary concept (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). The price therefore also depends on how exclusive the item is. Bofred explained that they aim to work according to fixed costing margins, while also taking the product's cost price and the market's retail price in consideration. As stated by Erasmus: "[W]e've also come to realise we live in South Africa and we're going through a massive financial dilemma at the moment" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). To accommodate the market, Bofred aims to make their designs available in material options that are more affordable. Erasmus explained:

*"So we dream big, we manufacture, we don't cut corners, we try and make whatever we want it to look like in the end. And then sometimes we give options on a material that is maybe not as expensive. Almost like the show-off, and then its more affordable friend kind of scenario" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).*

#### **5.4 Quality in workmanship**

The fourth chapter of 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' examines the epithets commonly applied to workmanship, focusing on 'good', 'bad', 'precise' and 'rough'. Good workmanship is referred to as that which carries out or improves upon the intended design, while bad design fails to do so (Pye, 1968:13). These are measured by the criteria of soundness and

comeliness: soundness implying the ability to transmit and resist forces, not containing flaws or weak places; comeliness referring to the ability to execute the aesthetic expression (Pye, 1968:13). All workmanship is described as approximation, where the workman executes an element of improvisation (Pye, 1968:14). Workmanship is also depicted as either regulated, free, or rough (Pye, 1968:17). With regulated workmanship the final product appears to correspond exactly with the idea, with free workmanship there is clear disparity between the idea and the final product, and with rough workmanship the disparity is very large (Pye, 1968:24). As rough workmanship involves preliminary approximation, and free workmanship entails deft, liveliness and decision in the production process, these only exist in the workmanship of risk (Pye, 1968:19).

Artisanal product design can often be related to with its quality and price (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Artisanal designers apply craftsmanship techniques and quality materials to their products, while investing a great amount of time in the development process. These factors contribute to premium prices, and products that can often be considered collectable pieces of art (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). According to Pye's criteria, the work of artisanal designers can be described as good workmanship. The workmen apply regulated workmanship to execute the designer's intent as closely as possible. As explained by Pye, this regulation in the workmanship of risk is achieved through dexterity, gradualness and shape-determining systems (Pye, 1968:18). Quality is however not prerogative to the workmanship of risk. The workmanship of certainty is usually applied for speed in production, but also often for its accuracy (Pye, 1968:6).

According to the relationship between markets and products explained by Chudasri *et al.* (2011:8)<sup>23</sup> artisanal products can thus most accurately be categorised as 'Artisanal Crafts' produced for the 'Medium-High Market', although the work of artisanal designers can often also be defined as 'Traditional Fine Crafts' for the 'High-end Market', and 'Commercial Crafts' for the 'Low-Medium Market'.

### **5.5 The designer's power to communicate his intentions**

In the fifth chapter Pye questions how effective and practical the designer's instructions are to the workman in words, figures and drawings of an intended design's qualities (Pye, 1968:28). Due to the high cost of designing for quantity-production, a strong incentive exists to use only shapes that are easily communicated; either standardised components or geometric shapes. This simplified level of communication and execution is practicable in cheap quantity production in the workmanship of certainty, while the free modifications of

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<sup>23</sup> See 2.2: *The practice of contemporary artisanal production.*

shape and surface quality which mark the workmanship of risk are unattainable (Pye, 1968:29).

The structure of the artisanal furniture design businesses was analysed, examining the roles of the individuals involved. As business owners, the artisanal designers are highly involved throughout the entire product development process of their designs (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Depending on how evolved the business is, the designer can also be responsible for other aspects of the business's operation, such as marketing and administration. Filho (2013:65) also explained that the artisanal designers may execute other product-related tasks such as research, market negotiations, and product design and conception if not actively involved in production. When employees or external crafters are appointed to execute the production of products, the designers constantly oversee all work throughout the process, working in close proximity with the craftsmen (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

The businesses consist of small teams of workers, as a small labour force is found to be the most effective (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). The ITC/WIPO (2003:6) also identified that working with a small team, and in close personal contact with employees, generates a sense of community and attachment to the craft. The employees execute the work by following the instructions and guidance provided by the designers. The studio environment of the artisanal furniture designers is similar to what Adamson (2007:14) describe as the old-fashioned studio, before the advent of mass production: a singular and confined space of artistic production characterised by artisanal rather than mass production, a limited number of workers, and the presence of one creative individual as author of goods made in the studio.

Working in a team of limited numbers, and in close proximity to the designer, it was found that the workmen are more likely to understand the intended design's qualities, and execute the work accordingly. The designs of artisanal designers are therefore not drastically simplified to standardised shapes for ease of communication and production. The free modifications of shape and surface qualities of the workmanship of risk are therefore applied to the artisanal designers' products.

## **5.6 The natural order reflected in the work of man**

In 'The natural order reflected in the work of man' Pye examines how the disparity between idea and final product gives an ideal form individual expression due to approximation in free workmanship (Pye, 1968:30). Traditional ideas of workmanship originated in a time when goods made were rare and of immense importance to the user, thus seen as admirable. As civilisation emerged, precision and regularity were strived for, symbolising mastery; man



standing apart from nature and having a power of his own (Pye, 1968:31). Pye states that creating goods that reflect the natural order through their diversity breaks away from the monotony caused by too much regularity and precision. The contrasting qualities of precision and approximation, and regulation and freedom are explained to be neither good nor bad, their value rather being relative to their time and circumstances (Pye, 1968:32).

In a market already flooded with products, it is important for artisanal designers to consider the aim of a design, and how it can be communicated and presented in a new and original manner (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). This is found to be especially true in a very small South African market. One of the benefits of the practice is the creation of niche products. The practice of artisanal product design is found to thus enhance a designer's brand (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Roets believes that if one is true in one's design, the products will speak for itself (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Bofred also follows this principle, as elaborated on by Erasmus:

*"[Y]ou can see it a mile away when someone didn't really start at a core, or a good core concept; you can see when it's taken from the back end and just tweaked to suit the brand. So we very, very strongly feel that you have to start from the ground and work up" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).*

Unique products are recognised fairly easily, especially if the craftsmanship techniques are exposed in the final product (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). This is in agreement with Pye's theory, identifying that diversity aids in reflecting the natural order in products (Pye, 1968:32).

If one's brand becomes known for developing original work on a constant basis, a distinctive following is gained through the media. Further interest is also often gained from international galleries and collectors.

## **7. Diversity**

In the chapter of 'Diversity', Pye explains that every formal element has a minimum and maximum effective range, only able to be perceived for what it is by an observer stationed within those limits (Pye, 1968:33). As the formal elements are commonplace, the art of workmanship lies in diversifying the scale and forms of the elements (Pye, 1968:35). There is often much insensitivity to the quality of diversity (Pye, 1968:38). As stated: "[I]n this age quantity is what we like; something that shows up well: for 'big' and 'important' are about synonymous in our conception of art" (Pye, 1968:39). Diversity is rarely achievable by the workmanship of certainty, always possible by the workmanship of risk, and particularly easy by free workmanship (Pye, 1968:35). Pye explains that diversification is not a property of workmanship alone, but is controlled by design at medium and long ranges (Pye, 1968:39).

Produced majorly by the workmanship of risk, the work of the artisanal furniture designers often reflect the property of diversity. The effect of approximation contributes to the aesthetic quality in workmanship. Pye states that contrast between the regulation and freedom, and uniformity and diversity is essential (Pye, 1968:36). This tension is often found in the products of the artisanal designers. According to Pye the effect of age and wear is a powerful diversifying agent (Pye, 1968:36). The furniture pieces of the artisanal designers, produced with craftsmanship techniques and quality materials, are made to be durable (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). With time, the effect of wear will thus reveal more diversity to the surface quality of the pieces.

### **5.8 Durability**

In the eighth chapter of 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' Pye explains durability as a preoccupation of every workman, believing that a product is not properly made unless it is made to last; time thus being a measurement of all workmanship. Manufacturing methods are often reckoned good solely as they are durable. High regulation is seen as essential to durability, while rough work can in essence create the same outcome. Pye discusses some of the social and aesthetic arguments for durability. Firstly, inherited goods from the past provide a tangible link with the makers and equipment of then. Secondly Pye explains optional durability. In a world of materialism and the desire for novelty, products are often made to be short-lived and replaced. Pye argues that these products should be made maintainable and repairable for those who care for more than novelty and status-symbols. Thirdly, age and wear are noted as adding great diversity to the surfaces of durable products. Lastly, it is stated that novelty becomes overvalued and mistaken for art in a ephemeral world; design is thus reduced to fashion. Only when a design lasts long enough to go out of fashion it can be appreciated or rejected for its true value. Durability depends largely on the workman in the workmanship of risk, while relying on the designer in the workmanship of certainty. The premature failure of products can thus no longer be blamed solely on workmanship (Pye, 1968:43).

Creating products that are physically and aesthetically durable is an important aspect of the artisanal furniture designers' work (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Van Heerden operates from the principle of only designing and producing items that he would enjoy having in his own house. Quality, durability and good aesthetic are vital aspects in Van Heerden's work (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). As Mtoba confirmed in the research exercise: "To my boss everything needs to be 100% perfect. Quality comes first in our product" (Van Schalkwyk & SM1, 2018). To ensure the quality of his work, Van Heerden prefers getting certain components of his products outsourced to specialists in specific fields (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Roets has key values that he works with, being good craftsmanship, quality materials and good design (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). These key values are also echoed in Roets's ideology:

To evoke and be part of a society where we design with passion and the human touch is valued, where we forget about what is trending and rather make our work personal is the fundamental ideology behind my work (Louw Roets, 2018).

In agreement, Mudge's furniture pieces aim to be as timeless as possible. Physically, the furniture pieces should not break. Aesthetically, the work should not go out of fashion due to being designed around trends (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). It should be an item that will last and still be valuable and worth keeping for many years to come. Due to this reason Mudge invests a great amount of time and money in machinery that create the joints perfectly. As stated during the interview:

*"It means that we make a real, genuine product that really does last. So the only thing that could go wrong is it could go out of fashion. Which is why you don't want to be too fashionable" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).*

Mudge believes that trends are merely created for media hype and should only be applied to items that do not have real intrinsic value, but that furniture needs to have more substance. As he stated: "If you want to make something genuine, it has to sort of rise above that level of intellect" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). It would be irrelevant to invest in an expensive item that is made to last, but that will be out of fashion in the near future. The design should thus be more understated, classic and timeless to truly last and be used through different fashions of the time (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

Bofred also focuses on creating products that have a life-long durability, stating that their work should not have to be replaced (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Apart from the physical durability, Bofred also firmly believe in the aesthetic durability of their work, not following trends that are momentary. As Erasmus elaborated: "[I]t's never based on this year or this trend or this colour... it really comes from a real place" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

Taggart (2018) also identified the lifespan of artisanal products to be of longer duration due to the fact that quality products are produced. The work of the artisanal designers is intended to endure a long lifespan from an aesthetic and quality point of view. According to Pye's explanation, both the designer and the workman is thus essentially responsible for the durability of the products (Pye, 1968:43). As previous literature revealed, the principle of durability was also highly applied in the Arts and Crafts Movement with the creation of simplistic furniture pieces made of quality materials (Taggart, 2018). Similar to the artisanal designers, the idea of 'design reform' aimed to improve the standard of objects designed, providing beautiful products that are skilfully constructed (University of Maryland, 2018).

## 5.9 Equivocality

Pye describes equivocality as the defect or inconsistency that occurs when a set of material properties are used that are incompatible with one another, as well as when adjacent formal elements that are incongruous are used together. Equivocality is often ambiguous, causing unpleasant tactile implications as one expects to make certain reliable judgments from the appearance of a material (Pye, 1968:49).

Pye analyses 'truth to material', consisting of two different ideas. Firstly, it is the respecting of a material to the extent of bringing out the inherent properties thereof. Secondly, it is the idea that any material takes certain shapes easily or directly, being unforced and natural to the material. Both these ideas are concerned with design, insisting that the material should not be shaped or treated in a way that suppresses the inherent properties which constitute its nature (Pye, 1968:45). As the properties of materials are readily expressed, objective and measurable, one in fact wants to express its qualities (Pye, 1968:48). Pye explains that equivocality is caused by faulty workmanship and immediately related objective phenomena, while the subjective importance of surface qualities is peculiarly the workman's preoccupation (Pye, 1968:57).

Pye also discusses surface quality, being the only measure to judge a material. Through acquired experience and material comparison, expertise is gained to form a generalised notion of what a particular 'look' means, associating it with distinctive properties of materials (Pye, 1968:50). It is stated that there is an immense lack of names for the various surface qualities, preventing any general understanding that they exist as a complete domain of aesthetic experience. This domain is man-made and therefore belongs to workmanship (Pye, 1968:58).

Being true to the materials utilised in products was found to be a prevailing occurrence among the artisanal furniture designers. Van Heerden aims to focus on being honest with the materials, forms and shapes that he uses in his designs (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). He works within the limitations of a specific material and applies the shapes and forms that are most suitable to it, as the material often lends itself to a specific form. Being honest to the concept and embracing materials that suit the design best is therefore important (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Van Heerden is intrigued by the technique of using traditional materials in a new and different way, warping something known into something precious and new. He applies this technique to his cork products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Cork is a fairly dated product which

people relate with as used in the seventies for tiles and cork stoppers. Van Heerden uses this material and transforms it into something contemporary. As stated:

*"Taking something that's normal but a material that people are used to or accustomed to and making it completely something different. That is difficult to do, it's a special technique" (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).*

Similarly, he applies this technique to his ceramic tables (Figure 5.4) in collaboration with Ceramic Matters, and explains that ceramic tables with small tiles is a renowned style of the seventies. Joined by the knowledge of Ceramic Matters, his product is a new take on the conventional design (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).



**Figure 5.4: Wiid Design's Ceramic Tables (Wiid Design, 2018)**

With regards to the timber that Van Heerden uses in his benches, he believes that the material needs to be cherished as it is an ancient and rare material (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). It should therefore not be cut up into pieces, destroying the authentic appearance of the material, but should be showcased. For this reason the timber is raised on a plinth with its two feet, transforming the bench into more of a collectable item (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Honesty also plays a vital role in Roets's practice. Roets aspires to be true to the process, techniques and materials used to produce the products, without hiding any features (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2019). This principle is further emphasised through the use of natural materials, the finishing kept as natural appearing as possible, and the use of traditional craftsmanship techniques and joints (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

The use of natural materials contributes to a principal value of Mudge's design ethos. As natural resources are utilised through essentially being subtracted and presented in another

form, the material needs to be respected (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Mudge aims to respect the underlying beauty, spirit and integrity of this asset and to ensure that its essence is retained, cherished and nurtured by the customer and its new custodian (James Mudge, 2018).

The contemporary artisanal designers' principle of truth to materials is similar to the beliefs of the Arts and Craft Movement, of which the work represented the inherent beauty of materials, the significance of nature as inspiration, and the value of simplicity, honesty and utility (Crawford, 1997:19; University of Maryland, 2018).

### **5.10 Critique of 'The Nature of Gothic'**

In the tenth chapter of 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship', Pye analyses John Ruskin's 'The Nature of Gothic', a chapter in 'Stones of Venice'. Ruskin supposed that more of the workmanship he was fond of would imply more happiness for the workmen executing the work (Pye, 1968:59). According to Pye, Ruskin aimed to express that making men do tedious repetitive work is unchristian; high regulation involves these tasks and should thus be eliminated; and the workman should be allowed to design as his work will be rough and eliminate high regulation (Pye, 1968:63). Pye argues against some of these beliefs, querying for example how the workman is more enslaved by working in high regulation from another man's designs than he is from his own (Pye, 1968:64). Pye believes that Ruskin was not condemning hard labour, but rather patient work. He did not realise that a fair amount of patient tedious work is required if one is to take pleasure in any kind of livelihood, and pleasure can be experienced in highly regulated workmanship. Ruskin was propagating naive ornament and free workmanship, believing he offered a cure for the miseries of industrialisation (Pye, 1968:63).

Ruskin believed that there must be an understanding of the kinds of labour that are good for men: by sacrificing the products that degrade the workman, and demanding products and results of healthy and honorary labour. To recognise these products and regulate this demand, three rules are to be followed:

1. Never encourage the manufacture of any article not absolutely necessary, in the production of which invention has no share.
2. Never demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some practical or noble end.
3. Never encourage imitation or copying of any kind except for the sake of preserving record of great works (Pye, 1968:65).

Pye questions why slavery becomes freedom as soon as a necessary or practical end are in view. As much of the greater part of industry provides for the practical necessities of life, Ruskin's rule is only valid for the inessential. Pye states that Ruskin was not against the

workmanship of certainty or quantity-production by machine, but rather high regulation (Pye, 1968:66). Pye explains that there are many goods produced in the workmanship of risk that requires a great amount of patience, the satisfaction acquired mainly being the finished result. It is also stated that the invent and design of a product adds to the pleasure of making it; seeing it take shape. However, this process includes a certain anxiety and working to one's own design therefore does not necessarily provide more pleasure than working to another man's designs. Workmanship can thus provide many kinds of pleasure that are not all reduced by not creating the design oneself (Pye, 1968:70).

Pye argues that the Arts and Crafts movement left behind confusion of thought about craftsmanship. One of the ideas influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement implies that a craftsman should not be judged by the result of his work, often used as an excuse for their incompetence (Pye, 1968:68). According to Pye, Ruskin propagated three important ideas that contributed to the theory of workmanship: he identified that free and rough workmanship have unique aesthetic qualities; he realised there is a domain of aesthetic qualities in manufacture and building that are beyond the control of design; and he described and understood diversity as a quality in goods, understanding its significance in the design of ornament, though not in workmanship (Pye, 1968:70).

Artisanal designers have the freedom of presenting their personality and ideas into a physical form, designing something that is true to themselves (SA Décor, 2013). Elaborating on their independence as artisanal designers of Bofred, Erasmus said: "[W]e're very selfish designers, we make whatever we feel like. Not to feed any market; we don't feed anyone except our clients that choose to buy from us" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Mudge explained that he has created his business to be precisely what he wants it to be, and essentially does not experience any drawbacks to his practice (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). As stated:

*"It's a replica of myself in a way, just scaled up that involves other people. I enjoy all the aspects of it; anything that I didn't enjoy, I stopped doing. So I just cut it out of the business eventually" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).*

Although certain aspects of the designers' businesses are not enjoyed as much as others, the balance will be required at all times. The less enjoyed aspects should therefore not be viewed as being disadvantageous, but merely as contributing to the overall gratifying practice (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). The designers also have the ability to enjoy the production process of their designs. Mudge stated that making beautiful furniture that last is very satisfying and rewarding, especially when receiving positive feedback from customers. He experiences his practice as being an honest living (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). As stated by Mudge during the interview:

*"You work hard, you get home at the end of the day, you wash the sawdust out of your hair and you have a good sleep, because you're actually quite buggered"*  
(Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

The designers execute their work by hand owing to their passion for the process. As Erasmus stated:

We get to play with textures and colours. We are our own boss and make creative decisions based on what we love and what we would want to buy for ourselves. We are basically designing a shop for ourselves, and so far our clients love it too. We enjoy getting our hands dirty and putting hours and effort into each piece. Delivering to clients that gasp when they unveil their latest purchase. We really do look at the small details and focus on the bigger picture at the same time (Van Rooyen, 2014).

The passion of their practice was also confirmed by Roets:

*"But the thing about handcraft is, specifically wood, wood is warm material, it's not man-made, it's as natural as it gets and it's that interaction with the material, the physical interaction. Like I particularly love it when I'm sanding down and how the dust is collecting on your hands, I don't know, it's just you are making and you are doing"*  
(Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

The physical process of the creation of their products, and not being separated from it, provides gratification to the designers (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). In agreement, Adamson (2007:16) identified that a sense of success, self-sufficiency and creativity is offered through artisanal production. This perspective of artisanal production is also in accord with the idea of 'joy in labour' of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Similarly, it was centred around the idea that ordinary work can become a source of pleasure and fulfilment. Arts and Crafts practitioners supported the connection that handcraft provided between the crafter and his work (The Art Story, 2018). Handcraft will therefore be a vital element in the artisanal designers' work at all times, adding value to the products created.

The aspect of business plays a vital role in the practice of artisanal product design (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). It is compulsory for the designer as business owner to have business skills in combination with artistic skills. As confirmed by Roets: "You have to be extremely business savvy to succeed as a designer" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2019). Mudge explained that finding buyers for one's products is an art in itself (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Selling the products is considered as half the job, making it is the other half, while designing it is in reality quite a small part of the entire process. The aspect of business becomes relevant through the process of employing assistance with production, as required to be able to make a living (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2018). Forming a business from the practice is essentially also requisite to keeping the artisanal industry alive. The artisanal designers therefore make use of machines to be able to



compete in the world, as it would be futile and a backwards process to execute certain tasks by hand instead of utilising the advantages that machines offer. As Mudge stated:

*"Something's got to pair, for everything. So you sell a little bit of yourself. I sell a little bit of myself with everything that goes out this door, but I try not to sell too much of it. So that's where it's quite nice to have the detachment of the machines and the other guys making stuff. That I'm not like selling my soul, I'm just selling a bit of it" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).*

The ITC/WIPO (2003:6) also identified the role of business in the practice, explaining that if these individuals do not participate in the production of products, they specialise in other business-related activities. It is advised for artisanal designers to work with a business-orientated partner if possible, as it will enable the designer to focus solely on the creative aspects of the business. The business partner can, for example, advise the designer on the retail prices of products, which the designer can then translate into his/her design thinking, material choice and manufacturing processes when developing new products.

With the development of a design, it is crucial to consider if it can be produced to be financially viable and affordable to sell, as the time and materials invested in a product is directly related to the price (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). The three aspects of price, quality and efficiency contribute to the final product, of which only two aspects can be thoroughly executed. A product can, for example, be produced through highly efficient methods and be low in cost, but in turn the quality will be low. Designers have to decide to which specific spectrum of the market their products will contribute, and make design-related choices accordingly (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

This framework can also be used to determine the position of products in the market according to the relationship between markets and products explained by Chudasri *et al.* (2011:8). As the work of artisanal product designers apply handmade techniques that are more time-consuming, in combination with good quality materials, it results to more costly products. If the artisanal designer has a range of collectable furniture pieces that is more elite and expensive, it can be balanced with his/her range of more commercial, bread-and-butter items. According to Chudasri *et al.* (2011:8), Artisanal Crafts for the Medium-High Market and Commercial Crafts for the Low-Medium Market can thus be created to support the designer's more collectable work as Traditional Fine Crafts for the High-end Market.

### **5.11 The aesthetic importance of workmanship, and its future**

In this chapter of 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' Pye analyses the significance and future of crafts in workmanship. Pye proposes the question of why the productive part of the workmanship of risk should continue with high regulated work, when the workmanship of

certainty is capable of higher regulation at a more economical price and faster pace. He proclaims that it should continue simply as the workmanship of risk in its highly regulated forms produce specific aesthetic qualities the workmanship of certainty, ruled by price, will never achieve. Furthermore, the high regulation of the workmanship of risk will always be in demand in the preparatory branch of the workmanship of certainty (Pye, 1968:72). According to Pye, the following areas are problematic:

1. The workmanship of certainty does not produce or exploit diversity.
2. Where highly regulated components are fitted and assembled by the workmanship of risk, in industries only partly industrialised, the workmanship is often extraordinary poor.
3. Some kinds of workmanship are dying out due to their high cost. These however deliver unique aesthetic qualities for which there are no substitute (Pye, 1968:73).

The preparatory branch of the workmanship of risk is described as economically more significant, as required for the existence of the workmanship of certainty. The productive branch is however declining, possibly becoming economically negligible as a source of useful products (Pye, 1968:75). Pye defines crafts as the part of the productive workmanship of risk whose justification is aesthetic, aiming to make the visual environment more palatable when the majority has been made by the workmanship of certainty. The crafts is not seen as superior to the workmanship of certainty, but should be a complement to industry.

Crafts in the modern world should produce only the very best quality, requiring the most time of the workman, and will thus result in being extremely expensive in comparison with goods of ordinary quality (Pye, 1968:76). As the difference in price between a product of craft and that of manufacture will always be large, high quality is the last remaining ground on which the crafts can compete. Elaborating on the price difference, Pye states:

It ought to be and it must be. Unless it is, the craftsman has no hope of anything approaching a modest professional standard of living, and he will never be able to command a better living than that (1968:76).

The crafts will therefore survive as a means of livelihood only where there is sufficient demand for the very best quality at any price (Pye, 1968:77). The pressure of competition adds a great disadvantage to the field (Pye, 1968:78). Due to the precarious nature of the crafts it is not always fully viable. Pye explained that the work of a craftsman should however not be influenced by considerations of what is likely to sell. "What concerns us is the very best. It is that which must somehow be continued because the aesthetic quality of it is unique, and the tradition of it must be kept alive against a time when it will put out some new growth" (Pye, 1968:78).

The future of crafts is said to depend on design:

If designers will only come to recognize it, the crafts can restore to them what the workmanship of certainty in quantity-production denies them: the chance to work

without being tied hand and foot by a selling price: the chance to design in freedom. There is nothing more difficult or more necessary for the modern designer to attempt (Pye, 1968:78).

Pye argues that if the crafts survive, their work will be executed for love more than for money. As stated: "...the scale of what craftsmen could achieve by concerting their efforts, and the opportunity it would give designers, would be something not dreamt of. We forget the prodigies one man and a kit of tools can do if he likes the work enough" (Pye, 1968:81). Free workmanship is described as one of the core sources of diversity, being the main reason for continuing the workmanship of risk as productive task, i.e. to continue craftsmanship. Pye states that the void of diversity can possibly be filled by future craftsmen, although only if they achieve some realisation of their role, set themselves their highest standards in workmanship, and attract the voluntary services of the best designers. Pye envisions that there should be an alliance between the craftsmen and the designers, as workmanship and design is described as extensions of each other (Pye, 1968:82).

In the study it was identified that the practice of artisanal product design is required to ensure that all products are not designed to be mass-manufactured. This aids in establishing a niche market for artisanal products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). The practice should separate artisanal design from the rest of the industry through established and defined categories for products. There should thus be a clear distinction between handcrafted, quality-produced and more limited products, and low-cost products of lesser quality made widely available through mass manufacturing (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). The perception of the market regarding products should consequently be challenged. As Erasmus stated during the interview:

*"I think the role of artisanal product designers needs to be just to shape creativity, to shape perception of what something should look like, or must look like, or have looked like before, and changing it ever so slightly. It doesn't always have to be the same, it doesn't have to be cookie-cutter... things don't always have to be perfect in a way; it can be handmade, and it can be different, and it can be less mainstream" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).*

Artisanal product designers fulfil a role of inspiring a great number of young aspiring designers (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2018). The artisanal designers prove that one can be successful in, and make a living from, the establishment of a business, the creation of new products, and execution of manufacturing oneself. As stated by Roets: "We inspire young designers to show them that you can actually go and make it... You can also see that the designer-makers are like pioneers in a way" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Artisanal product designers therefore inspire the next generation of designers as they are pursuing the practice that many individuals wish to follow. In accordance, Mudge stated the following:

I think design can inspire people, make them think about things and help them appreciate quality. Creativity is contagious – you'll notice that inspired people behave differently to others because design builds an awareness of things beyond the mundane levels of our existence (Basson, 2014).

Artisanal designers exemplify the creative element of humans, which only requires to be encouraged further. A few artisanal designers alone are able to inspire the next few artisanal designers, causing the practice to continually grow (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). The practice of artisanal design also leads to a great amount of creativity in the industry of design, adding creativity into the world. Consequently more well-designed products can be made available to a wider audience (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Roets envisions how the amount of energy and money used by furniture manufacturing companies to produce products of poor aesthetics and quality can instead be invested in an artisanal designer, and the amount of value that this designer can add to a furniture company (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). This is in accordance with the aim of the Arts and Crafts Movement to promote good taste, in reaction to the commercial taste by the unregulated market (University of Maryland, 2018). As stated by Roets during the interview: "I think artisanal designers can actually make big waves if the industry allows" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

It is clear that the movement of artisanal product design is creating vast developments in the industry of design. While the future of the practice is unknown, the market itself will eventually dictate with the occurrence of unfulfilled demand. If nobody is fulfilling the practice, it will essentially be started from the beginning by someone teaching him/herself (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). As the phrase "necessity is the mother of invention" insinuates, the practice will be constantly developing and evolving according to the current market's needs. Mudge stated: "Provided that it doesn't become superfluous, it will continue to live, but it will probably evolve and change" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Mudge explains that, similar to how his factory currently produces more furniture of better quality, with the help of far fewer employees than his father's business used, the industry will constantly be progressing and changing. He further said: "It's a dying practice, but it's alive here" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). To aid in the survival of artisanal product design, designers should find industries that the South African market is interested in and investing in, and create designs according to these areas of demand (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

The responsibility does not rest on the public, but rather on the designers to provide the public with artisanal products. As stated by Roets: "If no-one is doing it, we must be doing it" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). This is in accordance to the beliefs of Pye: "We made it so and we can unmake it. Unless workmanship comes to be understood and appreciated for the art it is, our environment will lose much of the quality it still retains" (Pye, 1968:3). Roets

believes that if artisanal designers want to see a change in the industry of product design, they have to work for it and offer the products to the public (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Erasmus stated that although working as a artisanal designer in an age of mass manufacturing is daunting and challenging, she would not change her practice. As explained: "It's quite a quite a daunting situation, but I wouldn't change it. I wouldn't change the way I design and the way we produce to mass production" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Although there are various factors that put the practice of artisanal product design at risk, the practice will always have its clientele and market, while its success only depends on the type of products created (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, JM1, 2018). The human factor of artisanal product design strengthens the practice, and is something that cannot be replaced. As Van Heerden stated: "There's some parts that I think will always be protected within a design process, or within a technique, or artisanal way of manufacturing: the way you join stuff" (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Some parts will therefore always be sacred to being handmade. As Louw explained: "The artisanal, handmade, craft – it's is a big movement and I don't think it's going to stop at all; I think it's just going to grow" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Although this emerging practice will never replace industry and mass production, the effect that one is starting to see is that smaller artisanal designers are increasingly being approached and involved with mass production.

## **5.12 Challenges of the practice**

### **5.12.1 Lack of skills and knowledge**

A lack of skills and knowledge among craftsmen was identified as a major challenge for contemporary artisanal furniture designers (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). The ITC/WIPO (2003:6) identified that as the traditional skills and knowledge of the practice are no longer passed on through generations, artisans in developed communities can study degree courses related to the practice at universities and colleges. It was, however, found that students and employees in the industry do not receive proper education and training. This was also identified by Klamer (2012:1), stating that educational systems in developed countries often approve academic intelligence, while manual skills are disregarded. The ITC/WIPO (2003:6) stated that artisans can receive skills training under government craft development initiatives. However, it is experienced that the South African government is not undertaking any substantial action to ensure the continued survival of tradesmen. Consequently, there is increasingly less of the deep understanding, knowledge and skill set of traditional crafts (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Drawing upon recently published research conducted in various countries in central America, Asia and Africa, Scrase (2003:449) also stated that governmental and non-governmental efforts

provide limited and ineffectual policies and programmes to support artisans. As the skills of the second or third generation craftsmen have not been passed on to their children, the practice is becoming extinct. Similarly, Kapur & Mittar (2014:2) identified that the skills of craftsmen is lost as accommodating the mainstream market often demands a decline in quality and workmanship. As explained by Mudge:

*"As you can see in the world, there are fewer and fewer designers and more and more stuff getting made because the manufacturing processes are more mechanised. So there are fewer artisans and it's something that's dying out" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).*

Erasmus stated there is a number of materials that they would like to use in their designs, but are limited due to the lack of craftsmen that have the required skill to work with the material (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). The designers therefore have to train the workshop employees in-house. Due to the small size of the artisanal businesses and the amount of responsibilities of the designers as business owners, it is most often not in their capacity to teach an employee from the level of unskilled to thoroughly skilled. The skills cannot be gained in a short period of time, but requires physical training and practice over an extended period of time. The success of the training period is also not guaranteed, as some individuals might never master the skills of the practice (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2018). In comparison to the apprenticeship model utilised in the Arts and Crafts Movement, employees of today are not compelled to work for the artisanal designers after the training period. It is thus a big investment to train someone over a number of years, after which they can essentially leave the company to start their own practice or work for another employer. Appointing interns in this specific practice is rather an inconvenience and danger in the workshop, as the interns are usually unskilled.

In addition, the training of employees contain many costly mistakes, as with the appointment of new employees. Roets stated that he had to repair approximately R100 000 worth of stock in 2017 due to the mistakes of supposedly skilled employees (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Funding for the education of employees is not readily available in South Africa. As Roets elaborated on the matter: "There is no catch-nets here; your only catch-net is your bank account, or your family if you are fortunate" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

The difficulties experienced with the labour force in South Africa result in business owners preferring to rather employ machines (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). To the advantage of the business, Mudge explains that machines are mindless slaves that follow and execute orders on repeat. As stated: "So that's a beautiful thing; it's got no attitude, it's got no back-chat, it's got no sick leave; it just grafts. So that's a really good thing" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

Roets believes that since South Africa has a big labour force, proper institutes with apt educators and mentors should be available at tertiary level to individuals wanting to work with their hands (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). To aid in recovering the skills of craftsmen and raise the standards of industry, Roets suggests that the government should subsidise business owners to train the employees (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Funds can be provided through a payroll system or governing body to businesses that can present a plan and scope to train employees. It is said to be difficult for South African small business owners already operating in challenging circumstances. As Roets stated: "It's always difficult times for small business owners and you're trying to make ends meet, but you also have to focus on solving the government's problem, which is training people" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Mudge believes that a school is essentially required to teach craftsmanship skills. It is, however, challenging as these schools will be filled rapidly with students who might not eventually pursue the practice (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). If persevering, one can, however, ascend in the industry. As stated by Mudge:

*"You kind of just have to start doing it, and struggle with it, and do it yourself, and buy some tools, and do it in your garage, and do it in your spare time, and just be totally obsessed and never stop learning" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).*

The matter often has to be taken into own hands by teaching oneself through the various sources available today. Similarly, Moran (2013:3) stated that the skills and techniques of the practice are often obtained through trial and error, through which the maker gains knowledge while creating products. Due to the challenges it entails, it might not be possible to be taught by someone else. Mudge stated that although it is challenging, employees essentially do not require the skills that their ancestors had anymore, as machines are used for many tasks originally executed by hand. "There is less skills around because there is less skill required" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). In accordance, Pye stated: "The arts are difficult to learn as being in a state of violent flux, and great interest is vested in constant innovation, with no settled tradition" (Pye, 1968:79). Although the techniques of artisans are becoming extinct, a great amount of the skills required in the past is essentially not needed today due to the development of machines.

### **5.12.2 Production processes of the practice**

Certain challenges were identified with the production processes utilised to create artisanal products. Artisanal processes of manufacturing are time-consuming and require more lead time than that of mechanised manufacturing (Van Schalkwyk & WD, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Although machines can be used to make the process more efficient, a great amount of handwork is still required for the assembly and finishing of

products. As only a limited number of orders can be completed in a specific time frame, artisanal products become more expensive.

Although the aid of the workshop employees and machines is beneficial, it also makes the artisanal designer's practice more complex. Working with humans as means of production can often be more challenging than working with machines (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2018). Employees might, for instance, be absent from work, or due to human error cause mistakes with the production of items. The aid of machines can also be difficult, as the machines break, can be complicated to work with, and are expensive. The machines are also dangerous, therefore requiring thorough knowledge to work with (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

To be able to successfully produce larger quantities of artisanal products and maintain an ongoing business, various elements are required to work thoroughly on a constant basis. Maintaining the quality of products is challenging, as every step of the production process is an opportunity for human error to occur (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). A single mistake can subsequently be executed on the entire batch in production, effecting the work of a number of employees. Thorough and efficient systems therefore have to be implemented to eliminate and prevent mistakes from occurring. Furthermore, creativity is required to fix any mistakes on a batch of products instead of discarding the units (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

### **5.12.3 Perception and value of design according to the market**

The lack of value afforded to design in South Africa as developing country was found to be a considerable challenge to artisanal product designers. As Industrial Design is still fairly new to South Africa, the market has an incorrect or misinformed perception of what the practice entails. Elaborated on by Roets:

*"You must put yourself in the shoes of someone that's highly uneducated regarding design. It's like an uneducated person doing stupid things; they don't know better, that's just their way" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).*

In agreement, the lack of appreciation for the value that design offers was one of the assumptions from which the process of the Western Cape's design strategy unfolded (Western Cape (South Africa), DEDAT, 2013:6). The market's lack of value for design is further exemplified in how the market awards more value to art than design. People invest in art, but are still hesitant to invest in design.

Furthermore, a different connotation is made to craftsmanship in South Africa in comparison to craftsmanship in developed countries. Craft in South Africa is often considered as unsophisticated in the eyes of the world (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). As also found by



previous literature, the ITC/WIPO (2003:6) identified that artisans are regarded as lower-status social groups by communities in developing countries. Roets explains the association made with design in developed countries by the following:

*"What has happened in Europe is design and craft has grown so close to one another, that when you say craft there's already an element of manufacturing into it; design thinking into it" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).*

What is regarded as a highly skilled artisan in developed countries therefore varies greatly from a skilled worker in South Africa.

The perception created by the media is also problematic to artisanal designers, as the uneducated market base their understanding of design on the work being published (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Although there are many artisanal designers in the industry, only a limited number of practitioners in South Africa are truly worthy. The names of certain artisanal designers are highly acclaimed and being driven as the best in South Africa by the media and cliques in the design industry. However, the work of these well-known designers often not being innovative creates a misconception of what good design is (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018).

To be able to support the practice of artisanal product design, the South African market's perception of design requires time to develop. As Roets stated: "Design in South Africa is a baby and it needs to mature; that's it and you can't really force it" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). The designers should take the responsibility on themselves to educate the market. Through an improved understanding, the market should be able to distinguish artisanal furniture pieces from the items available in commercial retail stores. Furthermore, artisanal product designers should assist the market's perception of the practice by not replicating designs (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). As clients requiring custom-made products do not have a design language to communicate with the designer, a photo of an existing product is most often provided to the designer to replicate and produce. Instead, reference photos, mood boards and sketches should be used to create a discussion on the required design, followed by the appropriate materials and manufacturing processes to use. The client will consequently gain an understanding of the entire product development process as contributing to the product's price (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

#### **5.12.4 Lack of support for the practice from the market and industry**

As the South African market does not have the disposable income of developed countries, the section of the market that can afford the more expensive artisanal products is fairly small in comparison to that of developed countries (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). In agreement, Kneese *et al.* (2014:6) found that even wealthy consumers are often not prepared to pay the

required price for the materials and reasonable wage of an independent artisan involved with the product's creation. As artisanal products are essentially not targeted at the mass, it becomes more difficult to obtain sales (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, JM1, 2018).

To be able to support artisanal product designers, the public requires more knowledge on the practice and exposure to these designers. Media such as online platforms and magazines aid in promoting the designers and their work (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Regarding the industry, the artisanal product designers experience that many big commercial retail companies do not support, or work in an ethical manner with, local artisanal designers. These companies replicate the original work of local artisanal designers, outsource the manufacturing in mass to the East, and retail the replicated products of poor quality at massively discounted prices (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2018). In addition, Mazzarella *et al.* (2016:2) stated that the production outsourced to developing countries is often executed by artisans at the BOP, having little opportunities to overcome their poverty due to long-term market access, regular wages and opportunities to learn new skills. As Roets elaborated on the matter of ethics: "People don't have respect for design in this country, they just don't. It's just an overall notion of design; people just copy" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Although differing in quality, to the market these products appear to essentially be the same, and consequently the commercial company is supported instead of the artisanal designer. In agreement, Klamer (2012:1) stated that the increased use of mass manufacturing causes the market to be unable to recognise the true value of artisanal products. The commercial companies, however, have the opportunity to rather collaborate with local artisanal designers. The companies have the network, cash flow and systems in place to enable immense opportunities and growth for the practice of artisanal product design (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). However, industrialisation is not prepared to accommodate the demands of the system of craft production.

Nandos is an example of a local influential company that created a platform to support South African design. As identified by Van Heerden, Roets and Erasmus, Nandos work with designers to promote and distribute their work on a global scale (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). The Nandos dining restaurants are used as portals, where the interior of each national and international outlet displays the work of South African designers. Instead of importing mass-produced items, the designers are commissioned to execute the work. The portal works according to a budget suiting the price range of artisanal product designers' work, as well as providing quantity orders (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). With more than 1 000 outlets worldwide and expanding with 500 more in the next five years, each outlet is renovated every

five years. Furthermore, galleries such as Southern Guild aid in the exposure of artisanal design to national and international markets (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Southern Guild commissions South Africa's leading designers and artists to create their most groundbreaking work, setting new benchmarks of quality and originality for the industry. Exhibiting locally and at leading Design Fairs around the world, the gallery strives to progress, stimulate and promote the industry (Southern Guild, 2018). Through these opportunities designers should strive for top quality products and provide their work at good prices in an attempt to be recognised, as well as establishing the trade and a positive reputation (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Erasmus explained that there is a number of South African businesses, interior designers and procurement agencies that increasingly include South African designers instead of importing products (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Located in South Africa, designers are increasingly included in projects focussing on African development. The commercial market is thus slowly adapting to support local and small companies. Erasmus stated that it is a more long-term investment: "[T]hey're investing in artisanal designers like they would invest in art in a way" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

#### **5.12.5 Replication of original designs and the influence of industrialisation**

It was found that South African designers replicate the design of others (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). As stated by Erasmus: "The biggest issue and crutch I think South Africans have, is we steal" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Erasmus explained that South Africans have a great amount of local inspiration to draw from, yet replicate international design trends, as well as each other and.

*"A lot of South African designers – be it fashion, be it furniture design, be it whatever – are tapping into international trends a lot. And you can see it and it's annoying... There's too many people copying one another, too many people looking at the same Instagram and Pinterest profiles" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).*

The mass manufacturing of products was also proven to be a major concern and challenge to the practice of artisanal product design, as mechanised processes enable the production of vast quantities at a rapid pace. The market is not prepared to pay the price of artisanal furniture pieces, as it is directly compared to low-cost, mass-manufactured products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Supported by previous literature, Scrase (2003:449) and Kapur & Mittar (2014:3) explained that traditional handmade products are replaced with factory-made, standardised and cheap products provided by mass manufacturing. It is stated as an immense problem that the whole world needs to be alert to, as it is applicable to all industries (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

Due to the market's misperception of the value of both quality and design, customers often do not understand the difference between the genuine and the replicated product. As the replicated furniture piece is made of poor quality and do not last, a negative perception of design is developed by the market (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018).

The concern of industrialised processes extends to the fact that machines are used to replicate specific techniques that are unique to artisans, further placing the practice of artisanal product design at risk (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). As with the use of 3D printing of ceramics with an artisanal aesthetic, although not exactly the same, a similar effect can be created by machine. In agreement, Panda (2013:2) stated that in a Western perspective technological tools are used to skilfully manipulate materials to imitate the effects of craft.

It is financially viable for artisanal designers to invest in the development and creation of a product of which many units can be sold concurrently, such as with the creation of a furniture piece for commercial interiors (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018). Unfortunately the clients, even if design-orientated and educated, mostly support furniture pieces that are low-cost, mass-produced items. As artisanal designers are unable to compete with mass-produced products, they are not supported by a large section of the market. As explained by Roets:

*"The Chinese market is really killing us, because if every interior designer had to come to a South African manufacturer it would totally bring the price down of everything. It would make it easier for us to enter the market"* (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

Roets feels that the government should forbid companies that replicate well-designed products and reproduce low-cost products of poor quality. Similar to architects, he suggest that designers should be compelled to obtain a licence to be able to follow the practice (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). As Roets stated: "Start a design police in our country just to enforce good design" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Through this method, the market can be rapidly educated on design and gain respect for the industry and its practitioners. As certain aspects are common to designers but not understood by the public, the consumers should be educated on design through events such as proper trade fairs (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018; ; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

Van Heerden and Roets stated that they would like to have some of their products produced in mass, while maintaining the quality (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). Mass manufacturing of products is lucrative, enables artisanal designers to lower their prices and make their work accessible to a bigger market. Consumers are starting to realise the lack of quality with many commercial companies producing mass-manufactured products, but not

everyone can afford artisanal products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). As stated by Roets: "I believe everyone should have access to good design. It's just that not everyone can afford it" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). This belief of the artisanal designers is similar to that of the Century Guild of the Arts and Crafts Movement, stating that good design should be available less costly (Krugh, 2014:285).

As small artisanal design businesses are not able to compete on price, the decision essentially relies on the client to decide if he/she is prepared to pay more for an artisanal product. Both artisanal and mass-manufactured products are required in the industry, as there will always be a market for both products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018). It is, however, vital to maintain a balance between artisanal and mass-manufactured products. Roets explains that the result of mass manufacturing depends on how it is completed: the level of quality, the choice of materials, and working ethically in terms of labour and sourcing of materials. As stated: "Mass manufacturing has had such a bad name, but if it hasn't been for mass manufacturing, you won't be able to afford a lot of things" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Mass manufacturing is thus necessary to ensure that products can be made available to all people in the world. In agreement, Erasmus said:

*"I think we have a very small part to play as artisanal designers and it's a very small market to fill. It's a market that makes me happy and it's a course of design that I would always choose above anything else. But we can't way away from mass production either" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).*

Erasmus explained that mass manufacturing is required for the production of certain materials used in artisanal design.

*"[Y]ou need the mass production to create the handmade in a way. And moving forward, and moving with technology, is also something that we should not fight against but kind of work with" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).*

#### **5.12.6 South African manufacturing industry**

Although South Africa has proficient design abilities, the manufacturing industry proves to be a difficulty (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). The manufacturing companies either require orders of high quantities, or are incapable of producing outsourced manufacturing as they are artisanal designers themselves only manufacturing their own designs. When approached to develop prototypes of design concepts, the manufacturers consequently overcharge as they do not see the value in the design development for the future (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). While the technology in the manufacturing sector is developed sufficiently, the quality and precision of South African manufacturers are not as advanced yet, as the required market to offer these products to in high volumes does not exist. Erasmus stated that manufacturing is the biggest challenge that Bofred experiences, as the quality of workmanship is often lacking (Van

Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). Being very strict with execution, they therefore often change suppliers, processes, the manner in which they work, and ultimately their design to adapt manufacturing processes of South Africa. As explained:

*"We do come to crossroads where we've realised that we don't have that kind of supplier, or that kind of skill, or master skill, in South Africa, unfortunately. Then you have to dumb-down the design ever so slightly, which I've realised is unfortunately the fate of the manufacturing suppliers in Cape Town... We have an amazing database of people we work with, and we love working with. But it is an uphill battle most days" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).*

Erasmus explained that South African designers are often challenged with the variety and quality of materials that they have to their disposal, consequently being forced to import materials (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). They are therefore not able to push the design's boundaries as far. Elaborating on the challenge of manufacturing quality and material, Erasmus stated: "Sometimes it's walking into a wall, basically, with how to execute our designs and our bigger dreams of what we want to create" (Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

The role of the manufacturer is therefore passed on to the designers. As the responsibility of the artisanal designer is explained by Roets: "In South Africa we take on the role of designer and manufacturer; that's why we are who we are, and it's purely because of the market" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018). Similarly, McGuirk (2011) identified that the global increase in artisanal designers is partly due to the fact that although design is an increasingly popular career choice, opportunities to work with manufacturers are not growing at the same pace.

The artisanal designers experience that the manufacturers in South Africa often do not value design (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). As the manufacturers do not necessarily have the design skills, but have the manufacturing knowledge and capability, they assist and work with the designer to produce products in volume, thereby lowering its prices. The designer can focus on designing and prototyping a good quality product, of which the production is the responsibility of the manufacturers. Working with a manufacturing company can therefore be of great benefit to artisanal product designers. The manufacturing company can advise the artisanal designer on the retail cost and manufacturing processes of their designed concept, whereafter it can be modified accordingly. An agreement can also be created to be of benefit to the manufacturers if they contribute in the creation of a successful product (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). The price of artisanal product designers' work should therefore not prevent manufacturers from working with artisanal designers, as the cost can be decreased by producing the products in higher volumes. As the process of developing new products is difficult and costly for small artisanal businesses, a different approach is required from South Africa's manufacturing industry on supporting and valuing the input of

artisanal designers, working with these individuals to aid the survival of the practice (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018).

Although proving to be a difficulty, this challenge also creates an opportunity for the artisanal designers in South Africa. Fulfilling the role of both the designer and the maker is extremely difficult to accomplish in developed countries due to the capabilities and efficiency of the technologically advanced manufacturing companies (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). As Van Heerden explained: "The main thing about South Africa is we are sort of forced to do it ourselves. That's why there's a lot of entrepreneurs and small business owners" (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). A number of small businesses in a specific sector of the market can therefore be created rather than only one principal business. South Africa being a developing country implies a great number of loopholes, where artisans execute the manufacturing themselves as it is easier. As stated by Van Heerden: "There's a lot of loopholes, negative stuff in the country that makes it almost positive where people are being self-sufficient; they're doing their own thing" (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). To the advantage of South African designers, it is extremely expensive to work from a studio space in Europe. Due to strict regulations and the price of labour, the manufacturing of products is also more expensive. Furthermore, students in many developed countries have access to advanced manufacturing technology at university level. However, these students do not have a connecting practice between studying and the highly efficient and technology-driven industry, consequently not understanding the process of manufacturing, but rather being intimidated by the technology (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, 2018). The industry in South Africa therefore acts as a connecting practice between the handmade and the advanced technological processes.

#### **5.12.7 Authenticity of artisans**

Experienced as a disadvantage and threat to the practice, many individuals in South Africa often claim the title of designer and to be an expert in a specific field of creation, although they are self-taught and do not have sufficient skills and knowledge (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018). In comparison, in the past craftsmen endured proper training with professionals in a specific field to be able to work in the practice. As Mudge explained:

*"In the old days to become a builder you had like a seven year apprenticeship with a master builder. Now you can't get anyone to build a straight wall because everyone is a builder and there's no skill there anymore" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).*

These individuals or manufacturing companies, rather than the more expensive true artisans, are often supported. As artisanal designers cannot be afforded by everyone in the market, there is then a market for these alleged experts. The authenticity of artisans and their skills therefore become invalid, as many alleged artisans exist (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2018).

The alleged artisans are often not able to execute the work properly or professionally and poor decisions are made as a design process is not followed. The market's perception of an artisanal designer is consequently damaged (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, JM1, 2018). Roets believes that all designers should complete a design course to gain a thorough understanding of design, regardless of the amount of talent or experience they have:

*"The analogy I always use is that someone with talent is like a rough diamond. It needs to go and have its facets cut into them and that's what a design course does"*  
(Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

The profession of a designer entails much more than the knowledge of a self-taught designer. As Roets stated: "The fact that you can draw a chair and make it, doesn't make you a furniture designer at all" (Van Schalkwyk & LR1, 2018).

True craftsmanship is thus lost as the knowledge of the practice is not valued anymore. Mudge explains that the information on the craft of the practice is still available, but is not valued and utilised due to the laziness and carelessness of the current generation of employees. Due to the consequent lack of quality, furniture pieces do not last (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Van Heerden believes that there should therefore be a level of quality required to be able to sell furniture to the public, separating the products created by artisanal product designers from those not made properly with the required skills and quality materials (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Similar to architects, designers should be compelled to obtain a licence to be able to work in the field of design. This belief is similar to the role that the Arts and Crafts guilds had fulfilled, as maintaining standards of quality, regulating trade and competition, and protecting the secrets of their trade. Furthermore, one could only pursue and execute a specific craft if being a member of a guild (Krugh, 2014:285).

#### **5.12.8 The risk of creating new products and the effect of trends**

As all existing products have essentially been made in the past, and many ideas have been reproduced, it is challenging for artisanal designers to create products that are truly original (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, JM1, 2018). Furthermore, the production of artisanal products are completed on risk, which can be a daunting task for small businesses, especially as these products are more costly. The creation of more collectable items completed on risk is thus also seen as a marketing opportunity (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018).

Artisanal products are often not viable to be drawn on a CAD program to obtain a better idea of the final product, but can effectively only be created through the physical process of making by hand (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). A great amount of time might therefore be invested into creating a product of which the end result might not be successful. This is in



accordance with Pye's theory of 'workmanship of risk', stating the quality of the result is continually at risk throughout the process of making, and depends on the judgement, dexterity and care that the maker applies with the production of the product (Pye, 1968:20). The creation of artisanal products can also be challenging as these products are often created with the aim of making a statement, which can at times be unsuccessful.

The market of Africa is found to be fairly conservative. When a new and unusual product is created by an artisanal designer, the conventional market is hesitant, not sure if they are in favour of the product or not (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). When the market eventually decides to be in favour of the product and desires to have it, it becomes a trend. The products are then produced in mass and made widely available, although the artisanal designer discovered it as a unique product before the emerging of the trend. Van Heerden explains that cork is a trend in the current market (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, 2018). Trends are especially disadvantageous as it can exploit natural materials. This is in agreement with the findings of Scrase (2003:453), stating that globalisation often causes essential raw craft materials to be diverted to mass production. As trending products are produced in mass and often in poor quality, the material and product devalues. The notion of fast-fashion thus causes an immensely shortened sense of value for products (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019).

#### **5.12.9 Management of business and design in the practice**

The management of a creative business was identified as a challenge when fulfilling the position of both the designer and business owner (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, LR1, JM1, 2018; Van Schalkwyk & BF1, 2019). As experienced by Bofred, the designers often find that the management aspects tend to override the creative aspect of their work (Fell, 2017). Designers are often busy with a number of projects at the same time and consequently do not have time to be creative. During times of pressure, clients often require new products to be designed. The design and development stage of a product also rarely take place in a singular continual attempt, but is rather a process that occurs over an extended period. As business owners, the designers do not have time to themselves to be uninterrupted and focus on only one project, as other projects and aspects of their business require their constant attention and need to continue (Van Schalkwyk & WD1, JM1, 2018). Furthermore, the designers are not creatively inspired to construct new designs at all times. As Mudge stated: "It's just not like a once-off flow of creativity that's on and off; it's not a tap" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

Businesses often fail with the change of ownership, as it is potentially not operated with the original spark of passion or vision. Explained by Mudge:

*"I suppose if you have your own business you appreciate every single client that comes along and you know how hard it was to start the business and you never let*

*anything slip. You never let a client go that's unhappy; you make sure that you're 100% dedicated" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).*

The business with its clients is never appreciated by others as much as the business owner from its establishment. "That's why, as the boss, I'm the most focussed out of everyone. I've also got the most at stake" (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018). Mudge explains that the threat of complacency with the changed ownership thus puts businesses at risk (Van Schalkwyk & JM1, 2018).

## **CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION**

The study applied the term 'artisanal furniture design' to explore and describe the practice and nature of a contemporary phenomenon of furniture producers in Cape Town. Relating terms in literature, such as art, craft and design were applied to build onto the researcher's findings.

It was identified that a combined approach of handcraft and machine manufacturing is used in the practice of artisanal furniture design, as requisite to keep the practice of artisanal production alive. Traditional craftsmanship techniques are, however, still the most distinctive element of these designers' work. In the contemporary practice the aspect of business was found to play a vital role.

The product development process utilised by the artisanal designers was found to be remarkably similar to that of traditional product/industrial design, with the main differences occurring at the initiating and final stages of the process. Although the process is essentially comparable, the manner in which the stages are executed is different. Although various factors put the practice of artisanal design at risk, the manual contribution of parts sacred to being handmade cannot be replaced.

Other than the means of production, the study established the role of the designer as an important aspect that differentiates the practice. While allowing the gratification and expression of the designer, the practice also aims to work towards achieving a relationship between individuals and products. The practitioners share the main principles of durability, quality, and truth to materials.

The study identified some of the shared challenges that artisanal furniture designers in Cape Town today experience today. The impact of global industrialisation and commerce arose as common dominator, while the workforce, supporting market and manufacturing industry were observed as challenges more specific to South Africa. In comparison to earlier means of craft production, the replication of designs and the authenticity of artisans were contributed as contemporary challenges experienced in the practice.

The practice of artisanal furniture design is requisite in asserting the importance of craftsmanship, quality and durability in product design. By establishing a relationship between the product and the user, more value is afforded to daily goods. The market's perception of design and everyday products can consequently be altered, influencing the manner in which products are attained, used and disposed of.

Artisanal production also enables the designer to direct and take part in the entire production development process of his/her creations. This enables product designers to understand the diverse alternatives in practice and gain inspiration from a different perspective of their field. Described as good workmanship according to Pye's theory, the intent of the designer and the execution of the work is most often aligned.

As recommendation for further research, the possible influence of gentrification on craft and areas of production can be explored, examining the relationship between the value of products and its context. More research can be conducted into the practice of artisanal product design in the rest of South Africa and the rest of the world, as well as how the practice in a developing country compares to that of a developed global arena. With furniture design being the area of focus of this study, future research can be conducted on the practice in other focus areas of product design, as well as other design disciplines. Potential research can also explore user market for whom artisanal products are intended, as the study focussed mainly on the practitioners.

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**Appendix A:**  
**Visual summary of the study**



## Who am I?

I completed my B.tech Degree in Industrial Design at CPUT in 2016. As I gained more knowledge and exposure to different areas of design, my interest in, and appreciation for artisanal product design developed further. In 2017 I started my Masters Degree with artisanal product design as my research topic.



## What is my study about?

Titled "Contemporary artisanal product design: a case of practitioners in Cape Town, South Africa", my study investigates the lack of understanding about what an artisanal product designer is, and what the practice of artisanal product design involves today. Artisanal product design has thus not been mapped out as an approach in the field of design, and the position of this practice within product design is unclear. My study aims to identify what the practice and nature of contemporary artisanal product design in Cape Town is, looking into the identifying processes, principles, perceptions, challenges and role of these designers in a global age of mass manufacturing and advanced technology.

## What is 'artisanal product design'?

Although no universally agreed definition of artisanal products exists, the following is my preliminary definition, as adopted by UNESCO:

- They are produced by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand-tools and even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product;
- There is no particular restriction in terms of production quantity;
- Even when artisans make quantities of the same design, no two pieces are ever exactly alike;
- They are made from sustainably produced raw materials;
- Their special nature derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, and religiously and socially symbolic and significant (ITC/WIPO, 2003:5).

## What will the study involve?

Method	Participants involved	Time required
Interview	Owner	± 45 min
Observation	Owner & employees	± 2 hours/day for 2 working days
Cultural probe 1	Employees	± 30 min/day for 3 working days
Cultural probe 2	Owner	± 30 min
Possible second interview	Owner	± 45 min



**Appendix B:**  
**In-depth explanation of the study**

**Misha van Schalkwyk**  
**Student Number: 213097893**  
**MTech: Design**  
**Full Thesis**

### **Research Title**

Contemporary artisanal product design: a case of practitioners in Cape Town, South Africa.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The research problem that this study will investigate, is the lack of understanding about what an artisanal product designer is, and what the practice of artisanal product design involves today. The shared challenges and opportunities of this practice are therefore not clearly defined. Artisanal product design has thus not been mapped out as an approach in the field of design, and the position of artisanal products within product design is unclear.

### **What will I be investigating during my study?**

I am interested in finding out more about the day-to-day practice of artisanal product designers. I will be looking at aspects such as the processes, principles, perceptions, challenges and the role that these designers fulfil today.

### **What will the study entail?**

Session 1 - interview and observation

Session 2 - observation and delivering cultural probe exercises

Session 3 - possible second interview and collection of cultural probe exercises

### **What will the observation entail?**

The two observation sessions should be approximately 2 hours each, during which the owner and employees can proceed with their work as per usual and do not need to set out time to assist me. I will be observing, taking notes and a few photos of subjects allowed by the owner.

### **What will the cultural probe exercises entail?**

The cultural probe exercises are essentially 6-8 short questions for 2 employees to complete per day, which should take approximately 15 minutes per day. The employees are also welcome to take the exercises home to complete. Similarly, the cultural probe exercise for the owner consists of 8 short questions.

### **Expected amount of man-hours required:**

Owner - 2 hours max (2 interviews of approximately 45 minutes each, cultural probe exercise of approximately 30 minutes)

Employees (each) - 1.5 hours max (3 cultural probe exercises of approximately 30 minutes each)

**Appendix C:**  
**Participants' consent forms**

### Introductory letter for the collection of research data

Ms. Misha van Schalkwyk is registered for the MTech Design degree at CPUT.  
Her thesis is titled:

CONTEMPORARY ARTISANAL PRODUCT DESIGN: A CASE OF PRACTITIONERS IN CAPE  
TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

*From the project proposal: Through utilising interpretive case studies that are exploratory and descriptive in focus and purpose, the study will observe three artisanal product designers based in Cape Town in their working environments, with the aim of providing a better understanding of this phenomena and their practice through in-depth narratives.... Being person-driven and centred around the creators, the study intends to be of main benefit to the artisanal designer, aspiring to achieve gained value for these individuals and their work through improved understanding and increased knowledge among industry and consumers. As the term 'artisanal product design' has not been defined in previous studies, the term itself and its definition will ultimately be a contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of design.*

Supervisor: **Vikki du Preez**  
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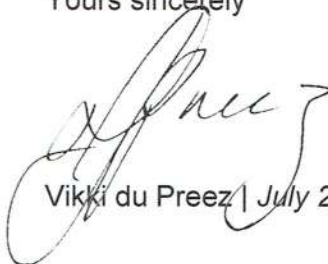
Co-Supervisor: **Veronica Barnes**  
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa  
E-mail: [barnesv@cput.ac.za](mailto:barnesv@cput.ac.za)

In order to meet the requirements of the university's Higher Degrees Committee (HDC) the student must get consent to collect data from organisations or individuals which they have identified as potential sources of data.

If you agree to this, you are requested to complete the attached form (an electronic version will be made available to you if you so desire) and print it on your organisation's letterhead (if applicable).

For further clarification on this matter please contact either the supervisor(s) identified above, or the Faculty Research Ethics Committee secretary (Ms V Naidoo) at 021 469 1012 or [naidoove@cput.ac.za](mailto:naidoove@cput.ac.za).

Yours sincerely



Vikki du Preez | July 2017

### Agreement to Take Part in Research Activities

Full Name: Armeign Lloyd Wedlake

Name of organisation: ASHLEE LLOYD DESIGN STUDIO  
(if applicable)

Position in organisation: OWNER / FOUNDER  
(if applicable)

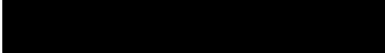
I give consent, in principle, to allow Misha van Schalkwyk, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data from research interactions with me (or individuals in my organization) for her MTech (Design) project. The student has explained to me the nature of her research and the nature of the data to be collected.

This consent in no way commits any individual to participate in the research, and it is expected that the student will get explicit consent from any participant prior to each research activity. I reserve the right to withdraw my permission at some future time.

In addition, the organisation's name/ my name may or may not be used in academic dissemination as indicated below (Tick as appropriate.)

	Thesis	Conference paper	Journal article	Research poster
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Date: - 16 February 2018 -

Signature: 





**Agreement to Take Part in Research Activities**


Full Name: Lourie Wiid von Heerden  
Name of organisation: Wiid Design / Wiid Design Original (Pty) Ltd.  
(if applicable)  
Position in organisation: Director / owner  
(if applicable)

I give consent, in principle, to allow Misha van Schalkwyk, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data from research interactions with me (or individuals in my organization) for her MTech (Design) project. The student has explained to me the nature of her research and the nature of the data to be collected.

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In addition, the organisation's name/ my name may or may not be used in academic dissemination as indicated below (Tick as appropriate.)

	Thesis	Conference paper	Journal article	Research poster
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant Signature:   
Date: 2018-07-18















### Agreement to Take Part in Research Activities

Full Name: Louis Reets.

Name of organisation: Louis Reets Design (Pty) Ltd.  
(if applicable)

Position in organisation: Founder  
(if applicable)

I give consent, in principle, to allow Misha van Schalkwyk, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data from research interactions with me (or individuals in my organization) for her MTech (Design) project. The student has explained to me the nature of her research and the nature of the data to be collected.

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In addition, the organisation's name/ my name may or may not be used in academic dissemination as indicated below (Tick as appropriate.)

	Thesis	Conference paper	Journal article	Research poster
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Date: 27/4/18

Signature: 













**Agreement to Take Part in Research Activities**

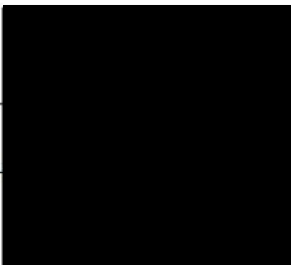
Full Name: JAMES MUDGE  
Name of organisation: James Mudge Furniture Studio  
(if applicable)  
Position in organisation: Owner  
(if applicable)

I give consent, in principle, to allow Misha van Schalkwyk, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data from research interactions with me (or individuals in my organization) for her MTech (Design) project. The student has explained to me the nature of her research and the nature of the data to be collected.

This consent in no way commits any individual to participate in the research, and it is expected that the student will get explicit consent from any participant prior to each research activity. I reserve the right to withdraw my permission at some future time.

In addition, the organisation's name/ my name may or may not be used in academic dissemination as indicated below (Tick as appropriate.)

	Thesis	Conference paper	Journal article	Research poster
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Date: APRIL 2018  
Signature: 















### Agreement to Take Part in Research Activities

Full Name: CARLA ERASMUS

Name of organisation: BOFRED FEATURE FURNITURE  
(if applicable)

Position in organisation: CO-FOUNDER & CO-DIRECTOR  
(if applicable)

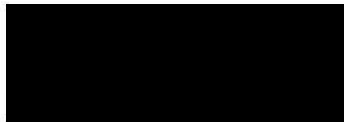
I give consent, in principle, to allow Misha van Schalkwyk, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data from research interactions with me (or individuals in my organization) for her MTech (Design) project. The student has explained to me the nature of her research and the nature of the data to be collected.

This consent in no way commits any individual to participate in the research, and it is expected that the student will get explicit consent from any participant prior to each research activity. I reserve the right to withdraw my permission at some future time.

In addition, the organisation's name/ my name may or may not be used in academic dissemination as indicated below (Tick as appropriate.)

	Thesis	Conference paper	Journal article	Research poster
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant Signature:



Date:

26 August 2019





### MTech Consent Form

The MTech course in Design, offered at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, requires students to collect primary data. All information relating to the research activity and how your information will be used must be explained to you prior to the start of the activity. The research activity will not advantaged or disadvantaged you in any way. Your participation is voluntary, so you can withdraw your permission at any time during the activity. Your name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing (unless specifically arranged otherwise with you). There are no foreseeable risks in participating.

#### About the Study:

Name of student: Misha van Schalkwyk Contact details: misherish@gmail.com  
 Title of Project: Contemporary artisanal product design: a case of practitioners in Cape Town, South Africa.  
 Research Activity: Semi-structured interview

#### Study Leader:

Name: Vikki du Preez Contact details: DuPreezV@cput.ac.za  
 Designation: Supervisor

#### PARTICIPANT DETAILS:

I acknowledge that I am willing to participate:

CARLA ERASMUS (name)

*\*You will remain anonymous unless you give written consent for your name/identity to be used in the study.*

#### I give permission to be recorded through audio/ video/ photographic media/ written notes.

Please circle to indicate your consent (Yes) or refusal (No) to each of the media\* indicated below:

[Yes/ No] Audio

[Yes/ No] Video

[Yes/ No] Photographic

[Yes/ No] Written Notes

*\*Data generated by this workshop will be stored securely, outside of public access.*

#### Please tick to indicate that the following conditions were explained to you prior to the activity:

[ ] I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time and will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way.

[ ] I know that I can stop the audio/ video/ photographic record of the interview at any time without repercussions.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

29. Aug 2019



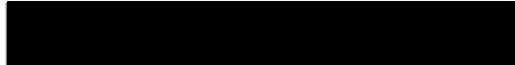
**Appendix D:**  
**Participants' written consent for personal identification**

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic  
dissemination**

o ASHLEE LLOYD - DESIGN STUDIO

↳ BY ASHLEIGH WEBLAKET.

**Signature:**



**Date:** - 16 February 2018 -



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic  
dissemination**

Please note: All audio, video, photographic and  
written notes regarding my company  
must first be approved & reviewed before  
completion. Some processes are confidential.

Participant Signature:



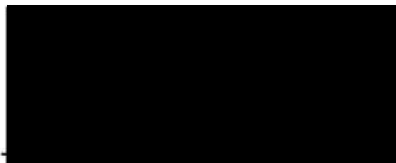
Date: 2018-07-18



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic  
dissemination**

Participant Signature:



Date:

23/05/2018



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic  
dissemination**

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: 23/05/2018



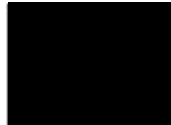


Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic dissemination**

I, Louw Reets, give consent that my name, business name & data & photography, etc may be used for the intended purpose of this research project.

**Signature:**



**Date:**

27/4/18.

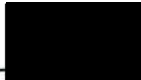




Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic  
dissemination**

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

26.4.2018

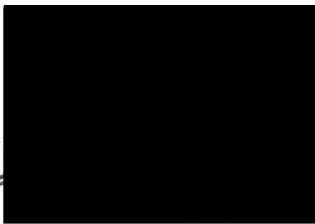


Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

*I James Mudge hereby give*

Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic dissemination

Signature:



Date:

*10 APRIL 2018*



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic  
dissemination**

I Cecil Allow my  
NAME + AIN ALL ACADEMIC


Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 11.04.18



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic dissemination**

I ~~JONAH TINASHE~~ <sup></sup> ~~JONAH~~ GANDAMBA HEREBY  
GIVE WRITTEN CONSENT MY NAME IN ALL  
ACADEMIC DISSEMINATION

Participant Signature:



Date:

11/04/18



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**Written consent to use the organisation's/ my name in all academic  
dissemination**

Participant Signature:



Date:

29 Aug 2019

**Appendix E:**  
**Analysis of research methods**

## Title:

Contemporary Artisanal Product Design:  
A case of practitioners in Cape Town.

## Main Question:

What is the practice & nature of contemporary artisanal product design within Cape Town?

## Sub-questions:

- What are the identifying processes, ① principles & perceptions shared by artisanal product design practitioners? ②
- What are the challenges that artisanal product designers experience within industry & market today? ③
- What is the role of artisanal product design in a global age of mass manufacturing & advanced technology? ④

## Methods:

- Direct observation
- Semi-structured interviews
- Photo documentation
- Reflective research journal
- Field notes
- Cultural probes → NEW CONTRIBUTION

## Artisanal Product Designers / Case Studies:

- ✓ • Laurie van Heerden - Wiid Design  
→ wood, metal, cork, ceramic collaboration. Mainly furniture.  
ceramic collaborations → Ceramic Matters.
- ✓ • Gareth & Gavin O'Brien - Stockton Goods  
→ Leather (smaller items)
- ✓ • Wade Ross Skinner - Wolf & Maiden  
→ Leather (bigger items)
- ? • John Vogel - Vogel Design  
→ wood furniture
- ? • Rial Klappers Visagie - Rialheim  
→ ceramics
- Luke Pedersen & James Lennard - Pedersen + Lennard  
→ wood, metal furniture
- Anthony / Bernhard - Ceramic Matters  
→ ceramics
- Louw Roets  
→ mainly wood furniture



Artisans working in 'natural' working environment, not removed from their environment.

Directly seeing & analysing participants & actions in specific context.

Leading to / used for which research question  
Sub-question 1  
Sub-question 3

Why this method?  
Why is it appropriate?  
How will it help?

Gain vast amount of data of different 'themes' / research questions.

can use a variety of tools to assist, such as field notes, research diary, photo documentation, etc.  
no sitting & observing.

Gain a proper, insightful, 'thorough' understanding of the specific context & how studio / participants operate.

Minimum 2 full days?  
Maximum 4 full days?

Estimated time required for method

Depending on context / case, divide participants / environment → few hours / day each.

Differ from case to case

# Direct Observation

Research diary

photo documentation

Visuals for printed paper  
'record' details

Tools to use to help method

Field notes

Video documentation? How will it be used in thesis / printed paper? Mostly used by researcher to recall specific details, audio. Can only use screen shots of video as visual in thesis.

Voice notes? X Quick to record, but takes longer to transcribe afterwards.

Concern  
Focussing on specific 'themes' / data required, yet being open to new 'themes' / data that might occur.

## Concerns

Being biased towards specific things observed.

Participants observed not being / acting completely natural while being observed.

obtaining too much or too little data.

Being an annoyance in a busy studio environment.

Privacy of designers' work, trade secrets, etc.

Non-disclosure agreement to be signed.  
Schedule for observation (sessions) of participants / environments

Timetable

Get documentation 'devices' ready → research diary, field notes, camera, audio recorder, etc.

Consent for methods of documenting observation.

Introduce myself & study to all participants involved.

owner  
employees working in studio / workshop  
Participants / environment to be observed

Studio & workshop itself

start of design process?

office area?

design work happening here? / only admin?

Differ from case to case. Specific members will have different roles with each company / designer.

Showrooms

If applicable, craft markets where showcasing? Interaction with clients happening here.

Shops where products are sold?

'Introduction' of designer / studio environment.  
general

Prior to semi-structured interview to avoid data affecting observation?

where will method fit on timeline of case study

Before & after interview??

After semi-structured interview to compare interviewee's responses to things directly observed?

Description of design process used by designer.

Description of challenges observed being relevant to industry & market

Expected outcomes

List of processes used by each designer.

Description of 'system' used by designer. Roles of different participants / workers.

Visuals for thesis (fall under photo documentation) general

Role of designer / owner in design process.

RQ1

RQ1

RQ3



Relatively 'short' method to gain answers focussed on study.

Ask questions & gain data directly linked to themes / research questions.

Why this method? Why is it appropriate? How will it help?

Structured & 'focussed' on themes, yet open-ended for discussion / more themes to arise.

Minimum 1 hour

Being open-ended & open for discussion, times will vary.

Estimated time required for method

Maximum 1,5 hours?

Analysis of interviews being biased.

Concerns

Participants not providing enough details / data through answers.

Interview before observation: Interviewee's answers affecting researcher's view.

Availability of participants should another interview / more data be required.

Interview questions being biased towards expected outcome.

Discussion of answers losing focus of question & proper answer not actually provided.

Interview after observation: Data gained / things observed steering / affecting questions being asked. Possibly gaining less data from interview, as 'answers' already gained through observation.

Gain data directly from artisanal product designer, being main subject & focus of study.

Can have more than one interview with participants throughout case study



Field notes / note book

Easily recall specific details.

Audio recording

Can be analysed by someone else to avoid bias.

RQ2, RQ3

Personal reflection & experience of designer.

RQ4

RQ1, RQ4

New ideas / themes arise to also look for while observing

Before direct observation

Where will method fit on timeline of case study

Before & after observation?

Get documentation ('devices' ready) -> notebook, audio recorder, camera, etc.

Preparation before method

Research questions / interview questions for first interview.

Arrange with participant

Review / editing of questions to eliminate bias.

Is designer & employee making product the same person?

Participants / environment to be interviewed.

employees working in studio / workshop.

Photo of participant & visuals for methodology section. Process of acquiring data.

Photo documentation

Tools to use to help method

Reflective research journal?

sub-question 1

Leading to / used for which research question

sub-question 2

sub-question 3

sub-question 4

Ideal to use for quoted sections.

Description of challenges experienced by participants relating to market & industry.

RQ3

List of processes used by each designer.

RQ1

Direct quotes to use in thesis

Description of principles & perceptions of each designer. Might be more specific to each with some similarities.

Description of the role of artisanal product design from a local & global perspective.

RQ2

Expected

Role of designer / outcomes owner in design process.

Description of design process used by designer.

Ask questions to compare with things observed.

New ideas / questions might arise throughout observation.

After direct observation

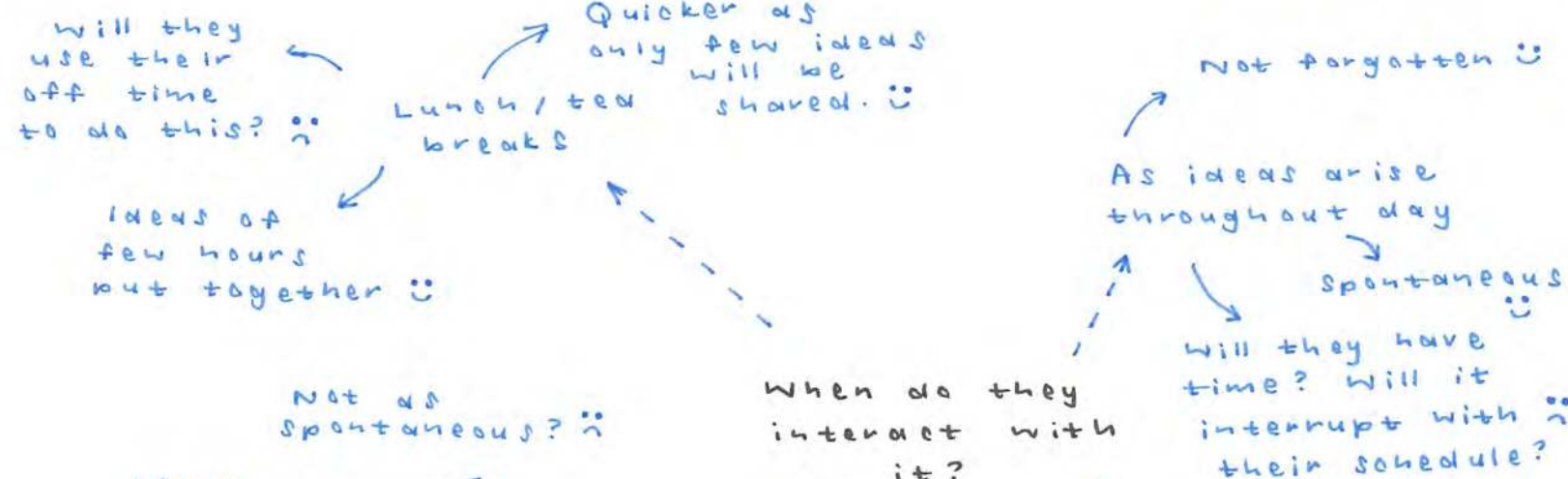
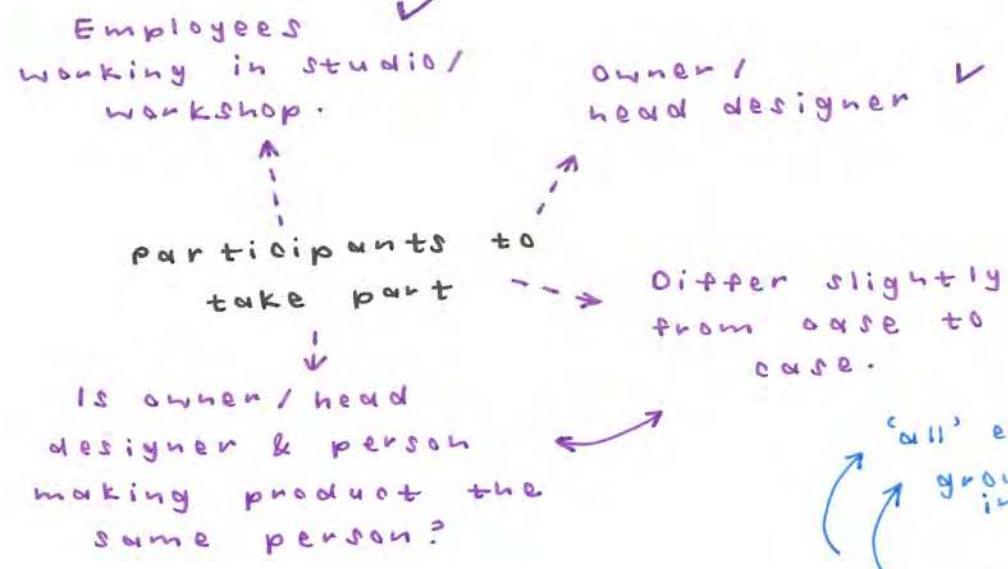
Might obtain less data from semi-structured interview after observing & answering questions? consent for interview & methods / tools of documenting.

Might avoid researcher to be affected by / biased towards interview answers?

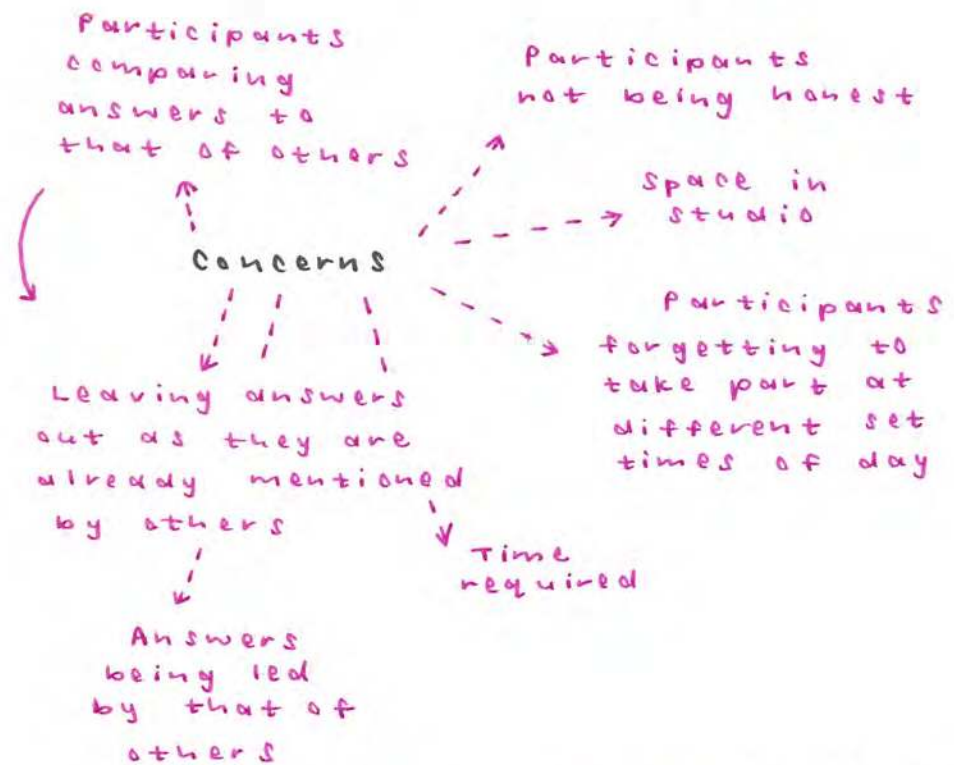
RQ4

Differ from case to case as roles will differ.

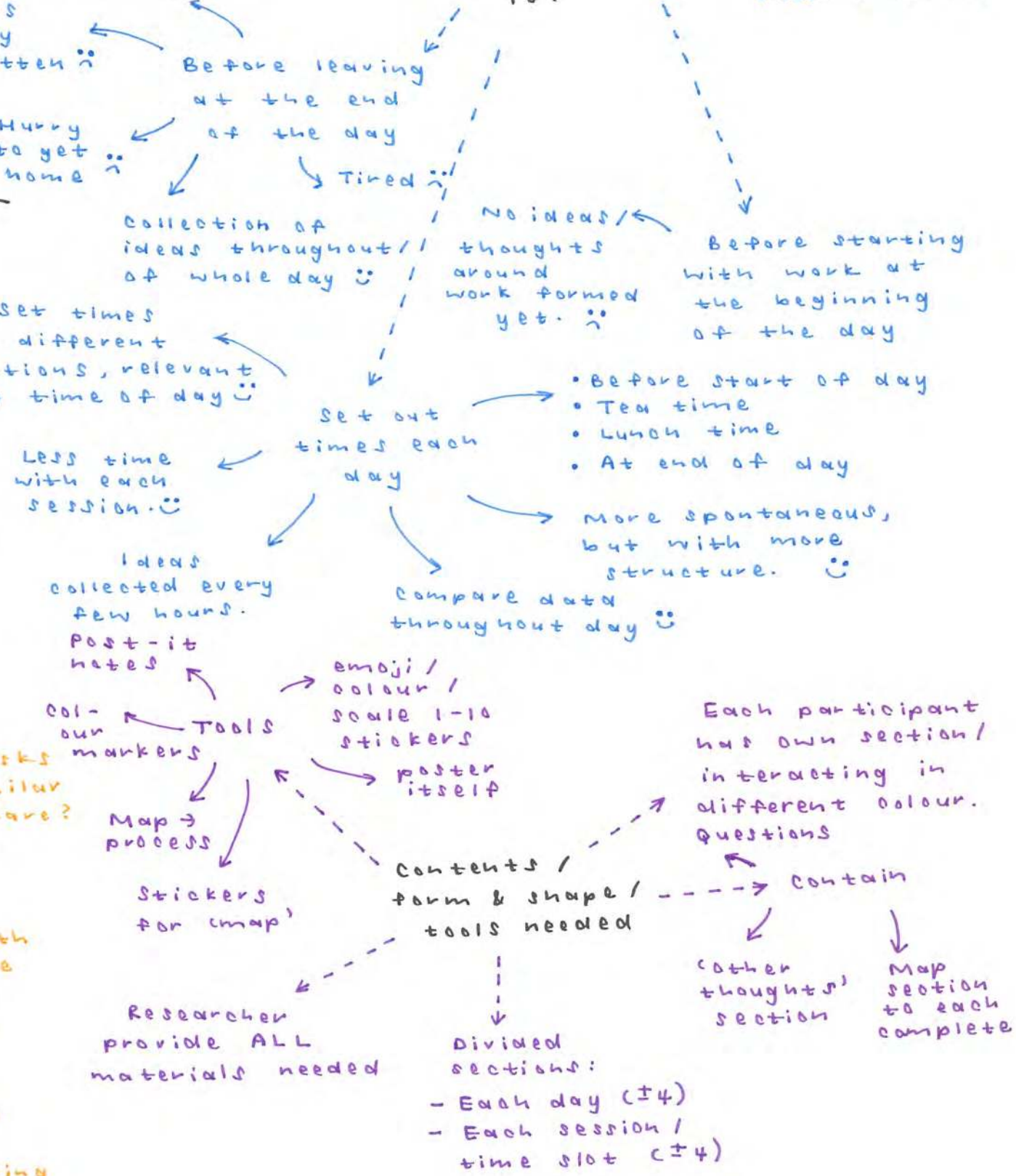
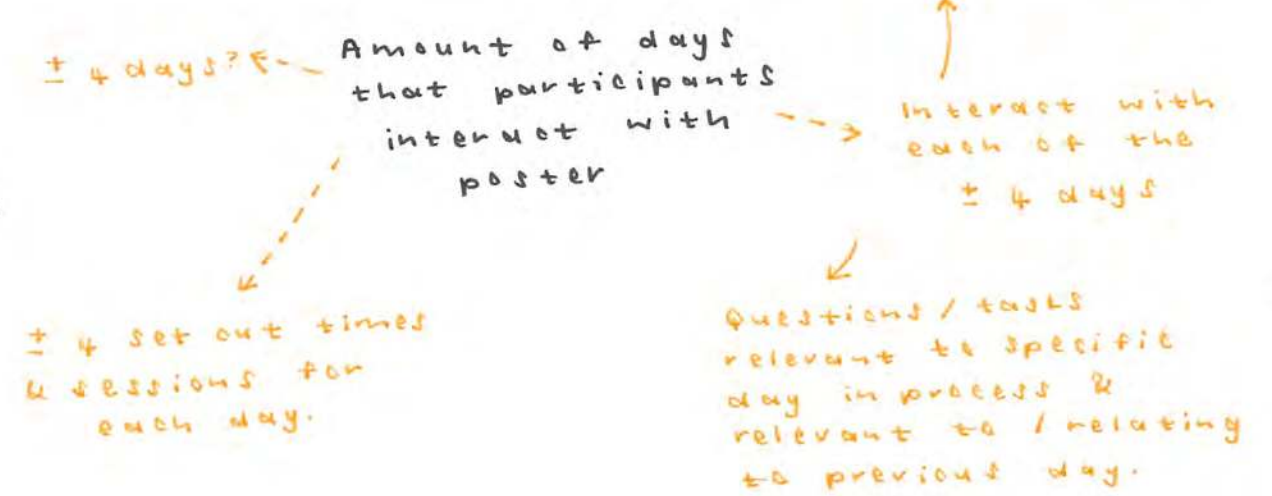




How will participants be reminded to interact with the poster?



Space in studio? Where will it live?





# New method: Cultural Probe Box

What is it?

Box provided to participant / few participants containing objects to interact with & tasks to complete in their own time.

take photos & notes of specific things?

disposable camera?

box / bag itself

cards with questions

colour-coded for themes / days.

red = RQ 1  
blue = RQ 2  
OR  
red = day 1  
blue = day 2

researcher provide ALL materials needed

colour markers

post-it notes

recorder (audio)?

save them time

more spontaneous?

follow instructions & record findings / experience?

Contents / form & shape / tools needed

Map → design process

stickers for map

Images

other general

materials designer use

designer's studio

designer's work

Instructions

each task

overall

each day (focus area of day)

specific activities / area

Areas of improvement

Role → man → machine

Processes & materials involved

etc...

Owner / head designer  
Participants to take part  
Differ slightly from case to case.

SOME employees

working in studio / workshop.

one / selected few participants individual interaction

Is owner / head designer & person making product the same person?

Name, surname, age, gender, etc.

Info to add / needed

Date, time, day - of - , task - of -

Position in company

Years in field / at company

Materials work with? Might be in different section as part of activity.

Participants not understanding tasks / questions properly.

Concerns

Researcher not present to help participant understand or provide enough info.

Time required

In-depth, bit more personal

Participant thoroughly think about answers, without haste / pressure in comparison to interview

Triangulation / verification of data

More organic, subconscious

Creative & fun way for participants to take part

Analysis / data gathering without researcher 'watching'

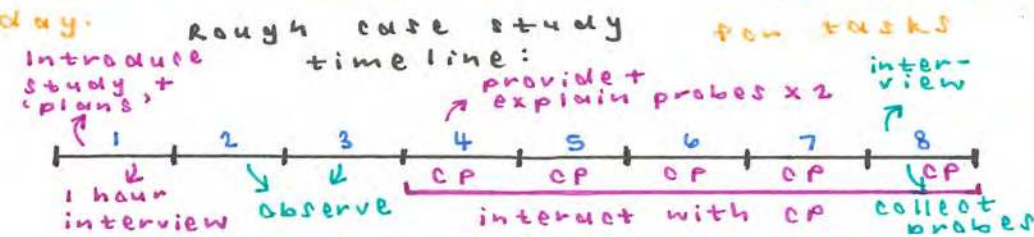
± 4 days to interact with.

Different tasks for each day.

Amount of time / days that participants interact with box

1-2 hours in total?

± 15 minutes per tasks



After interview & observation.  
Individuals in their own time, at studio.  
When do they interact with it?  
When have they time?  
± 15 minutes each day for tasks

more specific to tasks provided than to specific day & environment.

not as relating to specific day & time as poster

Should they be able to go back to tasks of previous days & add / edit?

Simple question & answer

Task / question examples

complete sentences

"which of the following..."  
→ 'set' answers to choose from to focus on themes / research questions

multi-choice

on a scale of 1-10, how...  
numbers write circle number 1 2 3 4

colour dots

Map process (design process).  
Identify role in process. Where each participant fits in.  
Identify challenges → areas

emoji / colour / scale 1-10 stickers

diary? → other thoughts

sketches

treat?

overall

each day (focus area of day)

specific activities / area

Areas of improvement

Role → man → machine

Processes & materials involved

etc...

**Appendix F:**  
**Semi-structured interview questions**



## **Semi-structured Interview Questions**

### **1. Tell me about how you got started in product design?**

### **2. Tell me about your design process?**

- How would you describe the different steps/stages in your design process?
- What is your role in each of the different steps/stages?
- What are the main manufacturing processes used to produce your products?
- How/where did you learn these specific manufacturing processes?
- How do you go about charging for the time invested in the design process?

### **3. Tell me about your views on design, your philosophy?**

- How would you define your design philosophies/ethos?
- What personal beliefs and principles are brought through in your work?

### **4. I've been working with the notion of "artisanal product design". [Tell interviewee about the idea]. What are your thoughts on the matter?**

Artisanal product designer:

1. Produce by hand - help of hand-tools and machines. Direct manual contribution - most substantial component
2. Knowledge of entire design & production process & mostly involved throughout
3. Value supported & dependent on technique, often employing traditional craft process
4. When more quantities are made of one design, pieces are never exactly the same
5. If assisted by team - constantly in close personal contact
6. Although not actively participating in production, specialise in research, market negotiations or product design & conception

- Would you describe your work as artisanal product design? How does it relate or differ?
- What would you say are the advantages and disadvantages of the practice of artisanal product design in terms of the processes used?
- What is your view on artisanal product design in comparison to mass-produced, industrialised product design?
- What are your thoughts on artisanal product design specifically in Cape Town in comparison to the rest of the world?
- Would you say there are certain principles and perceptions that unite artisanal product designers?

**Artisanal product designer:**

1. How would you describe your experience of working as artisanal product designer in a global age of mass-manufacturing and advanced technology?
2. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced within the practice of artisanal product design?
3. What are some of the opportunities or benefits that you have you experienced within the practice of artisanal product design?
4. How do you think these challenges and opportunities compare to that of the global market and industry?
5. How can the industry and market improve their support towards local artisanal product designers?
6. What are your thoughts on the sustainable development of artisanal products regarding the environmental, social and economical factors?
7. In your opinion, what role does artisanal product design play in the local and global industry of product design today?

**Gender (female designer/s):**

1. What is your view on, and experience of, working as female designers in the industry of product design in Cape Town?
2. How do you think does the industry of product design compare for males and females in Cape Town?
3. How do you think does gender in the local industry of product design compare to the global industry?

**Appendix G:**  
**Semi-structured interview transcriptions**



## **Semi-structured interview transcription**

**Business name:** Wiid Design

**Date:** 06/04/2018

**Code:** WD1

### **1. Tell me a bit more about you got started in product design?**

I never studied, well I did study Industrial Design for six months and then I decided I wanted to do more of a hands-on approach, almost... I never really enjoyed school that much or, you know, the system. I enjoyed studying and stuff but I never enjoyed the system. So I did well in Industrial Design but I decided, you know what, it's not for me. So basically I had six months to decide do I want to enrol in a different course or will I maybe just go and work with someone and find out what I want to do with my life. So then I worked for Bronze Age Art Foundry for about three years, and I learned a lot about mould making and we met a lot of artists and we even opened the Saw Mill with my ex-boss and everything, so I learned a lot about wood working. And from there I met the artist Wim Botha and then I went to work for him, I was his apprentice for three and a half years and within his studio I started, over weekends I used his machinery, I started making my first products. And then selling it and marketing it through media and VISI and local magazines mainly. And during that stage of my career I also, you know I was approached by Southern Guild to an exhibit work overseas and then sort of, my brand just grew a little bit. Then I moved to Woodstock, I resigned, well I decided I need to move on. It was sad because I loved working for Wim and I would still love to help him out but it's just I don't have time. And then I went to Woodstock, small studio, and then, like they say you normally start small until you feel like you're exploding in capacity or you can't physically cope in the space you're in, you have to look for a bigger space. And then eventually we wanted to buy a new space, [ag] rent a new space and then it was too expensive or it was very expensive to rent and then we decided, right, let's rather buy a building. My dad bought the building, it's in a trust, I did the renovations and now I'm paying rent. So we decided it's better to invest the rent back into, obviously, property you own. So that's sort of how I started out, from his studio, step by step, developing certain products and experimenting with materials.

### **2. Tell me about your design process?**

Design process, uhm, it's difficult. I'm not sure, because I'm not a trained designer I'm not really sure what the process entails; if there's a strict process. But for me it's always, it always depend what you want to design obviously. For instance if you want to design, let's say a chair, there's a certain process logically for me to follow and that will most probably be to obtain tons of references of various chairs from mid-century chairs to ancient chairs to modern chairs, and that's merely to look at form and shape and material use. And then you can also become more original because I feel, well you get some designers that just tend to copy and stuff but I think you become more original and mature if you have a lot of references which you can work through. But that's one stage, then research and drawings and prototyping. Some products don't even prototype, for instance the bench legs and stuff, that process just simply came because it was practical for the weight and the form and

everything, and also the process again about manufacturing. So a lot of the times when I design something you have to think forward instead of backwards, like for instance you need to plan - can this be done in ceramics, has it be done, or can this be done in steel, has it been done, and then you phone your suppliers and you phone people in the industry that specialises in, let's say, steel or ceramics, and then they might assist you before you design the product. So there's various design processes I follow, it just depends what you have to do. Commissions are different than in-house designed products.

### **3. What is your role in each of these steps or stages?**

Well only recently, last year I had an apprentice, Jason from UJ (University of Johannesburg), and that was the first time ever in my career that I had someone I could, you know like Douglas for instance now, somebody I had the luxury of saying, 'right, this is what I'm looking for, this is the references I've got, this is the style I want, this is the material thicknesses, tolerances, everything I want, just design something for me' and then I would review it, curate it and then obviously make amendments where need be.

But my role is always to, as the head designer, always to curate everything, to brief him, to get the business in, to essentially make the final call on every single design. I mean obviously in the future I would love to have two or three or four or five or six designers which can take initiative and I'll just see, I'll just look at the final product and say yes or no. But essentially at this point because it's still a small company I do a lot of the design work myself and then Douglas does his own design work. So I'll give him work to do and I'll curate it after and then in a sense I'll also do my own thing because it's just too much work. So it sort of depends, the roles shift at times.

### **4. What would you say are the main manufacturing processes that you use to produce your products? Just overall.**

I mean I use a lot of CNCing, CNC machining. I use a lot of laser cutting. When it comes to manufacturing processes, let me just think because it's machinery. I mean we use a lot of hand tools, for instance I use a lot of compressors; compressed air, compressed air is a big thing for us because we do a lot of spraying, sealing, a lot of my tools are used by air - our dremels are air tools. That's mainly for working cork. And then we do a lot of... I would say we do timber manufacturing in a sense - band saws, cutting cork, cutting the timber blocks, grinders, lathes, fest tools - they call it, uhm... not rip saws... ya it's probably like a rip saw - it's on a guide... anyway. But mainly I would say 90% of the work we do when it comes to commercial products is CNC manufacturing and then a lot of labour and air tools and stuff. I mean obviously the carpentry and stuff I outsource, so yes, we do a lot of timber manufacturing but then it's outsourced and we assemble everything in-house, the timber beams we do in-house.

### **5. How or where did you learn these specific manufacturing processes?**

The stuff was learnt again through working for other people; apprenticeships. So like I said, Bronze Age I learned a lot about bronze casting, materials, mould making, we did a lot of

plaster casting, various commissions, you know what I mean. We did lightning and we did beads, we did everything. Bronze Age had a functional art section side, where we had to do a lot of work for [Singita], where we had to do timber tables with bronze inlays or chandeliers from bone and crystals. So there was a lot of stuff had we had to do and learn and from there, like I said previously Otto... because the functional art side grew, Otto saw an opportunity to buy two saw mills, a [Locus and hudson] mill, where you physically chainsaw trees and slab it into timber and... [unclear] after six months you can take it out of the machine and make furniture.

So essentially I learned from the raw... I learned through that process. And Wim Botha obviously then specialised more in fine carpentry and carving and sculptural elements, so he had a lot of tools, so I used all his thicknesses, planers... whatever he had. So then I sort of gained knowledge about materials and the different ways of joining and the different ways of manufacturing. Laser cutting is just... because of experience you just order a lot of stuff, trial and error, CNC cutting is because of outsourcing a lot. So it's mainly through various... I don't know, it takes time, it takes time.

## **6. How do you normally go about charging for the time you invest in your design process?**

It's difficult, it always depend on what you're doing. For instance when a client comes to you which is a very good example, we're busy with a few projects now, where a client comes to you and they say 'please, I want to collaborate with you' or let's say they're a big manufacturer like [Guideline NDF] for instance, and they want me to design a chair but I need to collaborate with them. So now, for instance, now it's my time and my brand that's developing a chair for him and he wants to pay me royalties of sales. So there's two options - normally you can tell a client 'right, you must buy R400 000 the design' and there's various processes of working that out, where you can say, 'right, he might sell 2 000 chairs a year for endless years', or you normally work with five years, and then from that profit you can take a percentage. Or you can say pay me royalties.

Like, for Indigenous Planters it's an opposite thing where it's not really a collaboration, but he approached me to design a range for him and the initial range, the Soma range, he bought and I had to give him a price which was nothing, it was like a very small price because it was six year, five years ago and I sort of didn't know how much I can charge or/and he was also scared of investing too much because he didn't know if it's going to sell.

Obviously the more your brand grows and obviously the more established you become, the more you can charge for your time. And it's difficult to calculate, I think every single person's different. I'm sure, maybe people like James Mudge and stuff just work out how much their running cost are in their factory and whatever and then they'll charge that obviously, that's logic. But I'm not sure how much he would per say charge for his design time to design a product. It's sort of a thumb-suck.

I mean for places like... When it comes to design time and people don't buy the design, for instance for [De Stijl] I designed glasses, then it's easy. I do a lot of commissions. Let's say people say I need to quickly design something similar to this with a handle on, but it's not my design, I'm designing it for them but it's not like... it's a commission. So then it's straight forward - I look at my costs, so I look at, 'okay, am I going to do this or is Douglas going to

do it?'. So I'll give it to him, it's quick. And then I work out his daily rate, times it by two or three and then invoice the client six grand for his time. You know what I mean, it's sort of, it's six grand but then I always have a clause stating they do not own the design, it's still my property, my intellectual property. So if they still want to go ahead, you know if they want to own the technical drawings of the concept then they must... then I'll fork out a price, I don't know what.

But a lot of clients get very annoyed and confused with it, especially clients that's not used to, that doesn't respect product design because in this country it's still very new for them. De Stijl had an issue with it but they eventually understood it. For instance, I had to make glass moulds, I charged them for the moulds but then they assumed they own the moulds. So then I said to them, 'well no, you don't own the moulds, the moulds are my property.' 'No but we paid for it'. I'm like 'that's irrelevant, you're paying for cost, the moulds are still my property. You're not going to take the moulds and go to China. It has to get manufactured through me to make money, otherwise you buy the design and you go somewhere else. Or you can do with it whatever you want with it, then'. So that's sort of a very... sometimes a tricky thing to explain to clients because it's risky, you can lose the orders. And I have lost orders with clients before who say, 'no, it's too complicated' or they're not interested. But then a lot of people understand it, so it just depends what it is.

## **7. Tell me about your views on design, your philosophy?**

Design philosophies, uhm... views on design, I'm not quite sure what to say. I mean like my philosophy in a sense of what inspires me or what, what do you mean?

### **Ya, I would say that and then your design ethos in a sense.**

Oja, I see what you mean. I don't know, I've said it in numerous interviews I think before as where I tend to try and focus on being honest with your materials and being honest with your forms and your shapes. By saying that, I'm not a guy that would do eccentric things necessarily, well I do eccentric things as well, but it's... how can I explain it. It's almost like a good example might be if you look at the cork furniture the material lends itself to have curves, for instance, you know what I mean. And the material lends itself as a soft, organic material. Certain grades of cork, which is a harder grade, I would have more sharp edges on, but I would then [scamper] the edge. But then the design philosophy with regards to cork would be to take a very old, dated product which people relate to with, like in the 70's with tiles or cork stoppers which can be kitsch if you make it into furniture, which is upcycling which is very kitsch; I see it as very kitsch and crafty, and then you make it something contemporary. So sometimes it would be, for instance, also taking concrete and mixing concrete with precious stone for instance, and polishing it. It creates a different, it sort of takes something and you warp it into something precious and something new, if you understand more or less.

The timber beams are, also a good example is where, so if you look at a timber beam, what do you want to do? You don't want to cut it up because then you're destroying the actual visual of the timber. So if you source old timber, my philosophy about the timber benches is if you need to cherish it, you need to... it's ancient material, it's very old, it's rare and it needs to be treated, it needs to be displayed almost. That why it's raised on a plinth with its two feet, so it's more of a collectable item other than something that's just wacky and cut into

planks and made a [wayny] edge table of. For me, I see it, it's silly, they haven't thought it through.

When it comes to more commercial products, there's obviously design philosophy where I still want to keep something... make something unique, original. So it needs to be, you need to have sort of a voice or something represents my brand, for instance. People need to relate to it, in some way. I don't know how, but they need to and a lot of times people do, that's why I try to be as original as possible otherwise it's just the same as some other European designer or whatever. But ya, I mean a design philosophy, it's a tricky thing. But for me it's also... it's a lot about the quality factor, natural materials, quality, originality, design with purpose almost, not necessarily... it doesn't have to be practical necessarily, but there's a purpose.

Like the big cabin that I made, people are like 'why is it so big?', there's a reason why it's so big. And that is because I worked from a big painting, so an average big Lionel Smith big painting is the doors, and then obviously the gable needs to be proportionally sound with that size painting and then also the cork can only be x amount of... you know I need to increase the thickness of cork because of the manufacturing process. And then obviously from all of those little points, you design something that looks aesthetically pleasing, and also the reason I used cork there is because cork is essentially timber, so it sort of mimics the fact that it's a timber cabinet, but it's in fact cork, but cork is timber, basically. It's bark. And then also with cork, you can manipulate it. If that was a solid timber cabinet, I mean it would've cracked and warped and would've weighed like five, six tons, where that specific design is relatively lightweight for what it is. So there's a lot of design stuff I want to think about.

Now I want to move more into an artistic type of collectable objects, similar to the style I did with Wim Botha years ago. But we'll see, that will probably be more abstract stuff. But ya, but anyway, design philosophy... it's always, like even when you get commissioned from clients I would not do a project where a client wants to go the cheap route or the... you know, it's just not what I want to do, I don't want to get involved in it. I'd love quantity, but then I can outsource it. Like glasses, I don't touch it. I design it, they can make 40 000 units, I don't care, you know, as long as your quality is there.

### **And then, what would you say regarding your inspiration, like you mentioned?**

I find inspiration anywhere, everywhere. Mainly I would say... It's difficult, I mean like the other night I had like I had a lot of cool concepts and stuff and I never wrote it down, it's weird. Because... sometimes it comes to you, I mean like any creative person's got sometimes a block, and people has asked me how do I get out of it and that just, for me it's... I would say mainly when I feel creatively frustrated or blocked it's mainly because there's too many projects going on and I feel like I'm just running a ballad, I'm [not?] running a business, it's not like I can be creative. And then when all the pressure is on, then I get clients that force me like... or galleries like Southern Guild that wants new products, they want to showcase something new and then I would feel frustrated. But then I would simply just, I would try to zone out completely, leave the other stuff behind - it's very difficult because the phone always ringing and there's always people in and out and issues.

But then, I would say I find inspiration sometimes just by chilling, by collaborating with people, by visiting other artist studios, by going to antique shops, by going through all my

reference pages I've had years ago and just thinking of experiences I've experienced in Europe. I always document when I travel, I always have a lot of photos of... not travel photos, but mainly photos of let's say specific pieces I've liked; furniture pieces in particular, or design shops, stuff I really liked or enjoyed. But ya, I mean, inspiration... I don't know, I love to collect stuff, so then I always look at shapes and materials and... it's sometimes difficult, but uhm, ya, anyway.

### **8. Would you say there are some of your personal beliefs and principles that are brought through in your work?**

Yes, yes. Like I say, I really try and keep my quality. I mean, it's like for me - if I want to buy something I would expect it to last, depending how you treat it obviously. Cork for instance, it's a tricky material because some people are more malicious and damage... they damage it more, whereby I've never had issues with product client because if you pay R7 000 or R6 000, R6 500 for a stool, you look after it. But if it's a Starbucks or a Nandos, it's difficult to work with corporates because they've got a completely different brief basically. They want it to be durable and not break, forever and that's sometimes difficult.

But ya, I always just want to just... ya, I mean I only make stuff I would like, you know in my own house, for instance. I wouldn't design stuff in my range which I wouldn't enjoy having. So that's sort of how I see it, you know. I wouldn't create something that's ugly and commercial, and I don't want it still. I would rather create something that's good looking, nice and I know the quality is here. That's essentially why we've got the factory side as well, even though I outsource a lot, I still quality check. So for instance if we get 200 units like we did for One and Only last year per unit, 200 units or 400 units per unit, per design, we still finish everything in-house, I still double-check. I mean I send half of the batches back if I'm not happy with the powder coating or the steel or anything. So I'm always tripple-checking all my quality and that's why it's very important. I'm very surprised if there's a comeback or anything because that would be very weird. It might be a flaw in the glue then, or something. But ya, that's sort of my principles, I think.

### **9. I've been working with this notion of an artisanal product designer, and I see it as someone who mainly produce products with their hands but obviously with the help of tools, but then where the direct manual is the most... kind of important or most... the main contribution, and then where value is still supported by and dependent on technique, often employing local traditional wisdom of the craft process, when more quantities are made it's not... obviously it's not exactly the same, each one. And then if assisted by employees you're still, like in a personal contact with them. What else was there... Ya, and they also, if they're not actively participating in the production, they specialise in research, market negotiations or product design and conception. Kind of... that's like the overall idea. What are your thoughts on the matter? So, would you describe your work artisanal product design?**

Yes, I think there's a lot of... I think like you said there must be a focus on handmade elements, like James Mudge or myself, my guys will physically sand off the products with their hands, maybe on a machine, you know like an orbital sander, but the cork I would say is 100% artisanal because it's... they physically have to glue the seams, they have to chip it

out by hands, they have to re-glue it, they have to sand it with hands. You can't use... I don't, we don't use tools like orbital sanders and stuff on a circular stool because they'll change the shape. So they have to use their hands to follow curves; hands and sanding paper.

The timber benches - I don't have machines that's big enough to carve it, ag to machine it, like I don't have a saw mill or anything. You can't push beams that size through a big [thicknesser], it won't even work. So we essentially carve it by hand. We've got [Albetecs] tools that's connected, [dungsungs] bits that's connected to grinders and they carve it and they shape it. I used to do it myself, I taught Sam and then Sam taught Willard now, so they both can do it now if I'm not here. I'll just double-check the end result and make sure they don't take too much timber off, so I normally give them what they need to do.

Then of course I also employ a Zimbabwean carver that does all my... where we work together on the furniture, like the [Daybed], where he hand carves... it takes 23 days, where he hand carves the whole piece. Then he also hand carves this tortoise shells from timber, which people can't believe, they think it's machined or some process of machine - it's not. So it's all handmade. I only recently purchased them air tools which he can reach inside the shells to make... to increase his time, to decrease his time basically for manufacturing.

Ya, I mean, I'm bringing out a whole new range of furniture now where there's a carved element, a handmade element. A very good example of somebody that also does that is like [Castamento], you know, the upholsterers. So I'm working with [Eve] now, where they've for instance, yes, they've got standard process but everything is hand stitched and everything is... some, well not everything, but they've always got a handmade element to their pieces which I think is very important, obviously. So ya, I would say, I mean, totally handmade or artisanal, ya.

#### **10. What would you say are the advantages and the disadvantages of this type of practice?**

Advantages is it's unique, it's original, you've got a niche. Meaning, in Europe, sure, you can buy definitely hand carved or handmade pieced but you're going to pay a fortune for it. Here as well, the same thing... I think the same thing applies to any artisanal or handmade product. It's more limited and you can get, you can earn more money from it, you can charge more money. That's positive.

The negatives I would say, you can only make x amount. If I get an order for 20 Daybeds it's going to take him like a year to carve it. So then I need to... well it's not necessarily negative, I can then employ more carvers from Zimbabwe. But there's human error, you know, they can make a mistake on the pattern or they can be sick. You know, machines aren't, they can't get sick. They break and then you fix them quickly. It's... people die and you know, it's... people are difficult, like in any industry.

But the negatives, there's not much negatives I would say, there's not... I don't know, it depends how you see it, it depends. I mean obviously artisanal products you won't sell... you won't necessarily sell huge volumes. But an interesting thing is you can, like the glassware, which is hand blown. Every single glass is different because the spiral they put on by hand by putting it into a special tool. So essentially there's a balance, essentially I would say. If there's mould making... glass and ceramics I would say is a very artisanal process which can be made mass, I would say, at a... to a certain extent.



## **11. What is your view on artisanal product design in comparison to mass-produced, kind of industrialised products or products?**

What's my opinion about it?

**Ya, your view on the comparison between...**

Ag I think, I don't know, it's difficult because you need both essentially, you totally need both. For instance, I mean you can buy... I would love to get my stuff manufactured in mass, let's say one design, like Philip Starke's Ghost Chair for instance. I mean he gets it manufactured in mass, but still it's a high quality product with the right manufacturer obviously, not China copies or whatever. And ten-to-one that big Italian companies or whatever they still donate back to humanity or charity or they... like [Hay] designer, they keep on investing new materials and materials that's good for the planet, I mean, they have to. I mean at that scale you have to do something. So obviously that's a positive and there's...

I think it's a very positive thing that there is mass-manufacturing for designers, it's lucrative, you can make money, and also it makes it more accessible to people. I mean I can't afford a chair of ten grand so I need to buy a chair of two and a half, and it must still be good quality, good enough quality. So yes, but I mean the artisanal thing it's very important to have that as well because... it just sort of adds value to the industry, it adds value to... it's like you can buy a very expensive artisanal wine for instance and you can buy a good drinking wine that's affordable, that's R40 or R60 instead of R200 a bottle or R180. So there must be a balance, there must be... otherwise everything will just be the same, you know.

## **12. What are your thoughts on artisanal product designers specifically in Cape Town in comparison to the rest of the world?**

It's always strange when a lot of international people also ask what is different in Cape Town or what makes it different. It's weird, I've grown up here, so for me it's just normal. You know, and it's not like I travel every month and experience different cultures every day. You know, I don't really travel, I travel twice a year maybe, but not a lot, not for extended periods of time, for like a week or like two weeks max and then I'm back, and then it's mainly work-related, not necessarily exploring and stuff.

So for me it's... I assume, which I've always said... I assume it's the cultural differences and the fact that we've got so many races and cultural influences everywhere in Cape Town. I mean, initially when I thought people started designing fashion and whatever, I would be like 'ag, whatever', you know, we can't beat Europe. But I mean now it's like... I mean we've got very well-known fashion designers, our artists... our fine artists are world-class and also the designers are world-class because there is certain entities like galleries that take them abroad and that market them or designers that market themselves or artists that market themselves. You know, and the world has obviously changed where things are more accessible, like social media, I mean you can have a million likes if you're in Cape Town and then people in Europe will order your work. It wasn't like that in the past. So I think obviously there's more platforms of showcasing the quality we've got.

But Cape Town in particular, what makes us unique... to be honest, I'm not too sure, I'm not too sure. Because I mean I can put myself in Amsterdam or I can put myself in London or I can put... I don't want to see my... you know what I mean, I don't have necessarily a Cape

Town aesthetic, I don't necessarily have that. The only African aesthetic I do bring in my work is some of the shapes which I don't do... I don't do it with purpose, I just... like the Somas, it's a tree trunk, and the benches are related to Africa because it's timber, it's like raw big beams and people relate to nature and Africa. And then obviously the carved elements that's a very African type of thing. I am trying to design a lot more stuff with an African aesthetic in colours and stuff, it's not because it's a trend, it's just because you have to sort of showcase that you are from Africa and also it targeted a lot of Nandos and companies like that, you know there's a market for it.

So Cape Town I don't know, it's very weird, I can't really see... I mean there's forgers here and there's craftsmen here and there's carvers and graphic designers and I mean look at the stuff that's being showcased everywhere. Obviously there's certain people, I haven't seen one person necessarily like that works with a lot with beads, which I want to do. Like in you know Ndebele like they do these carpets and stuff, it's sort of been exploited a bit now with the [Estimoo of Mogramo] or whatever but for me it's... that would be like a... like Monkey Bizz for instance, they do all the weaving and the bags, that's very Cape Town, very South African, that's very... she's around the corner. Wonky Ware also with the clay, it's very handmade, like raw. So sort of relates directly for me to South Africa, and [Wenja] glass the same thing in Zimbabwe, ag in Swaziland. But I can't really... it's difficult, it's a difficult question. Gregor Jenkin you can put him in New York, you know what I'm saying. James Mudge you can, I mean James Mudge yes, you can put him anywhere in the world but yes, he's got quite a Cape Town aesthetic, like Pierre Cronje does. You know with the Riempe chairs, you know, it's very Cape Town. And like Adam [Lidge] they focus about, they focus on yellow wood and stink wood furniture which is Cape Town, it's very distinctive. The Gable is for instance one of... the cabinet is very Cape Town, it's only in Cape Town, well in Dutch, it's Dutch, but it's... you know, Holland, Stellenbosch area. So it, ag it depends.

### **And then how do you think the craftsmanship in Cape Town compares to the world?**

It depends what type of craftsmanship. I mean you've got a few. Like [Andrew Dominic] next door, he's a trained... he's a German, he went to a... I think he went to a German carpentry school. I mean, so that he's trained essentially European, like trained. And here you get a lot of people that like, like students, that go and work in Denmark and they do an apprenticeships there and they get essentially European influences. I obviously think we could, I would love to tap more into that to be honest. I would love to work more with beaders, and to... it's a very interesting question.

I mean the people that probably, which I would say invests the most money and time within South African craft and design, not necessarily design, but craft, and design, it's Nandos. But I mean Nandos is owned by you know [Dick], the [Eindhoven] family which owns Spier. Okay, and they own Hollard Insurance, they're billionaires. But Dick's been here a few times, we've had events and stuff here. And they own Yellow Wood Arts, which is in Cape Town, close to Harrington Street. And Yellow Woods Arts focuses just on ceramics, like mosaics and artists, fine artists, paintings, they do everything else, even some designed products. So they use a lot of craft; weavers, beaders, anything that's local, South African, which is purely South African they would work with and then push into the world, you know, and sell it through Nandos - it's their portal. That's why all the Nandos stores has got lots of art. But I mean I think, ya I mean, it's again, it's all our cultures. I mean we've got weavers, beaders,

ceramic - a lot of black ceramic artists which are doing really well, which is also their type of... like the Zulu pot, it's a certain technique they did it in the ground and... ya, so there's a lot of things that make us very unique.

**13. And then would you say there are certain principles and perceptions that unite artisanal product designers? So all these designers that work in this kind of practice.**

Ya ag, I mean you obviously get... I keep on saying Southern Guild, I don't even work with them that often anymore, I'm just saying... but I mean essentially it's a collective, it's like a guild you would look at - that's what they call themselves - a guild. But you would essentially see... there is... I mean more and more, I must say at their recent show - it's amazing, but their recent show; it's too, it's very European... it's very, it's just very European. It's like shapes you can look at Pinterest and it's like Europe, Milan, 'du, du, du, du, du' (....., etc.). It's just for me it's like it's losing a little bit of its... yes, there's a lot of work that's African.

I think the black ceramic artists, specifically the black ceramic artists, they're doing... their shapes and their colours are very cool and very unique and I think it's awesome; I can relate to it. But yes, I mean if you... I think... when you think of artisanal art design, do you think of it being expensive?

**Usually, ya.**

Ya, but then you can relate to it with the price tag and the quality, I would say. I mean if it's something... if it's an antique chair and it's hand carved, it's ten to one expensive, no matter how old it is. And a carved cabinet is normally more expensive than a simple square cabinet, for instance, I don't know... but it's, there's more... or it's handmade back in the day, an old yellow wood cabinet that's just square. It's still more expensive - it's handmade and it's old and it's unique. But when it comes to contemporary design, you still have to have those same things. You have to have good quality timber, it needs to be essentially some components handmade obviously. But then you also get 3D printing and stuff where you can print gold or whatever, then it's also very expensive and collectable. But, I don't know...

There's a very famous designer called [Max Lamb] and he for instance makes very artisanal stuff. For instance, he would go to the beach and then he would carve in the sand, he would carve let's say a shape, and then push four holes in it, and then he would melt aluminium because it melts quite low... no I think he used... no it was aluminium, he won't use tin, it's gross. He used aluminium and then he casts into the sand - it's essentially sand casting and then he just pops it out [with his/and it's a] chair, for instance. So it's very artisanal, but it's very... but he's a very conceptual... he's more of an artist. But he's a product designer, he's got lots of commercial products. But that's a very good example of... of ya, artisanal design.

But yes, you can definitely see... I mean if you look at Conrad Hicks, that works... that's just around the corner... that works in parched steel, I mean you can immediately see he is more of an artisanal, handmade forger, he's not a commercial forger, even though he makes gates, but he's charge you two million rand for a gate, so I mean. So you can see that, and you can see that... South Africa is quite small and Cape Town is very small and there's a lot of new young designers coming up, which is cool, but the established designers you can clearly see what's artisanal and what's... you know... like what their work entails, you know.

#### **14. How would you describe your experience of working as an artisanal product designer in this kind of global age of mass manufacturing?**

How do I find myself?

#### **How do you... how can you describe your experience of working as an artisanal product designer where everything is kind of leaning towards mass manufacturing?**

Ya ag, I think... It's difficult, I must say I get a bit anxious sometimes because of the economy and stuff and people always you know... obviously my products aren't... the artisanal products or the collectable products are not targeted at the mass, but then it makes it more difficult to sell it.

I would love to be in a position... like a good friend of mine, Lionel Smit, where he's got three year waiting lists even though his paintings, his smallest painting is R200 000 or whatever, and he's a very humble guy. That's the problem, that's the problem - people always invest in art and they're still hesitant to invest in design. It's almost like you first have to die and then it gets auctioned off later in 20 years somewhere in London and the people are like 'oh this guy was actually amazing, but ya, he's not with us anymore'. Where art is almost like booming and if you, you know if you're good at art and you're like a painter or something or a sculptor then you can make way quicker money with something that's quite niche, for instance. And you can reproduce quickly - it's moulds, bronze is moulds, so it's actually quite easy to reproduce it.

For me it's... I'm happy and I feel privileged that I can do what I'm doing and the fact that I can still get sales from it. Some years more than others, some months I get no enquiries for the artisanal expensive pieces and then some months I sell two or three, it really just depends. But I do feel being in Cape Town, other than the drought unfortunately, which is pushing tourists away, I still get a lot of walk-ins - a lot of German clients, a lot of Australian, a lot of clients from US, a lot of interest internationally, still. I've got daily enquiries or quotes I send out internationally to people that's interested in some stuff - commercial and bespoke products. But ya, I'm a bit... for me it's just very strange because we're sitting in Africa, South Africa, which doesn't necessarily have... it's not a first-world really... country and developing country, developing. And we are... we're doing okay I think. Jo'burg is doing really well, I must push more in Jo'burg.

But ya, it's stressful doing it. But it's like anything - I mean if you love what you do, then you just... you just push on, you know. If you don't have money to do the... that's why it's tricky because I need to balance it, you know I have to have bread-and-butter ranges, and that's what makes it very difficult for me to switch my head. If you're not good in business and you're just artistic, you're not going to get anywhere. If you're very artistic and you've got a good gallery, then it's fine because then they must manage you and they must tell you what shows you're going to do and how... I mean I know artists that doesn't have a clue, the gallery actually manages their bank account. Just to, you know, to give them x amount of... they pay them a salary basically, which is a very rare... from my understanding it's quite rare to have that agreement. But I mean I would love to have that, you know. But it's... everything I make is on risk. If I make that big cabinet that cost half a million in all or R300 000 to make, then you know it's, I see it as marketing, so it's what it is. I've got lots of stock, but then you just have to take the gut feeling and make stock. Especially when you're outsources you have to make stock, otherwise they charge you too much per unit. But uhm, ya ag it's

stressful, it's difficult to balance it and there's constant challenges everywhere. But ya, it's fine.

### **15. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced within this practice of artisanal product design?**

Challenges... The challenges are probably to make something beautiful that's unique, obviously, that hasn't been copied in the world or... every... like a chair - everything has been made, there's no way you can design something 100% original, I would say, because a chair is a chair. But on certain artisanal products, yes, you can be very original, you can be unique to you.

Like the planters, they're not... they are sort of artisanal because they're still handmade; the timber and the cork, it's all hand-done, the concrete is even hand-done, it's moulds, but it's handmade. So they've used their hands in the mould, it's not like a machine, it's not injected moulded. But for instance...

[Interruption by Douglas]

But the challenges I would say... it's the challenges, right?

**Ya.**

The challenges I would say is to... I don't know, it's always... I'm always intrigued by maybe new techniques or using ceramics, let's say ceramics for an example. How can you use ceramics in a weird way and it's something... in a different way, just... Like the ceramic tables - that's very 70's with small little... but then Ceramic Matters, they've got the knowledge to make big tiles, and they can make big tiles and not make it warp, because they low-fire their ceramics, not necessarily stoneware. So stuff like that - taking something that's normal but... a material that people are use to or custom to and making it completely something different. That is like difficult to do, it's a special technique. A lot of artists have developed their own techniques on making stuff and how to do stuff. Cork was my sort of thing and the beams was my thing. And now the ceramic tables is a very good collaboration again. I don't have the knowledge about the ceramics, they've got it, so I approach[ed] them to do it. So I would say the artisanal challenges is always to take a material and how to make it... how to make it into something that can be viewed in a new way, for instance. That's essentially what it is, you know, to make something new.

### **And then, difficulties that you've experienced?**

Difficulties... ya ag, there's a lot of difficulties, there's... A lot of, especially in South Africa, which I found, or Africa, is that people are quite conservative. So as soon as you bring something new out and it's out there and it's actually quite beautiful, people are hesitant, they don't know if they like it or don't know if they love it and then it takes them like four years and then they love it and they want it, and then it's like a trend. And then it's like, I did it four years ago. You know what I mean, really? So now cork is a trend, for instance, it's so annoying. And I don't like trends because trends can exploit the material. Exactly. If they make cheap cork stuff then the product devalues, the material devalues. Luckily it's still an expensive material.

But ya, so I think the challenges might be that you might, it might be something that's so original, so new it might put people off, it might be a bit weird for them. Or it can be very expensive to make. You know, the manufacturing processes are expensive if you don't collaborate with someone that might carry some of the costs. It might not even work. So if you do artisanal stuff and invest a lot of time in it and it... you just... physically after the product is done, you're like 'ag, I don't know, I don't think it's going to work, or I must do something else'. It's very difficult to do stuff like that.

Because some stuff like... that... like that Wim Botha bench I did that... that big carved that... faceted one... you can't design, you can't draw that really on CAD, it's... you have to make it just by hand, you have to go with the flow. You can sort of get an idea of CAD with proportions, but you can't really... it's going to take too much time. You can draw anything on CAD, but it's going to take too much time. So it's difficult.

So the artisanal stuff is difficult because normally you want to try to make a statement, and sometimes a statement can be like a backfire, it just doesn't work. You know, so that can be sometimes difficult. But like anything you need to sort of go through that. You need to have like good pieces and sometimes it just doesn't work.

#### **16. And then some of the opportunities or benefits that you've experienced in this practice?**

Opportunities and benefits... Ya ag, it basically uhm... it definitely boosts your brand. The more unique pieces you bring out, the more original you are and the... you know obviously then people, you get noticed. Magazines are all like vultures. They keep on even emailing me for instance 'do I have new work, do I have new...' I'm like 'I don't have new stuff, I mean really'. I do have always new stuff but I'm... I mean it's not necessarily photograph [technique]. Or you know, I'm busy with other stuff, so I sort of lose track of media, but I mean they are constantly waiting so that's the nice thing - if you are known for bringing out, let's say every two years, bringing out something special, something new, something original, then you get that sort of following, which is great. And ya I mean, what's the other stuff, I mean what... Just say, just read the question again?

#### **The opportunities of benefits of your experience in this practice...**

Opportunities and benefits... Ya you get, you get to collectors, you get international collectors and galleries that do... that do want to... that's interested in your work. The more positive thing about manufacturing is that, yes, you've learnt new techniques, you've gained experience, you've maybe developed something new. I mean essentially any, obviously any invention was done through thinking out of the box and playing around and maybe it was a mistake, you know.

Like my warped vase is... that's... they were actually a mistake, I mean my kiln didn't switch off and I lost all my stock. And then like a few of them remained, and then people loved them and then Gerhard, I asked them to make it for me. So take my standard mould and warp it. So that's again taking something that's essentially not artisanal. It's just the shape, which is cheap, it's quite affordable, and then they warp it and the price triples, then it's more artisanal, it's handmade. So that's sort of a... that's a very good example.

So sometimes you must just play around to try and figure out what might work, you know, and sometimes things work. And then you can physically maybe make... maybe you've got a new technique that you can invest in and buy a machine that can do it for you in the future. You know, stuff like that.

### **17. How do you think these challenges and opportunities compare to that of the global market?**

How does it compare, like what do the other people do, is it the same, sort of?

#### **Ya, like the challenges and opportunities that we have in Cape Town specifically, how do you think it compares to...**

I think it's... I think we... well it's completely different, it depends which country. I think South America for instance is a lot like us; it's very, like developing, it's quite a poor country, meaning there's a lot of loopholes, there's a lot of artisans that do it themselves. That a cool thing... that's one important thing about Cape Town I forgot to mention - the main thing about South Africa is we are sort of forced to do it ourselves, that's why there's a lot of... you know, there's a lot of entrepreneurs and small business owners. For instance if you like... there's not like one massive foundry anymore, there's like 40 or 60. You know, a lot of designers are... they're makers, designer-makers, so they make their own little thing - it's just easier. You know, and they can employ people and it's difficult to get a job at a big company. You know especially because there is BEE stuff, you know, so for instance, no matter what colour you are, but still, it's difficult. There's a lot of loopholes, negative stuff in the country that makes it almost positive where people are being self-sufficient, they're doing their own thing.

In Europe for instance, I would say it might be completely different... from my understanding it's very different. Like it's extremely expensive there to have a studio, anywhere. You know, space to rent. I know Rotterdam is quite big with studios and manufacturing and artisans. Paris is the [merrier] district. But from my understanding they've got different challenges to us.

We've maybe got challenges by we're struggling to find a good engineer. I struggled with always engineers. We struggle to find good carpenter because once again everyone is artisanal, everyone is designer-makers so they make their own little thing. They're either too big and they don't want to make a chair for me or ten chairs; they want to make 500, or they just manufacture for themselves, they're not interested in making stuff [even/either]. You know I work with a designer-maker that makes all my timber furniture and he's... you know he's very kind and willing. But he's only one guy, so he's limited capacity. So if I get massive orders we need to discuss what's going to happen with him.

Where I think in Europe they've got challenges... they've got all the suppliers, but they've got challenges again in the sense of money, you know, quantity, it's expensive, everything's expensive there, regulated. You can't just do a [CEA/Cear] approved light, there's must be regulated, it's illegal. But they've got the positive side where there's maybe institutions in place that would take the design from them and say 'you get royalties' and they're professional, they've got the systems. Here it's still growing, it's not really here yet. Ya, that's I think the differences are quite big. It's very difficult to place yourself... I always said 'I mean,



well what will I do if I have this in Holland'. Great, you know I mean, but then the labour would be, what... I mean a cleaner there is like R4 000 a day just to sweep. They don't get cleaners, you sweep, you clean yourself, it's like that. The richest people I know, clients of mine in Amsterdam - super rich - they clean themselves. They say it's a rip-off... staff, it's too expensive.

## **Laurie 2**

### **1. Can any manual processes you use also be performed or replaced by machine? If so, why do you do perform them by hand?**

The manual processes we used can't necessarily be mimicked by machine. For instance the tortoise shells, we can't hollow it out with a 5-axis machine. You can't have the amount of detail using a 5-axis machine in the sense of the detail being irregular, except if you physically make one, maybe 3D scan it and then give it to the machine. But still, it won't necessarily be the same because the tools we use, like a very sharp chisel, is very small and sharp chisels won't necessarily be able to be mimicked the same, you know, with like the same markings. It won't necessarily be able to be mimicked by a machine, even though if they use like a V-cutter or something that's very sharp, it won't necessarily be the same thing. Also, it might burn the timber.

So the patterns... the patterns we do on our Daybed... to be honest I'm not sure if it might be mimicked. The only thing is the end-grain, so if you've got a very elongated... let's say the table and the front carvings on the long side, I mean that's 2,8 meters tall, so I can't see how a machine can get in there, even though it's a 5-axis I'm not sure how big the beds are. So there's... I personally think there's some things that's not viable to be made on the machines even though pretty much anything can be made by machine, but it's... it's not really viable I would say, it's not... manufacturing-wise it won't be viable.

### **2. From a local and global perspective, what factors do you think put this kind of practice, so this practice of artisanal product design, at risk?**

What do you mean by local, so just say again, local...

#### **So from a local and global perspective, what factors do you think puts it at risk?**

I would say recession, the fact that people are more... well the super rich don't really care, I think. They... it's always... I think the more exclusive something is, the more they'll pay for it, always. So I think it's difficult, it depends what type of market you're targeting. So I personally think that... I mean is there a certain thing you think might cause the question, like is there like a factor that's causing this, the reason why you're asking this question?

#### **Ya, focussing on... so maybe the skills that's... that's not...**

That's lost.

#### **Ya, that's going lost, or things like...**

Well that's probably, ya it's probably a good point. I mean I'm not sure, I think there's a movement now where, especially with the local designers, where people are in fact

focussing more on handcrafted techniques. I'm not sure on a global... I think on a global thing it's the same thing almost, is where artisans are being more... ag it's almost like, it's not a trend but it's almost like yes, people are aware of machines and technology and cell phones and everything that's just evolving all the time. So sometimes people just want the basic stuff again. It's like organic foods and vegan and... it's like the same vibe I think that's happening within the design industry in some way. Like if somebody is buying a couch, a leather couch, they... it's a nice selling-point to say it's been hand-stitched and not machine-stitched, or... you know, but again it's price-related. Anything that's handmade, like an Italian saddle maker for horses and stuff, he's renown for, let's say for custom-made saddles and you pay premium for that.

So I think the threats might be that... yes, there can be a machine that can maybe copy something that's very special and unique to one artisan and copy it with a machine and mass produce it. So that might be like a negative, or a concern for artisanal designers. Also now with 3D printing where you can print ceramics instead of making something like this by hand which is very unique and like an artistic method, if you've got a machine that can print it for you, you can get a similar feel... it will never be the same, but you can get a similar effect, more or less, the same material sort of. So ag, there's a lot of factors, but I think as long as you focus on... I think you'll always have your clientele, you know what I mean, you'll always have your market, it just depends what you sell, you know.

### **3. What factors do you think strengthens this practice?**

Strengthens... probably the human factor. When it comes to machines now, when it comes to technology and everything... the human factor people, I think people always prefer to work with people. I prefer to work with people other than a machine you know, so. Obviously... it's a difficult one, it's... Ya there's, like I said, there's some stuff you just simply can't replace.

A very good example is like the harvesting of cork. It's been done for like probably, I don't know, 300 years or more and it's always done by families and it's always done by hand, so it's very... they use a special axe and they... it's a technique, you can't, you can't hit too hard. Obviously the bark, the bark... the trees grow differently so I really can't see how a machine can scan the bark and the thickness and then cut it with an axe in a special way and then slither the cork down from the bark, or from the actual... slither the bark down from the actual stem of the tree. So there's some techniques that I think it's untouchable, I think, personally. And obviously there's a lot of things that already replaced man, men, or whatever. Also the process of actually extruding the cork, like this... [shows cork sample]. This is done by a machine but it's hand-held. Meaning, if there's a machine, they have to hold it by hand and the machine... and then they step on it and the machine punches it out. The reason being is they physically look at where the weak spots is and the thick spots.

So there's some parts that will always be sacred to, I think, handmade elements. It's almost like tasting food and stuff. The chef needs to taste it, it's a handmade thing and you can't get a machine to flippen taste it and say if it's good or nice. It might be able to taste the acidity or whatever but it... you know, it's not, it's not what it is really, to be honest. So there's some parts that I think will always be protected, you know, within a design process or within a technique or an artisanal way of manufacturing, the way you join stuff. Ya, so. Ya, I don't know, a lot of things.

#### **4. How do you think can the industry and market improve their support towards local artisanal product designers?**

I think, ya... I mean I get it every day, it's like people are willing to pay a fortune for art and they don't have a question, you know, they don't really question it. You know what I mean, like... they'll obviously ask for discounts and stuff and whatever, that's normal. But I think...

I mean like a very good example is like Chris Weylandts whom I don't respect at all, because he's copied me and he's copied John Vogel and he's copied other people. That 's a very good example of a local guy whom I looked up to when I was younger because he was really the only guy in the country that had okay-looking furniture that was available, you know, other than Boardmans and Bears and all that horrible companies. But I mean, what I'm... I mean he's like a type of guy that doesn't support industry at all, except for maybe employing some people. For instance, he wouldn't approach, he wouldn't... people that's as powerful as [Robie Bozin] and [Dick Eindhoven] for instance, that owns Nandos and Hollard Insurance and all these big companies, I mean they actually approach designers and... even Starbucks, they approach designers and they see the value in designers and the value in artisanal crafts, where they would say 'right, we really need a chair, or we really need this, can we work with you to manufacture that?'. Chris Weylandts for instance, he doesn't care. If he like something, he takes the concept, if it's local or international, and he makes it in Vietnam or Pakistan and then he imports it. So he's a real asshole, if I could... I would say, to be honest. You know, he's not a... and that's just a good example of people that's not really supporting industry. I mean he's got the network, he's got the cash flow, he's got the money, he's got the system in place to easily collaborate with someone like me and say 'let's do a range together'.

Obviously there's positives and negatives, where the positives are, the same thing I'm doing now with another manufacturing company is, my stuff is expensive, but they can manufacture it. So the cool thing is they can then advise what cost, what price it must retail at. And then I can also adjust... so I need to adjust to their methods, they need to adjust to my style. So that's why it's a perfect combination. So it's not like Chris Weylandts can say he can't, for instance , work with me because my stuff is so expensive. I can take that design and make it in Vietnam still, and then still make commission off it if from a different species of timber and larger quantities. So there's various factors. So that's one thing - it's more industry [drones] must start focussing on supporting smaller companies more and start valuing their actual input and their design input. You know, if you're a young artist for instance, a big gallery normally sees you and then they build a relationship with you, and then you grow and grow and grow and over time you're like, you're a big brand and you're a big name. That's how everybody starts out, I assume.

So ya, so the industry and also I think personally the manufacturers in this country must really... there are a lot that's better now, but I mean they must... I think in Europe it's a different thing. The European manufacturers see the value in designers. They value that because they... they can't necessarily design, but they've got the manufacturing capability to assist the designer to make it a massive success. The designer brings a different element where he's like the brand and he's the look and he's the... he's sort of the marketing thing and he's the guy that creates something new and original. Where the manufacturers know how to make something new and original but they can't design it. So if local engineers and if

local people maybe had start a different mindset of how they can maybe support the designer.

And a very good example is if I want to make one chair and I need to go to an engineering company they sort of charge you a fortune for it because they don't see the value in it. I understand they have to charge more for one unit other than if I ordered and say 'let's do one unit and then order 50 chairs', but it's still very difficult for any designer to pay a fortune, like R10 000 or R14 000, for one chair and then you still have to make a few mock-ups to get your product ready. Instead where they might have an agreement with you stating that 'cool, we'll prototype this as much as we can because we believe in your brand, we believe your design, you've proven yourself, or even if you haven't proven yourself, this is an agreement we've got in place, this is how we can work together', you know, 'this is what we can do to assist you', you know, 'and then we take it from there'. Even if they say they want to own 5% of all sales you do but they will assist with the manufacturing. You know, just something, I think that's a very important thing people must start looking at, bigger companies must start looking at when working with designers, especially. Because it's obviously difficult to make anything new. I mean imagine I have to approach Green Cross Shoes and I say 'please man, I've got a shoe in mind, can you make some prototypes for me?'. There's obviously a lot of costs involved in, you know... I'm trying to do that now with [Ammering] International in Portugal, where I can't cover the cost but I need steel moulds made and everything, and I've proven myself to them so I believe they can invest and do it, and then we'll take it from there, you know.

### **And then from the market's side, so the more customers or...**

The customers, yes. So the customers, uhm... I still get a lot of customers that query pricing or they query... I don't know, I think it's a very difficult thing because normally people buy from brands they trust and they know. Okay and if you don't know the brand, like let's say and interior designer, and they work with you, obviously if there's a bad experience they won't come back. So it's very vice versa. It's very much... you can be an amazing designer and amazing products but if you can't sell the work or deliver on time or have consistent quality in place, then you're going to sort of shoot yourself in the foot. But if you that in fact, it would be great if the interior designers or clients, per say... which I do have loyal clients which come back and back and back, but not necessarily that often. So sometimes it's more of an communication issue.

Okay, so if they query for a price, don't assume the price I give you is the final price. If you've got a budget in mind, open your mouth, tell me that it's your budget. Don't shoot away a price of R80 000, maybe I can accommodate you for R40 000 depending on what you want. But I always do communicate that through to the clients. So if they want a copper bench with those legs and that one, then I say, 'well that one is R100 000, but what's your budget? I mean do you like, do you want something similar? What do you want?' 'No, I want that one, I want that...' 'Well if you want something... if you've got R40 000 to spend or R60 000 then I'll say cool, or R5 000 then I'll say well, then take the stool, or take this, or then go somewhere else', you know. So it's more about communication and I think clients must just... ya, I'm not sure.

I think... it's difficult because I can't... what can clients change? I don't know, because I mean I quote a lot and I don't get a lot, out of 40 quotes or 20 quotes you get like three orders, it's always difficult. Maybe clients can just in general start supporting more... instead of going to a Canal Walk and buying stuff, they can maybe... which people are doing a lot now, I must say. They're more into the city, they go more into like separate studios. They go to the upholsterers themselves or they go to the Biscuit Mill themselves and choose artisanal objects directly from the artists, which is great. But I mean that's obviously, you have to have some form of knowledge of the industry to do that, so that is a little bit difficult. But in the end magazines and things, and online platforms, and like media a lot. Sort of if a client buys a magazine they can easily see where it's from and Google the people. And that's sort of how I received a lot of sales in the past. But ya, maybe clients must just be a bit more supportive and understanding. Because obviously our lead times are a little bit longer than a commercial company's. We don't keep necessarily a lot of stock. You know, I have to calculate certain stock amounts of stuff that really sells. I won't have 40 benches in stock, it's stupid. So I have a lot of stools in stock rather, you know, or lights.

##### **5. What are your thoughts on the sustainable development of artisanal product designers regarding the environmental, social and economical factors?**

That a... ya, complicated one. So what is the responsibility... sorry, just read it again.

Sustainable development... like, how do we... it's our... like how do we evolve to meet that, or...?

**Ya, so say for instance in comparison to mass manufacturing, how do you think it compares, like the sustainability...**

Sustainability in a sense of the quality of the product and the way it lasts, or the way we manufacture our products?

**Both, definitely. And it's also regarding like environmental, social, economical factors. But definitely both.**

Ag, I don't know. I don't really know, I think it's... I don't know. Because you get big companies like [Amirim] that's massive companies but they're extremely sustainable. The way they... because they're so old, you know, they've... they run their machines on steam that's from the cork, that's burnt cork, steamed cork, that's offcuts from the actual offcuts and offcuts, because even this is recycled cork. So, and then you obviously get... I mean obviously we leave, the smaller companies leave less of a footprint when it comes to pollution and all that nonsense, they leave less of a footprint because they're smaller.

But I think the responsibilities might be also... will also be... it's always complicated because you can design something to last whereby you use materials like steel or fibreglass or something that's not necessarily very eco-friendly with regards to the manufacturing of it, with the bigger companies, but yet the product will last forever, so in a sense the product is sustainable; you won't throw it away or discard it. And then you can also think of the fact that, ya, is that product sustainable because it's actually concrete and is concrete sustainable, you know in the sense of manufacturing and is it eco-efficient... you know, so there's... but yes, it is because you can keep it forever. So ag, it's difficult, you know. I think in the market we are in, in the artisanal design, I think we will always be a sustainable...

there will always be a sustainability factor which will balance out essentially because... like a [Gredwill/Gregor] table, it's not necessarily... the steel is not necessarily a very... good for, you know the... environment, per say, how they make it and where they get it and... but I mean it's going to last forever and it's an investment piece, so people pay money for it and it's a sustainable piece in the sense that it's positive for the country with money coming in, and it's positive for his brand and for the country's designers because the market, it's good quality. You know, there's a lot of factors.

But like, when I for instance, in my designs, the cork is like 100%... like the perfect example of a sustainable product, because not just the materials, but also the fact that it's got a long life span, the products will last forever if you look after it, like anything. Obviously less in commercial settings, it depends how they damage it, but in private houses and stuff it's going to last forever. The same with the timber beams, I wanted to... I didn't want to go through a process of cutting up the timber and things like that, I just wanted to use something that's... it is what it is essentially, you know sort of use the nature as it is. You don't go chainsaw a new tree, this is an old piece of timber that's already been hand milled like a hundred years ago. The planter designs is also a good example where you sort of, you know, it something that will last forever; it's a good aesthetic, it's good value money. The process is concrete, timber and cork, that's the materials and the process of concrete is obviously... it's got [it's things]. But I mean the product is designed to be used as a planter so then again you invest in plants and nature and... You know, so it's got that factor to it. And also, using timber is not a negative thing, it depends where you source the timber holders from and who's regulating the forests. So the American holder council is always very strict on where their forests are from and how quickly... like that table will grow back two seconds in the forests, as a whole, not like physically, obviously. As a whole it can grow back in two seconds, the forests absorb it in two seconds, so in a sense of how they can get it out again. But... is there something I missed maybe, you want to add on within that social, environmental...

**Ya, it focuses on environmental, social, economical, ya.**

I mean economical it's probably a good thing, you know, if you charge more for something, I guess, in a country. It's obviously a good thing, right? Because you get more money in and then you pay more income tax, so it's a good thing. So yes, artisanal products is a good thing because you can charge more for it and clients pay more for it, essentially. You know, it depends. I mean some people don't charge a lot for anything. So like the African craft markets and stuff, their... well their stuff is actually quite expensive for what it is, but I think then there's a guy on top that's taking all the money, they're not making money.

So I try and empower the carvers, like my carver gets commission and everything from sales and all that stuff, which is confidential between the other guys, obviously. And also, it adds value to a country obviously. I mean if a country is well-known for pasta then it's a good thing, if a country is well known for design, like Italy, then it's a good thing. People go for the fairs, they spend money there, it's tourism. So there's a lot of different things, you know. And imagine there was no designers in Cape Town, how boring it would be. And I mean well what would you come and have a look at? Just the Waterfront and the mountains and the sea, but I mean people wanted to have... like our food is really doing well now, our food, our markets, design... you know there's a lot of shops; leather, craft. There's a lot of stuff that's

like upmarket now that's more... that can be placed on international platforms, sort of, quality-wise, you know.

**6. In your opinion, what role does artisanal product design play in the local and global industry of product design?**

What role?

Ya.

What would the role mean, you mean what role? Because it's quite a vague... it's quite vague.

**Just the... what's its purpose, what's... in the bigger picture, what... why do we do need it, why is it important?**

Why is it important, why do we need it. I think a lot of the other questions sort of, would explain that, I think; why you need it.

**So this, ya, this particular practice, like in product design this particular practice.**

Ya, it's a specific... yes it's a specific... why is it needed in industry. It's needed because then everything won't necessarily be manufactured or designed for commercial manufacturing, if you know what I mean. So a certain chair will be manufactured specifically to be made with... in large-scale, like in large quantities, sorry. Where an artisanal product is not necessarily designed to be made like that. So essentially there's a different niche market for that - it's less quantities, so it's limited, it adds more value; it's more valuable and it adds more value to the industry because you've got your like pyramid. You've got your high-end pieces and then it just filters down to the Chair Crazy pieces and the Boardmans and the Spurs and all that. And I personally think, you know, I'm very negative about the fact there's so many people... obviously everybody wants to make money. But there's so many people that's got no, absolutely no respect for any product, you know what I mean. Like they would take... they would make the most cheapest, horrific pieces if they can get the contract.

You know it's like government, let's say it's say like RDP houses. You know it's like, the biggest [country/company] will get the contract because they'll make it the cheapest. I mean that's such a [bomb] attitude. You know I mean rather make it, you know what I mean, like... I want to get the contracts that's got the right budget because then I can at least make quality products and not get the big budget and make the cheapest products to make the most profit from it, you know. Like I've pitched now for a government, for all the Iziko museums, like benches. And then I think I gave them a very good price because I obviously just wanted to get the stock out there. So I sacrificed on my profit but kept the quality of the product the same. You know, because it's silly to go... and then people are like 'ya, make cheap stuff for them, man. You'll get a contract, every year you'll get it then'. I'm like, what, I'm not going to use pine and like... you know all the mild steel must be electro galvanised, powder coated outdoor grades, like certain of quality polyethylene rubber to not stain floors or damage floors. And then I want thick timber, 45mm, not flippen 30mm, 25mm timber, 45mm, it will last forever.

You know, so that's the idea. So the thing that annoys me with a lot of companies that's not... like you can to flippen Beaconvale, Parow now and there's like always, there's always



woodworking workshops and all they do is push out kitchen cabinets and it's like cheap stuff, you know. It's like I would rather pay R200 000 for a kitchen and then you know it's going to last forever, you know. Or like, get a proper carpenter. Like go and support the artisanal carpenter other than a guy that like, that works from the board store and he can make walk-in cupboards for you, you know what I mean. I don't know, it's very difficult. That's exactly what Ikea does essentially, you know. So that's sort of... but I mean, then there's a flippen market because not everyone can afford you, obviously. Somebody wants a good looking kitchen but they can't afford x, you know. So it's a very difficult thing.

My point is just there's so many people in the industry that... I think there must be a quality thing, like you know, like... when you build a bridge there's certain people that flippen do quality checks on it and there's like, there's engineers involved, you know. Furniture the same thing - there must be a level of quality in order to sell it to the public. Obviously mass produced cheap chairs there are quality checks and stuff, otherwise people sit and break their backs and stuff and... ag, it's a difficult thing. I don't know, I can talk about it all day. I don't know... I mean an artisanal thing really adds value, because I think it puts the other people... it sort of, it separates you from them, you know what I mean. People won't get confused. Hopefully people won't get confused between Weylandts and my work, you know hopefully.

I had a client in yesterday that said she noticed Weylandts has copied me with the benches, years ago... no, like a year ago. So, but it's nice to know that... I mean the way I heard was because clients emailed me. Because I mean imagine how sad you would be or how annoyed you would be if you've purchased a bench for R300 000, or my concrete version of what he's copied was R23 000, and he sells it for R8 000, and it's much uglier, but it's visually similar. So I mean I would be very annoyed if I'm a client and I paid that but now my friend is buying a cheap version from Weylandts, you know, it's the same thing. So it's not cool, you know. But ya, so I think it needs to separate you from the other people. Ya, it needs to be a separation. So you get cheap art as well. Like these... you know, like these art you can buy anywhere and you get really good artists that's not necessarily that expensive, you know. But it's very important to have artisanal design and artists around, I think, otherwise it's just boring.

## **Semi-structured interview transcription**

**Business name:** Louw Roets Design

**Date:** 27/02/2018

**Code:** LR1

### **1. Tell me a bit more about how you got started in product design**

I came back from England in 2006 and I wanted to buy a bed and that was too expensive; R3 0000, and I said okay, I would rather buy R3 000 of wood. So I built my own bed and I discovered that I love working with wood and one thing led to another and I just started buying small tools. And then I tried to start a company and I realised that my work doesn't look like the other people's work, it's just not there and I realised that I need design. So I actually contacted Haldane Martin and I just sent him this long message on Facebook how I love his work and I'm so inspired, I want to study furniture design and he just replied - cool, CPUT Industrial Design and that's how I got started, that's it.

### **And then from there, after your studies?**

I knew that I would always work for myself and it's just, it's kind of organic the way it just grew. I mean I just wanted to work with my hands and design and make, and design and make. But I won't say that I'm a product designer like in the true sense of a product designer, industrial designer. I just use the knowledge of process and materials and then just bring that into furniture making which is in a sense product, but more furniture.

### **2. Tell me about your design process**

Sometimes it just starts with an idea or a concept that I have. It always involves research, so I would research what has been done, what is being done. It just depends on what it is that I'm making, I mean it's furniture, so it's more about (how can I say) a new form, I explore form and what I do is I would just start sketches. Do a few sketches, like those up on the wall, maybe a bit more basic and work my way towards that and then I bring it into the viability of business. So, you can't just make anything, it's got to be viable and that's what I've learned in the last three years. So basically I would just start with a concept, do a couple of sketches, see where I'm at, do research into joinery methods or techniques, bring that back in, see how I can build that in. Form obviously is very important to me, it has to be, the ergonomics of it. And then very quickly I move into prototyping and see how it works and then prototype, templates, moulds and 'til it's finished, and then it's done.

### **And then your specific role in each of these steps, how would you describe that?**

I'm fully in control of everything.

### **Louw 2**

My role is everything and I don't hand everything over to anyone else. I do sometimes [bounds/bounce] yes from other people, but I design everything really.

### **3. What would you say are the main manufacturing processes that you use in your products?**

I won't say there's a main process. It's just you get your wood, you clean it, plane the thickness - the wood, you cut it with a table saw and then from there it can go to more like shaping work on the spin drill or router and then it's your joinery with which I normally use a domino machine, and glue it up and sand it down. It's still very traditional, it's just the technology that one sometimes use is slightly advanced and then also a little bit of CNC - it's something that I want to scale up to, get more involved in CNC, just purely because of the problems we have with skilled labour in this country, and attitude, and bad work ethic. I can rather employ a machine and I know it's not ideal but that's just how it is, the labour force we just struggle too much.

### **4. Where did you learn the processes that you use?**

We were exposed to a lot of processes at university, but I just read a lot and experiment. Like for instance I'm very fascinated with Japanese culture, so I do tend to look at what they do a lot, like Sugi Ban where they actually burn the wood or for instance ceramics - I just, I don't know, just fascinating - just read up and you do, that's all.

### **5. How do you go about charging for the time invested in your products? So where does it go from kind of experimenting and exploring...**

You know, it's difficult to put a price on research and development and charging people for design. The problem that we have in South Africa is the market is extremely young to design, the customer, and they don't understand design. So for you to come into the market, you can't come in at premium prices and you can't load your price too much.

But ya, so I do work out an hourly rate on what I do but I don't load the price too much and it also depends on what I'm doing. But the idea is to first build the brand, build the company and then, you know, if you're successful then you can start loading your price a little bit more.

### **6. Tell me a bit more about your views on design, your philosophy**

I won't say I have a very defined philosophy, but I always have these keys that I work with - is good craftsmanship, quality materials, good design. And then... I don't have a real philosophy that I stick to and I think it's something that really evolves all the time. And also because I would say I'm more over to the designer-artist, it's kind of difficult to say 'this is my philosophy, this is what I do'. But I would say I draw a lot of inspiration or I get a lot from Bauhaus, what they did, I'm highly influenced by that and then I just pair that with handmade and traditional craft, I would say that's kind of really it. And then organic, I love organic. Not strictly organic, but most of my things or my products would have curves.

**7. Would you say there are some of your personal beliefs or principles that are brought through in your work?**

Honesty. I would say, I mean we try to be as honest as possible, but I don't like to hide what I'm doing. So if I use veneer, I show it. I don't hide and take press wood and hide the whole thing in veneer like a lot of people do. I try to show the process, the technique as honest as possible and that's it really.

**8. Obviously I've been working with the notion of an artisanal designer, which I describe as someone who basically works with their hands, they are mostly part of the whole design process and when more quantities are made there's not a specific, or none of them are really the same**

Louw: We do strive for that though

**And then value is still mostly dependant on the technique, not really... What are your thoughts on the matter, how do you feel about what I describe as an artisanal product designer?**

I think it's fairly accurate, although I must say they often... I mean you aim for accuracy in everything and that's why you make moulds and jigs, so it's not... there's a handcraft element. I mean you can go and CNC something, it's not going to be 100%, I mean it depends on how finicky you're going to be about accurate. But I mean it's, it does sound like the one leg is a bit wonky and the other one is more perfect. But I mean I think that's a very accurate description.

What I've discovered since I've been here, the showroom - it creates a perception with people that walk in because I've got a lot of clients that walk in here and what they keep on saying is it's art, it's artisanal and I never saw it like that, you know just, you don't want to label yourself too much either. It's more about what you're doing than 'ooh, I am this, ooh, I am that' but it does come across that people say 'artisanal' all the time, 'artisanal' and I think it's... You know like, what used to be like we would call a craftsman is, it's labelled as artisanal now. And I don't know, I'm not into the whole labelling thing, but that's how it seems.

And I think what happens in Europe and what happens in Africa, especially South Africa, what is regarded as a craftsman there is totally different than what is regarded as a craftsman here. Craft when you think Africa's beading and hand carved giraffes out of wood, and it's not. And that's why I think designers in South Africa we should educate and tell people like 'this is artisanal', or not tell but I mean you could explain it so they can understand it's not your run-of-the-mill Weylandts or Mr Price or @Home crap, you know, it's really, there's been thought put into it.

**9. What would you say are the advantages and disadvantages of the practice of artisanal product design in comparison to... in terms of the processes used.**

Well the pro's I would say is, if you are true in your design and not just copying, if you are true, truly a designer, your products would speak for themselves and you would create something that is really unique. I know unique is such a bad word, but it is different (the

products) and people pick up on it very quickly, especially if you start bringing in process and showing that in your design. And not just making a chair for the sake of making a chair, but what are you trying to do with this new chair of yours. I mean there's been millions of chairs made, so what is it that you are bringing to the party and if you can show that.

And also that goes to the next thing - it makes it easier to sell it. One thing that one needs to realise about what we're doing is design and business goes hand in hand, you can't ignore the one, unless you go totally over to the art side, but even then you got to think of how you keep yourself afloat.

And that's what makes it difficult, the con is that people are not always prepared to pay what we charge because they compare us to Chair Crazy, like I can buy a Hans Wegner replica for R2 250 and that is the downside of it. People get a mis-concept about these knock-off stores, like I can buy a Kartell plastic chair for R600 but then 5 months later the thing breaks and then they have this mis-concept of design. At the end of the day sometimes, depending on your product, like if you go into specifically chairs, we compete directly with China, we do and because the perception of what a chair costs. I mean, I'm selling a cheap chair at R3 000. People's like 'that's expensive', I'm like 'no, it's not.' Go compare what you can get'. But then, you know and I've started to realise that people are coming, like I get a lot of people from Weylandts, like how they tell me how they hate Weylandts and people are starting to realise that the quality is just not there with these manufacturers. If you want true manufacturing, you got to look at like Frits Hansen, Republic of Fritz Hansen or Carl Hansen and Sons in Europe, that's mass manufactured but it's quality manufactured and even for something that's a highly efficient process, you still pay top dollar for good manufactured wooden furniture, that's just the way it is.

Our processes because it's not as efficient, it is expensive. But I've realised that especially wooden furniture it's just, it's expensive just because of the handmadeness of it all. I mean I've seen CNCs, it comes out nice but when you glue up you got to still sand it down, I mean you from 80 grid, 100 grid, 120, 180, 220, 320, that's all the sanding grids that you have to go through to get to the finished product and that cost money.

## **10. What are your views on the practice that you do against mass manufacturing if you compare the two?**

Mass manufacturing depends on how it's done, on the level of quality because at the end of the day it's always price, quality and efficiency and you can only do two of those very good, you can't do all of them, the one will always... So you'd be highly efficient and quality but then there's going to be a price tag. You can do it very efficiently, cheap, but then the quality is going to go down. So I'm all for quality manufactured furniture, good materials, and that will always come at a premium price.

So if it's done in an ethical way it's fine, but I mean people are always knocking off China, it's not just China copying, it's South Africans copying all the time. And this mass manufacturing has had such a bad name, but if it hasn't been for mass manufacturing you won't be able to afford a lot of things. I mean if you go look at a car, I mean you can go and buy a good quality car for R200 000. Ask me to make R200 000 of furniture, you're going to get a lot of furniture but what's been built into the mass manufacturing of a car it's insane for how cheap they can manufacture it. So it just comes down to good choice of materials, ethical - you

know ethical in terms of labour and paying fair wages and where you source your materials from. Like, I'm totally opposed to plastic, I think we should get rid of plastic completely. Don't come with recycling this and recycling that, if you want to do plastic, do a bio-plastic or something, but something that can like dissolve like literally within days or months or whatever, not 500 years. So ya, I think it just comes down to once again honesty. Honesty throughout whatever it is that you're doing and then if you can mass manufacture it and you can make it available for most people, because that's what I would also like to do, is bring my prices down, because I believe that everyone should have access to good design, it's just that not everyone can always afford it.

### **11. What are your thoughts on your practice specifically in Cape Town in comparison to the rest of the world, so if you compare it.**

I'm small, I don't know ag it...

#### **Or your kind of... the kind of practice that you are in.**

I'm not at all unique in what I do, I think there's a lot of designer-makers out there, I just don't think there's a lot of good ones in South Africa. I think there's a lot of 'Hoo-ha' around certain names out there are being pushed by the media and clicks in the design industry, it once again comes down to money and it's totally, it gives a misconception of what really good design is and if you go look at what good design is and in terms of... good design must be innovative and sometimes what is being pushed as the best in South African design, it's just not innovative. But ya, I would say in terms of what I do, I think it's something it's kind of a trend that's coming back up where you can go speak to the designer and he's also the maker.

Like I've had this German intern and what I'm doing here, you don't get that a lot in Germany, just purely because of how efficient they are and the reason why he actually came here is because they have access to like, 5-axis CNC at university, and not just one, there are a few CNCs. They can literally carve an entire car out of wood if they want to. But the problem that they have is between studying and their highly efficient and technology-driven industry is, there's nothing in between, and that's why he came here and others come here, because they don't understand, the technology is intimidating. So we are in between the hand, the handmade stuff and the technology. So I think we fill a good gap, I don't know if that's totally answering your question, but...

#### **Ya, just how this artisanal product design how...**

How it compares, or...

#### **Ya, how it compares locally to globally**

I think we've got the design, I think we just sometimes struggle with the industry. Like if I go to other manufacturers, certain things I need to outsource, the capability is not there or they need more numbers or quantity and I need to find someone that can set off a thousand chairs for me every six months or something, who am I going to go to? Weylandts is not going to do it, Mr Price is not going to do it, because they want cheap stuff, crap stuff. The value of our retailers is just horrendous. Like Woolworths would copy left, right and centre. And everyone's got this... they make something look nice but it's bad quality. Where if you go

to Europe or America, you've got Eames and you've got Knoll and you've got Herman Muller, the American guys and then you go to all the Europeans. It's just quality-driven stuff. Like Italy, it's like quality-driven product and they understand it. It's just the South African market is young and they don't understand that yet.

So ya, I think we play a part where we play a role, what I've gathering a lot is like we inspire a lot of young designers to show them that you can actually go and make it. It's frikken hard work, but you can go out and do it yourself, you just got to be clever about it.

**12. Do you think there are certain principles or perceptions that unite all these designers like you, what I call artisanal product designers? So would you say there are principles and perceptions that they all have in common.**

Ya, I mean but it's like any industry or sector in that industry, like let's say artisanal, not everyone has the value of good design or good quality. And even sometimes, you know what happens like you have the intention of good quality and because you're not that experienced yet, I mean I've only being doing this for 3 years, your quality is not always there as you want it, sometimes it is. But I think the majority, what I've picked up is that the viability of business plays a very important role. So we are trying to seek good process, but make it viable, so we don't scare the public away with our prices because it took me 5 months to make this one chair, you know it's going to cost you like R50 000. I think we all agree on good quality and materials and processes. I think that that is a common there, the same with the principles.

But then what I don't like is people that come in that's artisanal and they have no former studies. I don't care how much experience you have, or how much talent you have, I still believe that you should go through a design course and that's also what's very dangerous to this industry is that you get designers or artisanal designers self-taught and they come in and then they say 'Ooh, I'm a furniture designer', but you don't know the next thing about design. Just because you can draw a picture and make a chair it doesn't make you a designer. There's a lot more to it than that and that sometimes destroys the perception of what we are and then people say 'Ag, you know they can't really do it or they can't make it properly', this and that, and it's because people have made bad choices because they don't follow a design process, they just see something, they copy it and they change it a little bit and then make it, and that's very dangerous to what we are doing. And that's why I always tell people just go and study, I mean I knew, if I can brag in this sense, I could see that I have potential with my hands and working with my hands but I realises that I need something more than that and it was design.

**13. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced in your practice?**

Cash flow. Cash flow, cash flow. You know if you go look at restaurants, because it's something that I find viable for what I do, it's like if I create a good chair and I can sell 50 or 100 at a time it makes it very viable for me. But then if you go look at restaurants, it's full of Chinese stuff and it's Chinese crappy chairs, you know, all just replicas and there they have no shame about it. And interior designers, supposedly that are all design-led and design-this, they don't think twice of putting a Chinese knock-off in there. I mean can you imagine if we



had to ban Chinese furniture or they just have heavy import duties on it, that would create an entire market for us as South African designers and we can come very close in price if you give us quantities. And the Chinese market is really killing us, because if every interior designer had to come to a South African manufacturer it would totally bring the price down of everything, it would make it easier to enter the market for us.

**14. And then some opportunities or benefits that you have experienced specifically in this...**

Nandos. Nandos is a big, big supporter of South African Design. I mean the budget they sometimes have for furniture and lighting is amazing, it's within our range that we can do it and they bring quantity. That's why I'm a great supporter of this, it's called the Nandos Design Portal, it's a great initiative and like they have budgets they have to put like R40 000 or R50 000 of South African art into each store, they renovate each store every 5 years and they've created a design portal now where they've chosen a few of the local manufacturers or designers and they put our stuff or our products on there, and then internationally because there's like 1 500 or something stores, sorry 1 300 or something and they're rolling out another 500 in the next 5 years. And the design portal is a gateway where all the international designers and national designers can come and choose our products and then they put it in their stores. They don't have to, but at least someone is taking the initiative of pushing South African design. And like, I've sent like my Pulp Fiction lamps I've sent quite a few to the UK already just because of Nandos. And I've sent chairs to Nandos in Sun City and there's other projects where we were involved. It's just, we just need someone that's big, you know, with influence and that doesn't value profit over South African design and if they can just see that.

And if, for instance, if Woolworths can just be ethical about it for once they can create a massive opportunity for artisanal design. Like my wife was pulled into an artisanal range and they copied us, blatantly. And they ask what's your cost price, where do you print this. We negotiated with them for 7 months, I mean 7 months for a small guy like me, it's heavy intensive and it cost me a lot of time and money. And at the end of the day they offered us R13 on a cushion and they only wanted like 75 pillows, I mean that's not business. I mean R75 times 13, how much is that. And where they could really just suck up a little bit of the profit and just hand it over to the designer or pay them lump sum or something. You know, even with Weylandts they have a great opportunity where they can just work with local artists or designers, just in an ethical way. And it always just comes down to ethical or how ethical these people are and usually they are just greedy and that just destroys relationships.

**15. And then the last question is how do you think your challenges and the opportunities of this practice compares to, specifically local, compares to global, to the global industry?**

South Africa we have a very funny market. We don't have the volume and we don't have the market here that can afford what we are offering. There is a market but it's just very small. Our technology in the manufacturing sector, it's fairly up to scratch, but it doesn't have the volume. Like in Europe, you can be a designer and you can go to a manufacturer and you can work hand-in-hand and you can produce volume and you can bring the price down. But

you have that back-up of manufacturing. Where in South Africa we take on the role of designer and manufacturer, that's why we are who we are, and it's just purely because of the market. Although you can go to manufacturers but you really struggle with quality a lot of the time and they don't have that precision yet. The reason for that is because they don't have the market where they can push product to create volume to bring the price down, and then that kind of gets passed on to us as designers. So the relationship of designer and manufacturer in Europe and America is much better, where the designer can focus on prototyping and designing and getting a good quality product and then handing it over to manufacturing. In South Africa we don't have that yet, not to the same standard. I think that's a big challenge. But it's also an opportunity, because it's difficult for what I'm doing to go do that in Germany or France and get into the market if you want to do the manufacturing yourself, because the big guys just take you out. In South Africa that's an opportunity for us and that's what I'm kind of exploring.

### **Louw 3**

#### **1. You mentioned that some hand work might be replaced by CNC machine in the future. Why/what is the reason that you have been doing the work by hand until now?**

It's the cheapest entry point. You don't need capital layout to work with your hand and maybe basic tools. I mean if you start with CNC as a minimum you probably need like R200 000, R250 000, which is massive capital layout for a small business owner that's just starting out.

But the thing about handcraft is, specifically wood, wood is a warm material, it's not man-made, it's as natural as it gets and it's that interaction with the material, that physical interaction. Like I particularly love it when I'm sanding down and how the dust is collecting on your hands, I don't know, it's just you are making and you are doing. And I think it's just the passion for it, but I also think that's like the sculptural side of what I would love to do, is like, it's just shaping by hand. Most people you speak to, they hate sanding but it's one of the nicest processes of woodwork for instance. I'm just saying sanding because it's so physical. So ya, I just think it's the physical interaction and not being separated from it. I mean, what is the purity of watching a machine cut it out. I would always bring handcraft in and the thing is handcraft, if you go look at the definition of selling handcraft, handcraft is still qualified as 20% handwork 80% machine work, that's still handcraft. So you understand, it depends on what the definition is.

And also if I can double-answer it, everything always comes down to business when you do design, especially when you work for yourself. And you have to add value to your product and there are certain cultures that really appreciate that handcraftness about the product and I can't say handcrafted if it's not handcrafted.

#### **2. And then you also mentioned that unskilled workers, their attitude and work ethic have been identified as one of your main challenges. Why do you think there is a lack of skilled workers in South Africa?**

I think there's a number, there's quite a number of reasons and I might sound bizarre, but I think it's because children are not being brought up in the right way. I think children are

being brought up with no values, people are being brought up with no discipline, no responsibility. They move through school without proper education, there's no regulating of any standards really, I mean our standards are so low. By the time they exit matric, and that's not any particular race, that's all races, that's all youth, they're just not matured enough when they exit, they have no drive.

I mean the world that we live in is so, so temporary, everything. Like clothes, you wear it for six months and you throw it away and this whole notion of fast fashion is filtering into everything, from education to manufacturing to how we value everything in life and coming down more towards the core, I think the government is not doing anything really, that's substantial to ensure that there are tradesmen. There's only one company, I think, but privately owned, that's Furnitech and that's not really an option for someone like me so we have to train in-house.

Ya, and just like the overall attitude in South Africa is mahala, 'alles moet verniet wees', I mean that's just, you don't do that. You can give education for free, sure, but not housing and water and electricity, because then where's your sense of responsibility. And if you put all of that together, you see why we have issues with skilled, unskilled, semi-skilled, it's all an issue. That's why people automate.

### **3. What do you think can be done to improve or avoid this, to avoid that skilled work completely fades out, so ya, disappears completely?**

I really think it starts... It doesn't help the government to come and set up something. Like for matriculants or whatever. It's an attitude thing, it's not a skill thing, it's an attitude, because if you have the wrong attitude, you can't train someone. I don't care how much talent you have, no-one wants to work with bad attitude, you can't work with bad attitude, you can't work in a group or a team like we have to work here with a bad attitude. And that is the problem. And I think it is... I think children need to be disciplined, I honestly think that is the problem, children need to be disciplined the old way, not talking, go sit on the stairs or stand in the 'hoekie', that's nonsense man. The child needs to be disciplined properly and that's how you would... You know, like back in the days, and please, I'm not old regime apartheid, I hate that, I think it's frikken barbaric. But like, they had this thing at school, for instance at school, for instance when I was at school, we were initiated. When you're initiated, you know your stand in the hierarchy of things, you don't go and tune a matriculant because you are a 14-year old. But they do today, because they come in and they can do whatever they want and they can talk any way that they want. After school you went to army for 2 years. I'm not saying we must bring back all that nonsense, but that's kind of an initiation into adult, you know. Because there, they are being shown how low they are on the ranking, you are at the bottom, at the absolute bottom and they break you and they make you even, all of them. And it's that kind of... it's just that people need to understand where they fit in into society, you can't come in like youngsters.

Like my one cousin, he was 24, no education, nothing, he got a job for, a walk-in job that his mom organised for him, I think it was like R11 000 walk-in, he said 'no sorry, it's not enough'. I'm like, who walks in, no skill, R11 000. So I think if they can sort out... if we can sort out discipline in this country and then proper education, like proper education, and then make it free! You know, make education like really free, especially for young children, you know. But

there must be something... there must be some sort of reprimandment connected to it if you fail, if you fail then you pay. It's like, I think if you go to Finland, you can go study for free but as soon as you fail you pay. And I think that's what we need to do and then after that make universities free or those that want to go work with their hands because we have a massive labour force in this country. Have proper institutes with proper people at their help, you know, to raise the standard. I mean, South Africa in the old regime where we were sanctioned and boikot, we were very sufficient. So I just think it's responsibility and a no-nonsense attitude if you come with stories.

#### **4. And then do you think this lack of skilled workers can be experienced majorly as a challenge or then actually as an opportunity since there are less skilled workers?**

No, I think it's a massive challenge. I think it's a massive challenge. Maybe if one don't... you know I don't see the opportunity in unskilled people. I think the opportunity lies in the government to prove themselves, or whoever it is that wants to run the show.

#### **And you don't think, say where, if you are a company and have skilled workers, you don't think that then is obviously an opportunity for you over others?**

Ya, but you have to understand like, to get people from unskilled to skilled is a lot of time and money and it comes with a lot of mistakes. The problem, okay... so we're not in a first-world country where we can get funding easily or... there's no catch-nets here, your only catch-net is your bank account or your family if you are fortunate. If you have the money to absorb those costs, those mistakes, I mean like last year I repaired R100 000 in orders of so-called artisanal skilled workers. R100 000. I mean, first of all that's the value of what needs to be replaced, then the extra time in materials and labour, firing those and re-employing. Then you... you never know what you're going to get, kind of thing.

If the government is smart, what they would need to do is actually just subsidise us, we'll do the training for you but subsidise the workers. I mean, it's so decent realised, the running cost would be so little. Obviously you got to have your tax up to scratch, your VAT registered and SARS and all those, you know. Just... don't just go and throw money at any frikken John Doe and whatever, go to legitimate companies or people that can prove or come with a plan to show that, listen here, I've got scope, I can train 5 people here for you or 10 people. I mean, we are a very entrepreneurial country because here you have to make things work in Africa yourself. If they had to give us that subsidisation, and I mean, we don't even need to touch that money, they just... can go on a payroll and the government can pay these people directly and we just send the hours or something like that, or just have a body governing it. We could train the entire labour force in 5 years, from nothing to like skilled, highly skilled people. I mean what you can do with someone in 5 years, you can transform his life and you would raise the entire standard. It's just no-one is taking initiative and it's difficult for us because we are already in difficult times, it's always difficult times for small business owners and you're trying to make meets-end, but you also have to focus on solving the government's problem which is training people.

#### **5. You mentioned that the market in South Africa is young and that what is considered craftsmanship differs to other countries and that the market's perception of design**

**and quality is uninformed. So in your opinion, what's the difference between craft in South Africa and craft in other countries.**

I can only give my idea and how I perceive it. But craft in another country... for instance Germany, craft, if you say craft, he is a craftsman or a master craftsman, that's wood work or steel or something. Craft in this country, I mean if I ask you what is... If I say tell me what is craftsman in South Africa, what is the first thing that comes to mind, in your mind?

**Beads**

Exactly, everyone thinks beads or carving a giraffe. That's... it's... in the eyes of the world it's unsophisticated but I mean we've seen how people become very sophisticated. It's just, European countries and America their design world is just so developed... centuries, it's been like, how old is Industrial design, like almost 200 years old I think, 250 whatever.

I know these chairs that I'm sitting on the production method for this was done in 1829, Michael Tonic. He figured out how to steam bend wood at an industrial level and just an interesting fact, that these chairs is the most sold chair ever, more than 50 million units were done by 1930 and not one skilled labourer worked on them. None. He had no carpenters working for him, they trained everybody in the factory and showed them the process. The process was just so well developed that anyone could kind of do it with a bit of training.

But we don't have design in South Africa, or since they've been beading, you know. So I think what has happened in Europe is like design and craft has grown so close to one another, that when you say craft there's already an element of manufacturing into it, design thinking into it. Maybe a bit rudiment at first, but now. I mean like a highly skilled wood craftsman in Germany or Denmark or Japan, I mean compared to a skilled man in this country. I mean if you go look at what is being produced in the 1700's or 1500's or whatever for the kings, what they've [have] been made for them versus what went on in here, you can't compare it. I just think because, you must also remember where we are in South Africa, it's like, South Africa is one of the last places where people have actually reached the continent, a continent.

**Louw 4**

**6. How do you think can the market's perception of design be changed?**

I think every designer should first of all take that responsibility on them to educate their clients and to start with not copying. That's the main thing that you have to teach your clients is that they shouldn't bring a photo here and you copy. You can teach them or ask them to bring... for instance like this client that just walked in. Because they don't have a language to speak to you, the best language they understand is here's a photo, make it. Instead of telling them bring me reference photos or mood photos, like exactly our process of how we would use reference photos or mood boards. And then you create a language between you and them and then from there you can say, listen here, we can use this material because of this, and we can use that because of... that manufacturing technique because of this, and then they can start seeing what they are paying for. Like I, most of the time, I would bring the client, I will explain that to them and I'll bring them up here and I'll show them the product sketches, like this is what you will get and from this we take it to 3D rendering, and and and. So then they start seeing the process and the design process and an understanding what it

is they're paying for. Because in their mind, they see a chair, and you, and then 5 days later that chair must be finished. They don't understand everything in between and as designers we should educate them about it.

But then also the thing is time, we need time, like another 20, 30 years for... Design in South Africa is a baby and it needs to mature, that's it and you can't really force it. But I think just... the other problem is this whole design led movement, or not design led, but this... what the media like Elle Decoration or Visi and these people are pushing on us as designers, because for people who don't know anything about design that's kind of, that's design to them. But then the people that are being uplifted in these things, some of them don't even have design backgrounds and people always say 'Ya, but he's got talent or she's got talent', like I don't care how much talent you have. It's like the analogy I always use is someone with talent is like a rough diamond, it needs to go and have it facets cut into them and that's what a design course does. Yes sure, I have talent, but I went to go study, I realised there was something missing. And now that I've gone through it I understand design much better and I... the fact that you can make or draw a chair, and make a chair, doesn't make you a furniture designer at all. It's like a police officer, if I put a uniform on and I have a gun and I drive in a bakkie, am I a police officer? No, I look like one and I can do stuff like it, but I'm not a police officer.

And I think it's just... another big thing is I think the government needs to clamp down on manufacturers like Chair Crazy, where they knock off good design like Hans Wegner chairs or Philip Starke chairs, whatever. That should be utterly banned, we should not have that because that destroys what people perceive as design. Because they would say 'Eames replica' or 'Hans Wegner replica' and some people might go and search Hans Wegner or whatever, it's like 'Oh, this is Hans Wegner', 'Oh, I can get his chair. Why must I pay R12 000 for Hans Wegner when I can pay R2 000 for Hans Wegner.' And then they go sit in the chair, the chair is uncomfortable, or after 6 months the chair breaks, it's like 'these designer chairs are crap', but you just bought a fake. But, you see, what seems common to us is not common to the public. And it's things like that - just copying, replicas, all that should be eliminated and then people should be educated about it. I mean I can think of a lot of things like just proper trade fairs or trade shows or... you can like, start a bloody design police in our country just to enforce good designs, you know. And I almost, when I was at university and when we were studying and doing research and I actually started to learn how important research is in design.

I actually had this idea that... like architects, you can't just become an architect, you got to get a licence, why can't we have the same for designers? If you want to make furniture or whatever, you got to have a licence, why not? Sorry, I know it's extreme, but I think that is how you educate people fast. It's like, there must be respect for a designer, there must be respect for a teacher, there must be respect for any kind of someone that has studied and gained knowledge and want to give that back to the world. Ya, it's for money, but I mean that's how we survive, but I mean... because people don't have respect for design in this country, they don't. It's just an overall notion of design, people just copy.

**7. And then the next one is: How can the industry and market improve their support towards local designers? So how can they actually support designers in this specific practice?**

If you say the market, do you mean the South African, the buyers, the public buying?

**Ya**

Well they should just frikken buy our stuff, that's it, buy our products. But it difficult, I understand, you know third world country, or semi third world, semi first world, we don't have the disposable income of Europe and America or Asia. And I think that goes hand-in-hand with people not understanding design or the maturity level of design is not yet there.

I think it's massive on the rise you know, like for instance like Southern Guild what they are doing. It's very functional art but it puts South Africa in the spotlight and I think South African Designers should strive for top quality, like top, top quality and bite the bullet and just give it at good prices. Eventually we will be recognised and then... you must put yourself in the shoes of someone that's highly uneducated regarding design. It's like an uneducated person doing stupid things, they don't know better, that's just their way. So uneducated, how can I say, uneducated educated people if you understand, uneducated regarding design by educated people is the same, they don't understand.

So you have to understand... like people walk in here, like people have yachts, people are millionaires, billionaires sometimes, I mean I deal with rich people sometimes, they are strict on price, don't just... Like even the Germans, the Germans that walk in here, they don't just 'gooi' money at you. People always want the best quality at the cheapest price, always. Ya you get people they want to show they have a Minotti this (Minotti is like an Italian brand), but that's a status thing. So you got to be competitive with your prices, it's just how it is. But you also don't go and undercut yourself stupidly, so you got to play the market. You got to understand they want good quality but they don't want to pay too much for it. And you just got to make sure you understand your costing, you got to understand your structure of your business - how you manufacture, and you got to make a living and just find the right balance.

I think also what... the thing is the responsibility doesn't really rest on the public, it rests on us because if no-one is doing it, we must be doing it. And if you... it's like... not that I'm following Ghandi, but Ghandi I think was very wise, which he said it's like the change that you want to see, be that change. So if you want to see it change, you got to work for it, give it to the people. And I think designers should try and, if possible, partner with a business partner which frees you up to do the creative side, the design part and have someone that's pushing the business. Because business and design, in what we are doing, is hand-in-hand and it's very difficult to do both. And if you have someone that's business orientated they can say 'listen, your price points are too high, you got to bring it down by x amount' and you can say 'okay cool, so you want me to manufacture a chair at R3 000' then, you have to translate that into your design thinking, into material choice, manufacturing choice and process, and you give it. And that's what I've realised after 3 years of doing business in design.

**And then from industry's side, how do you think they can...**

Well I think that's kind of what I just said now, but... You have to be extremely business savvy, very business savvy to succeed as a designer. Because you can't make... it's a difficult market. I mean you can make top... it's very difficult to create top, top, top quality stuff, but where are you going to distribute, how are you going to sell it? And that's the thing, it's understanding viability versus the quality. Someone told me there's always these 3



pillars, it's quality, efficiency and price. You can only do two of them very good. I don't know if I've told you this before? And you must understand the triangle and you must enforce that into your work the whole time. And where do you want to play the market, do you want to play low budget, do you want to just make pine stuff... pine-based, you know, or do you want to be middle-class, middle high-end, middle-end or whatever, or high-end, and then you make your choices according to that.

And be creative, you know, find industries that people are tapping into. For instance, in South Africa we have good weather, good weather equals people being outside, people being outside equals outdoor furniture, go look at what's been done in outdoor furniture and go for that. And just be creative in who you want to tap into and go look who's the competition and just go [for an offer/ from off there].

### **8. What are your thoughts on the sustainable development of the practice regarding the environment, social and economical factors?**

Sustainability I suppose when it comes to materials - chopping down of trees, sustainably social I suppose is employing people and economical... just those two basically almost I could say put together. I'm going to give you a very selfish answer, I'm going to say first look at yourself. First get the business going. It's very difficult to be like highly sustainable, like 100% sustainable, I mean not even Apple or Coca-Cola or these big brands, they're not doing it. And I had this German intern (that I had) made a very valid point. I think the idea is not to see the massive change that you can do, it's like don't go 100% environmentally friendly because you will crash and burn. Start with 10%, 20%, 30%, work your way up.

Our idea of ergonomics (economies?) has to change. We are... we harvest, we process, we design and manufacture, use, throw away. I mean, recycling isn't really going to save the world, it's a plaster. The whole human way of consuming has to completely change. And once again, it's greed versus being environmentally friendly. I mean this goes for social, economic... and just sustainability. All those things... it's engrafted in human nature. Yes, we can be 100% sustainable but who's going to pay for it? No-one wants to really pay for something that's really greener. Ya, there are individuals, they say 'okay, I'll pay an extra R1 000 per chair.' But the market... people don't want to spend too much money, I mean... and the problem is like we don't... it's not like if you start buying wooden chairs, only wooden chairs from sustainably forested forests, you're not going to see the effect and people only change when it effects them personally, now, not in 50 years' time, we're not like that. So it's a catch 22 kind of thing, but I think it's just... for instance I use, I try to use water-based spray as far as I can. I only use 100% environmentally oils. My wood mostly comes from sustainably sourced forests, but not all the time because I can't but I try my best. I just think you have to try your little bit and that will... if everyone can just do that little bit, then it could amount to something.

But there has to come a massive... more a massive change from the leaders, like big leaders like Woolworths for instance. They should do it properly, don't fake it. Or like Pick 'n Pay or Checkers or these... you know, big, big companies. And they have to set the tone and then that would make it easier, because they are the people that influence the perception of product and price the most and if they can change, then it will be easier for the smaller guys

to change. And I mean, we are the small guys, it's the most difficult for us to do that. I hope that answers.

**And then how do you think it compares to mass produced products. So... but it differs from company to company, so it's...**

It depends on what you are doing. It's once again, it's profitability, you know. Can we make water pipes, for instance, from something that's biodegradable? Yes, we can. Is it viable? No, because the Chinese are producing PVC pipes at a stunning rate and it cost a fraction of the cost. So, the question is how are you going to change the people that are consuming attitude. Because if everyone today comes together and we say 'okay, we will no longer buy PVC drainage pipes, we will only buy it if it's made from bio-polymers, the industry has to change, they have to, because it's like they say, you vote with your wallet. If people do that, then it will change, that's the only way. The consumer has to change its behaviour to allow industry. Because as long as you are paying, you are feeding and why would they stop taking your money? We don't work like that.

**9. Then the last one is maybe a bit broad, but in your opinion, what role does artisanal product design play in a local and global industry of product design?**

I definitely think... maybe not a big thing, but I really think we... and I'm learning this now because I'm being asked to do a lot of interviews by students and... I think we inspire the next generation of designers big time, because we are doing... it's almost like we're doing what everyone wants to do, but they don't do it. Like this lady who was just down here, her husband says 'Ah, I would love woodwork', it's like, just do it! Stop saying you love it, just do it. I mean... how do you say that in English... an Afrikaans saying: 'Byt the spit af', doen dit net! It's frikken hard work and it's not like it's... ya, you're living the dream, but a dream comes with a big price. And it's really just loving what you do and I think then you can inspire the next generation. You can always also see that the designer-makers is like, we're like pioneers in way, you know. We're showing people like, listen you can actually make a living of doing this, you know...

I think the artisanal guys also show the creative side of humans and I think it just needs fire. Because if you think you start with, let's say 3 artisanal designers in the world, they inspire the next which is maybe 5 or 10, and it just grows and grows and grows, before you know it... I mean it's already... the artisanal, handmade, craft, it's a big movement and I don't think it's going to stop at all, I think it's just going to grow. It will never replace industry and mass production but the effect that we are starting to see is where smaller guys are being pulled into mass production, more.

This whole thing about collaboration, you know. Proper collaboration, I'm not talking about stupid collaboration - you use my fabric and design the thing. No, I'm talking where like Vitra or Carl Hansen and Sons, Republic of Frits Hansen, all these European manufacturers, they pull in designers, they are pure manufacturing and they have pure design and then they combine, and that's when you see like really creative stuff. And it comes at a bit of a price... I mean if you go buy anything from Republic of Frits Hansen now, like just a normal basic chair, but it's properly made, properly upholstered, proper steel, everything, you're looking at

R20 000 a chair. But it just shows you - that's the actual value of handmade stuff, mass produced.

I think it leads to a lot of creativity, artisanal... we put a lot of creativeness into the world. And I think we can see a lot of, a lot more well designed products can be made available to a wider audience. I mean, if you think the amount of energy that's being put into producing crap, like Morkels or Russells, all those, or frikken Lewis or Joshua Door. If you can just take that energy and tap into an artisanal designer. Pay him R100 000 for a year, you know, for... just to do, or 5 months' work for you, what that company can get out of it, it's so much more. I mean, can you imagine people in Khayelitsha going to Morkels and have highly designed stuff. It's completely possible and instead of having that chunky crap stuff. So I think artisanal designers can actually make big waves if the industry allows.

## **Semi-structured interview transcription**

**Business name:** James Mudge Furniture Studio

**Date:** 10/04/2018

**Code:** JM1

### **1. Tell me a bit more about how you got started in product design or furniture design?**

Did you read our bio, the bio on the website and all of that stuff, presumably you have.

**I've just kind of swerved through it, but not really in depth.**

Well a lot of it is on there. My parents had a furniture business down in Knysna and I learned, I learned, you know, my trade from them and the sort of... they had 40 or so artisans working for them. So I've sort of grown into it my whole life really.

### **2. What is your role in each of the different steps or stages of your design process, would you say?**

Well... I don't know. What do you mean? I mean my role... I am it, like I am all the steps, you know.

**So you'd say you're involved in every step, all the time?**

Ya, of course, absolutely. You know, I love designing the work but I also love making it and I don't think you can really separate design from making, because a lot of design comes through making, if that makes any sense. When you make it, you design it. Like I don't just sit in the office and go like 'Hmm, you know, what can I design today'. A lot of it will come through the making of it, so through that understanding of how things come together and how things are made. Because you can't just take two pieces of wood and stick them together like that, it won't be strong, you know. So a lot of the design that I do is informed by the materials that I work with.

So it's very different working with plywood and solid wood; they're two different materials, they have... you can't treat them the same, you've got to have two different design approaches to them, it's completely different. And the way, the means of cutting them is different, you know, like plywood lends itself well to CNC, you know, but then you're also going to end up with that aesthetic of, you know, CNCed plywood furniture, which is neither good or bad but it is what it is, and you know, if you want that, then use plywood. If you don't want that, then use something else. So, you know, a lot of the material actually forces you to... or just predetermines how you make something, you know.

That... you can't make this (wooden chair) out of plywood for example. It's not the right material, it won't be strong enough, you can't bend plywood like this, you can't turn plywood in round dells, you can't... You know, you couldn't make this out of plywood, but you can make another chair out of plywood, but it's not going to look like this. And if you try and make a plywood chair look like this, it's going to be shit. So you've got to sort of work within the

limitations of your material. So you can't just sort of design... you can't just design stuff without taking all of that into consideration, it's very important.

### **3. How do you normally go about kind of charging for the time that you invest in your design process? So from start to end-result.**

It's an interesting question, because you can't really ever charge enough because... so I don't charge for it, I don't factor that in, I just... But I don't make one-offs anymore neither, because it takes too long, it takes too much of my time and I can never charge enough for it. So if I make something, it's something that I want to continue making, so that that time that I invest in it gets amortised over like, the years that I make it for.

So, you know, if I spend like three weeks working on a chair, or six months on and off, you know, like it's often not like I sit down, I start working on a chair and a week later I'm completely finished. It's never like that, because I never get just... I never get to have a week to just do a chair. Like, I get distracted, people come and call me away, a machine breaks down, like clients want to see me. I just don't have that kind of time, myself, to... to be uninterrupted. So it's something, it's a process that happens slowly, or I'm just not feeling inspired to do it, or I'd rather do something else, or... It's just not like a once-off flow of creativity that's on and off; it's not a tap.

So I don't really factor my time into it anymore. So I'll just... you know, you can either price things according to the market, or price them according to how much you think you can charge for it, or you could price it according to how much it cost you to make. And they're quite three different approaches and I sort of find my way somewhere around, in the middle. And you can also price it according to how many you want to sell. And do you want to sell a lot, price it cheaper, or do you want to sell a few and price it more, it's the same thing. You know like, it's the same item.

So you know, the value of pieces of furniture is really quite an abstract concept. You know, I can sell a chair here for R3 000, but if a client doesn't like it in six months' time and they try and sell it, they're not going to be able to sell it for R3 000, you know. It's kind of a random... you know, value on anything, not just my stuff; anything, is completely abstract, you know. You've then got to find a buyer which is also... like that's kind of an art in itself. That's half the job, is selling stuff. The other half is make it, and the design, like, it's actually quite a small part of the whole massive process.

### **4. How would you define your design philosophies or design ethos? But I think that will probably also be on your website.**

My design philosophy, well, I've already told you about that.

### **5. What personal beliefs and principles are brought through in your work? If any.**

I believe that the work should last. Both physically, like chairs shouldn't break or anything like that. And also, they shouldn't go out of fashion, so they shouldn't be like trendy and what's trending now and all that crap, like that's... I don't [have/give] shit, if you ask me that's

magazine hype, like it's bullshit, like. It's fine for... it's fine for stuff that's, you know, trendy and has no real intrinsic value. But if you want to make something genuine, it has to sort of rise above that level of... intellect. You know like, it needs to be, have something with more substance.

So I like to think of the furniture that I make and design as trying to achieve a timelessness, you know, that will last and have value and still be valuable, like... worth something to people worth keeping, put it that way. You know, in a 100 years' time, because the piece of furniture themselves won't break. That's why I spend so much time and money investing in machinery that makes those joints so perfectly because it means that we make a real, genuine product that really does last. So the only thing that could go wrong is it could go out of fashion. Which is why you don't want to be too fashionable, you know.

Like a good pair of leather shoes that's made in Italy, they're not like outrageously, like fashionable, because there's no point in buying a pair of shoes for like R5 000 that's going to be completely un-wearable because they're just so un-cool like, in a year's time. They've got to be like a little bit more understated and a little bit more classic and timeless to last. You know, otherwise I don't want to invest the money in them. So our furniture is meant to last and stand the test of time both physically and from a design point of view.

**6. And then, of course I've been working with this notion of artisanal product design, which I basically see as... where there's still a lot of like, handwork involved and where the designer is still very much part of the... mainly part of the design process, and where value is still supported and dependant on technique, often employing local traditional wisdom of craft processes, and if you are assisted by a team of employees you work... like in close contact with them. So would you describe your work as artisanal product design?**

So, okay, it's an interesting one, because we use a lot of machines, we have to, otherwise we can't compete in the world. And it's also stupid not to, I mean, would you write this out by hand or would you use a computer. Like, and is a poem on a computer any less artisanal than a poem written out by hand with a feather quill, you know. And I would say the answer is no. Like, it's still a beautiful poem, no matter how it's written or what it's written with.

So we've got like a combined approach here. So when I design a new piece of furniture, and I'll take you down and show you a chair that I've been working on, it's very much a hands-on process. So I make it with my hands, personally. And I spend a lot of time doing it. And I'll cut something off and like, screw something in, and get it comfortable and right and try different things, all by hand. Well I use machines as well, obviously. So you have to. Like, I'm not going to chisel it with a chisel, that's just retarded, like there's no point; it's backwards.

You've got to embrace technology. But at the same time, some... machines can't design anything, they only... they're slaves. They're slaves, they're just, you know, mindless slaves that just do the same thing over and over again; that's the beauty of a machine. So that's a beautiful thing; it's got no attitude, it's got no back-chat, it's got no sick leave, it just grafts. So that's a really good thing.

And it also... you know this, [way/main] of working with wood and working by hand is... you know, it's everything that I've said to you before like, the wood informs you what you can do

with it. Like you can't just do... you can't just do anything, it's... there's limits in place and you need to have a thorough understanding of that. You know, and that is where the artisanal stuff comes in. Like I've grown up with wood my whole life and I understand it deeply, like [my/on] deep level.

Like this (chair in office) is bent. You can't just make a tabletop like I made and cut the shape out of it, you know, with a CNC. It's not going to be strong, it's going to snap like right over here. And you've got to have that deep understanding of how wood works and how it responds and how it changes over time because it expands and it contracts. And if you make mistakes it just... it literally just breaks. Like it has a grain and it's fibre, it's like you can snap it... you can easily pull it apart sideways but you can't pull it apart long ways. So there's a lot of that, and that's a very basic notion, but it gets quite abstract and quite complex later on, further down the design process.

So that is very artisanal and then I translate that into something that can be reproduced by other people who are less skilled than me. So all the guys that work down there are trained by me and some of them have history of wood work. In fact most of them do, because I don't even bother taking people that don't have any training because it's just too... it's too much work to train someone from the beginning. Because... you know, even hand sanding something is an art, like, if you just take anyone, they just can't do it, like, it's not worth trying to teach him from zero. Unless they're really amazing. You know, and I have done it once or twice, but generally I try and find people who've already had a lot of time in the industry. Because there's just so much to learn. It's like trying to get someone to... it's like trying to get someone to work on your science project who hasn't been to school at all. It's just never going to happen, like, you need like, years of maths, you need like years of writing, you need to know how to use a computer, like... you know, it just, you can't just take someone with no skills and expect to be able to teach him how to do something, you've got to take them from somewhere.

So ya, once I've done the design like that I will then teach others how to replicate it and that's where the business side of things comes in, so. You know, it's two things. Like if I was just an artisan making everything by hand, one thing at a time, I'd probably be like poor, like living on the street, you know. Or, you know, I often think about it, like I could probably have like, you know, like a humble life somewhere out of the city, which could be cool, actually, and that's like really artisanal. But if you want to actually buy a house or something like that you need to have a business, so you need to combine the business end of it. And in a way that's what keeps the artisanal stuff alive, you know. Something's got to pair, for everything. So you sell a little bit of yourself. Like you sell a little bit of... I sell a little bit of myself with everything that goes out this door, you know, but I try not to sell too much of it. So that's where it's quite nice to have the detachment of the machines and the other guys making stuff. You know, that I'm not like selling my soul, I'm just selling a bit of it.

## **7. What would you say are the advantages and the disadvantages of this specific practice in terms of the processes you use?**

That's quite an abstract question.

**So... in comparison to things where the designer isn't necessarily part of the design process, where it's just mass, mass, mass manufacturing, where... ya, what do you**



**think makes this kind of better and then also the disadvantages of it in terms of the production processes.**

I'm not sure I really know what you're asking. Try and ask it in a different way.

**Okay. So... Or just in general, let's say the pro's and the con's of this practice in comparison to 100% mass manufacturing or... to the practice of artisanal...**

[Well, you can't have...]

As I've said earlier, the one... they're two different things that are running side by side, so first I do the artisanal stuff where I actually... that's where the creativity comes, you know, where the piece is born. Then it kind of moves sideways into where it's made, you know, so there's not... they're working side by side. It's not like there's an advantage to one and a disadvantage to the other. Like, even if you have a machine, you have to tell it what to do and if you, if you've got no imagination and no brain, you're not going to get anything nice out of there that someone is going to want to buy. It's not like you buy a machine and it's like done everything, like... It's really like, it's a really manual process. I know you see it doing all of that stuff, so its capabilities are fast, which is amazing, but it only does what you tell it to do. So if you've got shit ideas and you've got like no... you're going to get nothing out of it, like it's going to be completely useless to you. No-one is going to want the output. So you don't... I also don't want my furniture to look like it's been made using machinery. It's not... the machine is my slave, I determine how it works. You know like, that's my choice, so... I choose that it... You know, the making of it is a really practical part of it, and in a way it's an art form as well.

You know, just running these machines and running this factory is also a very creative thing. Like, making things in production is actually a very creative process, because it's not easy at all. Like, to make money making furniture. And you know like, if that is how you would judge success, like success... well let's just say, if it didn't make money, it wouldn't continue because something has to pay for something along the way. So if you... no matter how you judge success, if you just judge success on that it's an ongoing thing, then... it needs to work and it's not easy to get all the stuff to work all the time like, the machines break, they're very complicated, they're very expensive, they are very difficult to run, you know, it's... And then also making stuff on a large scale and keeping the quality high, which is what we do, is also very difficult because every step along the way is an opportunity for someone to do something wrong and someone to make a mistake. And then they haven't spoiled one chair, they've spoiled 100 chairs, you know, because they weren't paying attention and they make one small little mistake, which spoiled 100 chairs, which spoiled the work of 12 people over three weeks, you know what I mean. So it actually gets harder the more you make because the fuck-ups get so big. You know what I mean. So it's not at all easy making larger quantities of things. Actually you have to be so strict and have such good systems in place that mistakes cannot happen, you know, and they do still happen. Then you have to have like very creative ways of fixing them. Because you can't afford to throw a whole batch of chairs away because someone used the wrong glue, for example, and it's actually just like, didn't glue properly.

It's like, it can get horrific. You know, you're like 'where did you even find this f\*cking shit glue', it's like 'oh no, we found we found it in the back there, we ran out, we just thought we'd use that'. This shit happens like the whole time.

So, it's almost worse than just me, making it, by myself, one thing. But of course, then it wouldn't be financially viable and it wouldn't continue and my art would die out because I have to get a job somewhere else in order to survive. So, so ya, I mean this... this set-up that I've got here enable us to be successful and to continue and you know, we can share it with so many more people and so many more people can appreciate it because we've got the systems of... of using... of this machinery.

## **8. What are your thoughts on artisanal product design in Cape Town in comparison to the rest of the world?**

Cape Town's got one of the highest ratio's of entrepreneurs to people in the world. You know, there's a lot of people doing their thing, you know, opening like a little handbag shop or like jewellery or furniture or whatever. People open restaurants... you know, it's got it's pro's and con's, like, it's really quite cool that... that people can open like a little business that sells recyclable paper cups and it's totally hand-done and it's amazing and... the market supports it, you know like, there are people that can pay extra for a handmade cup, you know, for example. And I think that's really great, you know, I think it's fantastic that this... that people...

I mean you can't do that in Europe, the market is like saturated; it's huge and saturated and you'll just be a blimp in the ocean, like... And I often think, you know, I wouldn't have really been able to do what I did here if I'd been living in a developed country. You know like, it's just impossible, there's just like a thousand other people also trying to do it and it's impossible to get anywhere. Like, it's just, you know everyone is like... doing it already or you know, there's already thousand, like young artisan wood workers in their aprons, you know, with the CNC in the background kind of thing, you know. How do you ever get noticed even?

So what's nice about Cape Town is it's small and you can have a stand at the Design Indaba or whatever, and all of a sudden, you know, you're in a magazine like, even just a tiny little mention, if your stuff is really good you'll get discovered like, because there's just not that much else going on, you know. So it's really great like, this means that's possible. And we've got huge... I mean it's [vague/big], but a huge stimulated set of people here and also an audience that is into it as well. So, you know, you've got to have the one with the other. You can't just have the people, your clients, the potential clients also have to be, you know, ready to buy your shit, or interested to buy it, or like interested to see what you do.

You know, on the downside, what I see a lot in South Africa is that people will start doing something, start making something and then all of a sudden, they're like fucking... all of a sudden they're like some sort of expert, but actually they don't know... they've done like some research on YouTube and they actually f\*cking know like... builders, for example. You know like, in the old days to become a builder, you had like a seven year apprenticeship with a master builder. Now you can't get anyone to f\*cking build a wall straight, like, because everyone is a builder and there's no skill there anymore. It's just someone who thinks they know what they're doing, but actually they're f\*cking totally clueless, but they're a builder, you know.

And that's where stuff is actually getting lost, because people aren't really valuing that knowledge anymore because... but it's not that... the information is still there, people are just lazy to find it or they don't care or they're just like... I'm sure it's fine like this. And I see people doing it with solid wood often, they're like 'ag, I'm sure it's fine', and actually it isn't

fine and it's not going to last and it's... you just wasted a piece of wood basically, you wasted a tree, because what you've made is a piece of shit and it's going to break and in a year's time it's going to crack and it's going to be [a throw away/thrown away].

So, you know, there's less and less of that deep understanding of some of... crafts or of... that deep skill set, that deep knowledge. So that's just not something you can get like, in a short period of time and you often need to be shown like, over a long period of time. But you know, it involves a lot of manual work along the way, so. You know, you can't just sit down with an artisan and say like 'tell me everything there is to know about wood work'. It's just... there's no book, there's no list, it's just like, 'well you try and drill a hole in there' and then you try and it like, splinters and goes all skew and then the guy will be like, 'well, let me show you what you did wrong. If you want to drill a hole through that piece of wood at that angle, you're going to have to do this, and you're going to need to make a special little jig and'... you know, what you're trying to do is actually really hard, but you don't even know that, because you know nothing. You don't even know what you're trying to do is like, one of the hardest things you can do, because you're just so nowhere. And you just get someone to tell you that because there's so much stuff, it's impossible. And also, not only is it knowledge, it's also them... practice. Like it's a, it's a tactile thing, like you have to be able to feel it, like, like your drill and the wood will give you feedback which you have to anticipate through your hands. So, you know, you'll feel that thing moving, and you're like 'ah', and then you're like 'shit, maybe I should get a clamp, and like clamp it down.'

Stuff like that, like it's just, it's like, it's like any kind of real skill, like surfing or skateboarding or... you can't... it's like, put someone on a skateboard who's never been on a skateboard, they'll just fall off immediately. Then you watch someone who's been skateboarding their whole life. It's like, you can't teach that, you know. You can't just, you can't just share that knowledge. That is something that they have been intensely passionate about their whole life, and all they do is talk about skateboarding, all they do is skateboard and they're really good at it because they've been doing it for like 15 years, all day, every day, and that's... they've been obsessed with it, you know, their whole life. So some people... and some people will never be good at it, no matter how hard they try, they just won't have the coordination, you know, so it's not even something you can teach to everyone. So a lot of people are just... you know, I'll start showing them something, and I will be like 'you know what, you're never going to get this, like, forget it, like', you know. This is as far as you'll get it like, like, and then maybe hand sanding, maybe you can master that. But probably not even, you know, so. It's just, it's so deep, that knowledge, that not everyone is going to get it.

## **9. How can the industry and the market improve their support towards local artisanal product designers?**

I don't know, it's hard. Because as I was saying to you, like, some people are just never going to get it and other people, they might get it but it takes 15 years, and how do you support someone for 15 years while they learn it, do you know what I mean. So... I don't know like, you can only have so many interns flapping around, getting in the way, do you know what I mean, like, it's... having an intern in a factory is kind of dangerous, it's annoying. They're irritating because they have no skills and they're not very useful at all. Like even if they offer their services for free, you know, it's actually inconvenient having someone around who doesn't know what they're doing. And as I was saying earlier, it could cost you like, you

know, 150 chairs and three weeks of work from the whole factory. So, it's a huge risk. And... I mean that's aside from them actually hurting themselves, which is a whole other story. So ya, I don't really know.

I suppose what you really would need is some sort of school. And again that's also really hard because they fill up so quickly and with people who aren't necessarily even any good at it, so. But there are some people who, if they persevere, will rise up, you know. So, if you're wanting to be a designer and wanting to learn, you know, you kind of just have to start doing it, and struggle with it and do it yourself, and buy some tools and do it in your garage, and do it in your spare time, and just be totally obsessed and never stop learning, and look on YouTube, there's so much stuff out there on how to do stuff and, you know, start with a desk, start with a small little saw in your garage, make a plan because no-one is really going to try and teach you because it's such a mission to teach someone.

And the last thing you want to do is spend like five years teaching someone and then they go off and do their own thing, because it's a serious investment in somebody to train them, so... which is why in the old days a lot of internship positions were paid. Like a father would pay for a son to be an intern at the local wagon maker, you know, and if the son wants to leave early, he had to pay to leave, to get out, because the wagon maker had already like, invested so much time and energy in teaching this guy who was clueless, it would be super annoying for them to leave before their contract would expire, it's like, I will contract to teach you, however you need to be here for seven years, so that after two years when you are actually able to do something useful for me, you're going to be here for another four years and keep working and actually pay back some of that time that I've spent teaching you, you know. So it's got to be like that, otherwise there's just no point. So, it's... ya. It's hard. I don't really know how industry can help.

**And then from, kind of like a buyer's market, or the industry supporting companies like these, or... how can I explain it. So not going to @Home or Mr Price or whatever that... just... supporting the local artisans and not supporting the stuff made in China that's...**

The problem with that is, you go to @Home and you pick up a lamp and it's like R47,95. And you're like 'how the f\*ck did they make this lamp for R47?', ship it from China to here, you know. If you went to the local hardware store and just buy the light switch, the plug, the cable, the thing, the light bulb, the lampshade, it's going to cost you more than R47, just to buy... before you've done anything. So, you're never going to compete on price because in the factory that they made those lights, they made like, you know, 300 000 of them in five days, you know, and they sent 100 000 to South Africa, they sent 200 000 to the States, you know. And... for someone starting out on themselves, in their garage, making a lamp, spending R47 just on the fittings before they even cycled for free to the wood shop and bought a piece of wood, you know like, you know one trip to the wood yard in Epping is going to cost you more in fuel than it cost for the whole lamp.

So... it is, ya, it's quite a big barrier and it's something that, you know, the whole world needs to watch out for, you know, and you can apply that to restaurants who compete against fast food chains. At the end of the day it has to come from the clients really, who, are they prepared to pay more for something that isn't from @Home, you know. And some are, and

some aren't. And that's where it is kind of always going to be both. Because you go to @Home, you're like 'Jeezlike, how do you make this, how do you make this for that?', and still, don't forget like, @Home is paying quite a big rent for their shop in a shopping centre. So they're probably putting on 100%, they probably bought it for half of what they're selling it for. So if it's R47 at @Home, it means they paid R20 for it. Which means the guy who actually made it maybe got R2 for it, because it still needed to be shipped, import duty, all that kind of shit, like. And then you're like 'holy crap, how are they making these lights for R2?'. And it's mind-blowing.

And I mean, I've just been buying some equipment in Italy because Italy is one of the specialists in solid wood furniture manufacture, and they've got... they were telling me some things like... I've been buying some specialised chair making equipment because chairs are a notorious bastard to make because there's so many there's so many components, they're labour-intensive, there's so much... if you see all these pieces, it all needs to be sanded by hand, need to be assembled, just wiping all the glue off, all of this shit will take you like longer than it takes to make a table, you know, like. So I've been buying some equipment and there are guys there making 150 000 chairs a month, okay, with 20 people. So... and those are proper chairs, like, they're not shit chairs. But those guys are like professionals and they're like, feeding machines and like 'tjik, tjik, tjik' because it's all like, completely, radically mechanised, but made well, you know, so. But they're selling them in Ikea for, you know, five euro's. Okay, it looks like a cheap chair, but it is, it's five euro's. And then I say to him 'well, who would bother making a chair for five euro's, why even bother making a chair for five euro's?', he says well this is the thing. Like Ikea said they have to make a chair for five euro's. But then they'll give them other business which has better margins on it. So, they're not making any money making those chairs. They're not even... their manufacturer is making no money, and maybe Ikea is not even making any money. But they're getting people in the door to buy them to then buy other stuff while they're in there, so it's like... That's more like business and marketing and [law's leaders] and all of that kind of stuff. So, no-one is making any money on that five euro chair, no-one, so. But they are, but they make it on other products. So then you've got to contend with that, and I don't know where that leave like, an artisan, because that's like a whole different league, you know.

## **10. What are your thoughts on the sustainability of artisanal product design regarding the environmental, social and economical factors?**

Well environmentally solid wood furniture is very good because it captures carbon in the trees and then, the carbon stays in here. And the longer this piece of furniture survives, the better, because the carbon is still in here. So let's say that this is an antique chair. This chair is 40 years old, it's still 100% perfect and it still looks cool. You know like, these were mass produced [things] by a company called Ercol. And they are still making this exact style of chair, you can buy it new, it will cost about R8 000. But this is a 40 year old one. During the time that this chair was being in existence, the tree that was used to make it has re-grown in that forest, there's another tree standing there. So it's absorbed carbon again. So that could now be cut down and made into another chair which could be around for another 40 years and furniture, if it's made well, could last for hundreds of years. So you could actually just keep going with that cycle and it's really good, like, it's environmentally sound. Provided that no-one throws it away or burns it or, you know, it rots, and then the carbon is then released

again into the atmosphere. But like, it's way more sustainable as a resource than anything else because, I mean, a tree in itself is carbon neutral. Because it grows, dies... it grows, absorbs carbon, dies, releases carbon. But there's no more or less carbon in the world in that cycle. It's just absorb... but when you start using fossil fuels like plastics, and those kind of materials, then you're digging up carbon that's been buried like, for like, you know, a couple of billion years, and you're releasing that into the environment and that's a total f\*ck-up. So, sustainably it's cool.

Is artisanal stuff sustainable? Well someone's got to design all this shit. You know, and somewhere, someone is designing stuff that people want, you know. That's the thing, like, it's got to be... you've got to make things that people want, otherwise then it isn't sustainable, because they'll throw it away and then it's bad, so. But, you know, as you can see in the world, there are fewer and fewer designers and more and more stuff getting made because the manufacturing processes is more mechanised. So there are fewer artisans and it is something that's dying out. I mean, people are not getting educated. Like young people now have no skills, you know like, they are... they have none of those old skills. Like we had 40 or 50 cabin makers in our old factory who were second and third generation, like, they're all dead now and their sons are not cabin makers. So, it's dying out, like, there's no two-ways about it. So the guys that I have here, I had to teach and that's why I often go for older guys who still have some of those skills.

And ya, I mean it's very hard, but also at the same time, they don't need the skills that their ancestors had anymore. Because we're using machines for a lot of that stuff. Like, it used to be really hard just to cut something on a basic saw, whereas now, I've got a CNC saw which will cut it perfectly and there's not going to be any skill involved in putting in a tiny piece pass the saw blade without cutting your fingers off. Like that's different now, so. There is less skill around because there is less skill required. That's not to say that you have to have no skills, like, you still need skills, like, a lot of them and...

But ya, I don't know where it's going. I mean, I don't have a son, who would carry on with this if I died, like, no-one. So... ya, but maybe someone else will do it, you know. And... probably someone will. I mean eventually the market will dictate, like, 'hey, no-one is making solid wood furniture since James died and Pierre Cronje and like, a few other guys died. There's a gap in the market, like, someone figure out how to do this'. And then maybe someone will teach themselves like, on YouTube, and... start from scratch. So, you know, you can't really worry about that kind of thing. You know, uhm, what's it... "Necessity is the mother of invention", you know, you just make a plan. So maybe they'll do it differently, I don't know, maybe someone from Italy will come over here and start a business. There there's plenty of people that know what they do, so.

## **11. In your opinion, what role does artisanal product design play in the local and global industry of product design?**

Another very broad question.

### **Sorry? Broad?**

Another very broad question, ya. Local and global? I mean, what do you mean?

### **So, what's the value of artisanal product design, why is it important?**

I don't know, why don't you tell me that?

**Well I'm asking everyone's opinions, but...**

Well what's your opinion? I don't know. What is their value?

**I think they're important to, obviously as we've said, or as we're realising that the skills are dying, it's fading away. So at least there's some people left to actually teach people these skills to do the work. And... it's also, I mean it's... there are certain values kind of captured in the practice of artisanal product design against...**

What like, it's an honourable thing to do?

**Ya, against mass manufacturing where, ya, products are being copied left, right and centre and then just mass manufactured, so it's like...**

That is true.

**Ya, it's... it is very broad, I know it's, ya.**

Well, I mean making furniture is very satisfying and very rewarding and it does feel like quite an honest living, like to be honest, like, I work pretty hard with my hands a lot of the time, I'm often dusty and saw dusty and I'm going to go down into the workshop right now and go and make a bench for a underprivileged school and... design a bench, sorry, which I'm then going to make a few of out of old packaging materials that have been donated. And ya, you know, you work hard, you get home at the end of the day, you wash the sawdust out of your hair and you have a good sleep, because you're actually buggered. So it's quite an honest living and it's very rewarding to make beautiful things that last also, and therefore also even more rewarding when people actually say 'we love that and we want to buy it', and you're like 'phew'. And ya, it's a dying art, but it's alive here.

So... ya. Globally, I don't know, they've got their own issues, I mean McDonalds... I suppose running, you can also say that running like, one of, a huge business like McDonalds is kind of an art form as well, you know, it's just different. So stuff evolves and, you know, just like when the evolution... stuff that was superfluous died out, you know, the same will happen with everything. So provided that it doesn't become superfluous, it will continue to live, but it will probably evolve and change. I mean it already has. Like if my dad was alive and could see my factory here and what we do with like, 13 people... I think we make more furniture than they made with 60 people, and we make it better. Like, there's no two-ways about it, like the quality is better and we make more of it. And, he'll be blown away. You know, but like in the same time if we went back a hundred years and showed someone what he was doing then, they'd also be blown away, so it's like progress, I suppose.

## **Semi-structured interview transcription**

**Business name:** Bofred (Carla Erasmus)

**Date:** 20/08/2019

**Code:** BF1

### **1. Tell me a bit more about how you got started in the industry.**

So, the company is run by two female directors; Christa Botha and Carla Erasmus, and we started in August 2015. Both self-taught product designers, we both have a Fine Arts background, history of Fine Art. I've got a honours in Fine Art at the University of Pretoria, and Christa studied at the University of New Zealand... in New Zealand, I don't know which university. We go together as friends and decided to start the company by bringing a fresh perspective to design. So both being practicing artists, we felt that art per say is not the only medium that you can make sales from, or sculpture or fine art per say as we know the term. And we would like to have made it into little bit more of a commercial product, or a commercial output, at least. And we thought that artisanal product designs would be a good sellable item without being too specific in a category of art. So it's a functional item, but it's still a little bit left off-centre as a typical classical product design.

### **2. Tell me about your design process, so the different steps or the stages in your process.**

Per product?

#### **Just in general I would say.**

Okay so we're very strict in our execution, actually. Christa and I both being fine artists we go from concept to execution, so we don't necessarily just decide that we want a mirror or a chair or a couch. We formalise a concept, give the concept a theme, decide what the concept needs to entail, the formality behind... where the influences are from. So, the previous collection I can give you as an example. The previous collection called the clay collection was a combination of bringing handmade and artisanal artists and ourselves to get together to create functional products. So the clay collection is... the essence of it is being handmade, being unique, being deformed slightly, not one product looks exactly like the previous one, but it is. And the stages of that process is deciding how many products we want in the collection, and then each one telling a story, so that the shapes and the forms and the structures all coherently tell the same narrative in a way. So to answer your question: what is the processes, we start at a concept, we pull that concept right through to make sure that we stay true to the concept form start to finish. We really try not to sway from the original concept because then we just give in to trends, or you just give in to mainstream, or what you see around you all the time. So we really try and stay away from what's already/readily available, try and offer a unique product, and to try and offer a unique point of view. And then it's the process of prototyping, sampling, manufacturing. And... at the moment we've only launched three... we've only launched two big collections and we're



almost done with our third. It takes about eight months from start to finish. This one is taking a little bit longer, eight to nine months.

### **3. What would you say is your role in each of these kind of different steps of the process?**

What is my role?

#### **Ja. Or the two of you basically.**

So the roles do get split. So, Christa Botha is in Oman, in Muscat, and I'm here in Cape Town. So we have naturally split our roles in one being more administrative and long-term, and the other one being more operational and short-term. So Christa has a bigger, broader overview of the company and does all the long-term projections, long-term planning, long-term understanding of what we need to do and the deadlines we need to meet. And I do more of a short-term, client-based, get-things-done, operational role in the company. But we both play equal parts in the design, both play equal parts in communication of the outcome of the product, projects, building relationships with clients. So it's very 'even-steven', it's very 50/50. But we naturally fell into different roles. So where I would do hand sketches of the designs, because that comes naturally to me, Christa falls automatically in more of a Sketch-up, technical point of view, and she'll figure out the technical bits of something. I'd rather look at the overall look and feel of what we want. And her technical brain and my 'wishy-washy' brain sometimes just collides and then we come up with the right thing. So we've met one another in partnership with friendship, but the relationship works really well because whatever I'm not really strong in, she picks up, and vice versa.

### **4. What would you say are the main manufacturing processes that you use in your process, in general?**

So, do you mean medium?

#### **Ja, or then also to actually execute, to make the products.**

Bofred is very... our business model is very different from the other designers that you've mentioned. Very different from Laurie, Louw, James Mudge - they're all in-house. So we don't do anything in-house, we only design in-house, and we work with about 20-25 suppliers, so it's a lot of operational work. So what we do, we dream up what we want, we design exactly what we want, and then we try and figure out how, then we try and find a supplier. We do come to crossroads where we've realised that we don't have that kind of supplier, or that kind of skill, or master skill, in South Africa, unfortunately. Then you have to dumb-down the design ever so slightly, which I've realised is unfortunately the fate of the manufacturing suppliers in Cape Town. So our manufacturing is from steel to wood to ceramics to paint to soft furnishing to marble to granite to mirror to... it's non-stop. So it's different factories, different relationships. And then each supplier produces either one leg of the product, or solely manufactures the product. Something like our Arch Table Lamp, which was maybe a 6-month design process is finally put together in three steps, four steps actually. One is the casting of it, which happens at a big clay casting studio. Secondly is the

finishing by the artist who made the original master mould, so she does all the unique finishing. Then it goes to a wiring company, and then it has to be finished off by a finishing company. So, one product sometimes has four to five suppliers. And other products that are easier has one or two suppliers, but one manufacturer, so it depends. But it is quite... it's a lot more intricate than our piers, if you want to call it that.

#### **5. How would you say do you go about actually calculating what you charge for a product with the time that you invested in it?**

So, we work with... we try and work with fixed margins. So we try and aim to get the fixed margin. But we've also come to realise we also live in South Africa and we're going through a massive, well financial dilemma at the moment. So we have to cut costs here and there and then also stay in line with what everyone else is supplying and what the retail prices are on those products. So we dream big, we manufacture, we don't cut corners, we try and make whatever we want it to look like in the end, and then sometimes we give options on a material that is maybe not as expensive. Almost like the show-off and then its more affordable friend kind of scenario. And the only way to figure out cost is to... well it's market research firstly, meeting a margin, and then just covering the basic cost of production. But time... time is not always relevant, because we work full-time in Bofred. So it's more of a costing from a cost point of view than spending time as a designer, putting time into it. Because like I said, we spend 8, 9, 10 months, we will never be... we will never get that money back, but it's our baby so we don't mind.

#### **6. Tell me about your views on design, so looking at your philosophies or your ethos.**

Our philosophy for Bofred is very much creating artisanal products, which sounds very basic, but sculptural, functional items that become works of art in the home. Maybe things that you don't really need, stuff that doesn't really make sense, but you have to have it. And it's... we like to work with... it's very simplistic, minimalistic design actually. Even though there's a lot of hard work and technicality into it, if you look at it in a boarder feel, it becomes very sculptural, most of our products become very sculptural - if it's a light or a chair or a bench or a mirror - it all becomes sculptures in a way. So, that's a tricky question... our ethos, our... is ya, creating works of art that become collectors items in people's homes.

#### **7. What personal beliefs and principles would you say are brought through in your work?**

Not to copy, never ever to copy. So even if we get close to something looking similar, we'll scratch it and start again. We've come to a point where we've designed completely so freely in our own heads, and then we see extensive research to see where it is, or where we've seen something similar. And if it's too close to something else we'll try and scratch it and either start again or tweak it completely. So very, very important for us, especially in a very small South African market. There's too many people copying one another, too many people looking at the same Instagram and Pinterest profiles, you can see it a mile away when

someone didn't really start at a core, or a good core concept, you can see when it's taken from the back end and just tweaked to suit the brand. So we very, very strongly feel that you have to start from the ground up and work up. That's why we've got every single hand sketch we've ever made for every product in a file. Because we want someone in ten years' time to come to us and say 'okay, so where did you start?' and I can show them exactly which hand sketch we've started with, why, what is the concept, where did it come from. That it's never based on this year or this trend or this colour; that it really comes from a real place.

**8. And then like I've said I've been working with this notion of what I call artisanal product design. So basically where products are produced mostly by hand, but also with the help of hand-tools and machines. Where the knowledge of... where the designer basically has knowledge of the entire process, and where possible they are actually involved in the process, where value is supported and dependent on the kind of traditional craftsmanship techniques, and then when more quantities are produced of a specific design they're actually not the same, although it's the same product, but never exactly the same. And then if not actively participating in production, the designer specialise in research, market negotiations, or product design conception. So, would you describe your work as similar to this definition that I created?**

Your definition is spot on, but I'll mention it again, that we are part of the production and manufacturing process 100% of the way, but we don't produce in-house. So nothing is just left to a manufacturer or production co-ordinator to do whatever they want - every single detail is obviously designed by us and executed by us. Even though I don't sit and stitch the tubular shapes of my Moore Bench, is every millimetre always measured out and we give it to a master crafter. So the process of finding master craftsmanship is actually the research part, and then keeping a hawk eye on production; checking in as often as we can, doing a lot of site visits, a lot of factory visits. So yes, we are not making hands-on anything, apart from some artworks, but the design process is the making part. And the handmade element, like I mentioned, every piece comes out differently. Especially with handcrafted products like our lights, where it's a ceramic base and it's an aluminium, modern top. The base, it's shape changes because it's clay and it's handmade and every time you fire it, it might come out a millimetre smaller or bigger. And I think clients like that, that's why they come to Bofred, because it's not just a factory-made product. You can see there's love and detailing in it.

**9. What would you say is your view on artisanal product design in comparison to your more mass-produced, industrialised products?**

I think we have a very small part to play as artisanal designers and it's a very small market to fill. It's a market that makes me happy and it's a course of design that I would always choose above anything else. But we can't way away from mass production either. So I need mass production if I get an order of a hundred of a unit of something, if you think about it. I need a lamp holder and I need aluminium tubes and I need all of these things that come probably in from where ever. So I'm calling myself a local designer - which I am, which we are - and everything is made in Cape Town, actually not even just South Africa, everything is made in Cape Town because we have to keep an eye on it. But you need the mass production to create the handmade in a way. And moving forward and moving with technology is also something that we should not fight against but kind of work with. I'm not sure what that

overlap would mean for us, because we don't mass produce anything in a hundred. We do small production lines, we do small boutique projects, it doesn't really make a difference if I make four or 400. For me now, I can honestly say that it needs to have exactly the same quality. It will just take longer - I'll just need six months and not six weeks. But each product will then also look very different from the other, but not really, they'll all look the same. But because everything is handmade, they work as a collection, but it's nice that they're not identical. But it's also, the material is different, nothing is really so rigid and so specific. Especially like our new products that we're launching, you haven't seen. It's sandstone and it's wood and it's hand-carved, so each arch that will be hand-carved will be identical, but it won't. And I need machinery to do that as well; you can't sit and do ten tables and hand-carve them because no-one is going to pay R40 000. So I need technology to make the handmade.

**10. What are your thoughts on artisanal product design in Cape Town, in comparison to more of a global view, so in comparison to the global market.**

I think we have a very long way to go and the biggest issue and crutch I think South Africans have, is I think we steal. We have so much to tap into, we have so much information to work from - it doesn't have to be African - but we have so much local inspiration to draw from but still South African artisanal designers, and it's few and far between - it's a very small group, and even the bigger... ja, a lot of South African designers - be it fashion, be it furniture design, be it whatever - is tapping into international trends a lot. And you can see it and it's annoying. And I think we all fall into that gap every now and again, because you have to stay with the times and you have to make something that kind of looks like what's on everyone's iPhone's at the moment...

What's your question again?

**So how do you think it compares to the global market, the artisanal product design in South Africa or Cape Town.**

It's good, and I'm very proud of what South Africans are putting out there. But we draw inspiration from the international market, but the international market... I'm amazed by what they can produce. And I think part of it also is what they have to their disposal, if that makes sense. Especially the natural materials; there's a lot of natural materials we would like to work with here but we don't have the master crafters to work with it, so that is a bit of a wall. And, ya, I don't know. We look at international designers every single day and I'm amazed with what they come up with, it's very inspiring at the moment, there's amazing stuff happening. And South Africans I think just need to take a step back and just keep it at home, and not copy. Copy, copy is the biggest thing I've got an issue with.

**11. Would you say there are certain principles that unite artisanal product designers? So things that they all have in common.**

In South Africa?

**Ja.**

Who are the other artisanal designers?

**That I used in my study?**

Ja maybe, if I have to find a link. I'm trying to think what would the link be. We all use the same suppliers.

**Or just principles and perceptions, so do they have the same... how do they think the same, or the same principles about designing.**

I don't know. I would assume that other artisanal designers... because the names that you've mentioned they also... they do also do commercial design, and multiples, and not only artisanal design, if that makes sense? So I think they practice the same principle of being very original. I think the designers that you've mentioned do beautiful original work, and put a lot of emphasis on craftsmanship. So I think craftsmanship and quality is what we all need to strive for. Because mass production sometimes leaves you a bit empty, that things will break in a year or two, and artisanal designers need to lay the foundation of making air looms; it needs to last a lifetime, and the next lifetime; and the next lifetime. And not mass production that can break easily. Because you do pay a price; we don't sell our items for the big commercial company prices, we can't compare them, we can't mass produce the way they do. So we ask a higher price, but then it needs to have a higher quality. So I think quality.

**12. How would you describe your experience of working as an artisanal product designer in a global age of mass manufacturing?**

It's daunting. It's absolutely daunting. Because some mornings we wake up and we go 'what on earth are we doing?'. Because the market is slow, and the projects are small, and the budgets are limited, and the discounts are big, and at the end of the day it would be easier. But the impact that I have in creating what we want; we're very selfish designers, we make whatever we feel like. Not to feed any market, we don't feed anyone except our clients that choose to buy from us. So ya... it's quite a quite a daunting situation, but I wouldn't change it. I wouldn't change the way I design and the way we produce to mass production.

**13. What are some of the challenges that you've experienced in the industry?**

The biggest challenges that we experience is... it's quite blunt to say this, but manufacturing. Manufacturing is quite tricky in this country, but everyone will say that. If you have an outside supplier, which all of our suppliers are - external, the quality and the workmanship is sometimes lacking. And we are very, very strict with quality and execution. So our biggest issues are things that are not the way we wanted it to be... the outcome to be, and then going back and forth. Working with someone, changing suppliers, changing processes, changing the way we work to adapt to manufacturing processes in our country. Sometimes too slow, lack of quality... And it's definitely not like that on an international platform. So that - working with local supply sometimes is very tricky. We have an amazing database of people we work with, and we love working with. But it is an uphill battle most days.

#### **14. And then some of the opportunities or benefits that you've experienced?**

Benefits would be collaboration. So we've done some really nice collaborations. And it's very... it can be very natural to us. We like working with other creatives because being two creatives, and self-taught, and trying to figure out what we want and what we want to produce, putting another creative head in the mix is very beneficial. So we've never collaborated with another product designer, but we have collaborated with other artists. So ceramic artists and sculptural artists, and we have normal fine artists that we work with. So I think that's the best part - building relationships and collaborating with other creatives is what I look forward to, and holding onto those relationships. And having more, to build more in in the future. That's quite exciting, I think working together with other artists and designers is definitely the way of the future. Because number one it cuts costs, which is very practical. And it puts talents together, it makes a bundle of information, it makes things new and fresh and just... change basically.

#### **15. How do you think these challenges and opportunities compare to the global market?**

I don't know the global market that well to be able to do that comparison. But like I said I think the ease of manufacturing in a global platform, I think is easier than South Africa. Your avenues are just... it's a larger pool to pull from. That if you want limestone, you can go and fetch it. You can get it from the supplier, it's right there. If you're looking for a very specific... I don't know, there's so many examples... fabric, then it's right there. Where we have to import most of it, obviously. And it's just the quality, I don't think it's the same. I don't think we can push our limits as far. I look at some designers on an international platform and I'm like 'I have no idea how you did that.' I have no idea even where to start Googling who can do that for me. Sometimes it's, ja... walking into a wall, basically, with how to execute our designs and our bigger dreams of what we want to create. Because there's things that we really, really want to create, but I don't know how yet. But it's pending designs and pending processes.

#### **16. How do you think can the market and the industry support, or actually improve their support towards local artisanal product designers?**

How can?

**The industry and market improve their support towards artisanal product designers.**

The creative industry?

**Ja, so I would say...**

Commercial support.

**Ja, so commercial support, but then also the buying market.**

So we've got trade shows which are working in our favour and it's beneficial. So I think the only... a very good example is someone like Tracy-Lee Lynch that does the Nandos. She

dreams up concepts and instead of importing all the products, or mass producing all the products, and copying stuff that someone's seen in a magazine, they commission. And they commission local artists and artisans to create something to create a bigger concept and a bigger picture. And that's very African, and that's very community-based, and I like that. So someone like her has created a great platform for supporting the market. And then, lucky for us we're in South Africa, but we're also in the bigger picture of Africa and we're doing a lot of project, or the promise of projects, of African development. And there's a lot of South Africans, businesses, interior designers, procurement agencies, that are working on projects and then including South African designers more and more, and not only importing from Italy and where ever. So I think the South African commercial market is adapting and supporting local instead of only buying in bulk, and buying imports, and buying cheap. So it's more of a long-term investment. And I think they're investing in artisanal designers like they would invest in art in a way.

**17. What are your thoughts on the sustainable development of artisanal product design? So in comparison to, again, mass-produced products. So looking at the sustainability of the products.**

I think the products that we... the influence that we have and the... what we need to... we NEED to create sustainable products, that's our mission, we should be doing that. But I feel like a complete cop out saying that because what we do is we use material and it's... I don't know how far the sustainability really impacts. Ja, it's a bit of a tricky one. We're sustainable on your packaging, if that makes any difference, if that makes any impact. But it's tough, because none of our products can really... are we talking recyclable sustainability?

**So I would say if you look at environmental, social, economical, so...**

Yes, I don't know.

**So under environmental it would be recycling, or the actual durability of the products...**

Ja, so all the products need to be life-long durability, so it's not like you have to replace it in two years. So the sustainability is there, in the design. So unless you drop my lamp, it shouldn't break. Unless you drop my mirror, it shouldn't break. It might age, or get some character, or get a stain or whatever, but that's normal. The sustainability therefore is it needs to last you a lifetime. And then sustainability... what we're trying to incorporate is in our packaging. So our packaging is 100% recyclable and we re-use our packaging. Cape Town deliveries, we collect the packaging again, or we ask the clients to deliver back to us. We use minimum wrapping and we pay more for courier if that makes sense. Because the handling is more delicate, but then there's less of a footprint. But that's something that's really tricky. And we can't move away from bubble wrap, for some reason there's... unfortunately plastic is still in our day-to-day activity. So we recycle it, we recycle the products that are here, and we recycle packaging. And then socially, we have no impact, I think. We're two women running a very selfish business and we don't employ anyone. We employ factories, and we employ small businesses, and we employ small artists, and commission the small guys. I won't say we avoid big corporate companies... or not corporate. We don't avoid big production companies, but we prefer to work with smaller

companies that are still growing, because we can make them money and they can make us money, and it's an exchange in a way. If I just ask a massive manufacturer just to produce, then there's no relationship, there's no trust, there no quality, there's no... there's nothing, and I just become a number in the system. And unfortunately for some products we have to do that, if it's a small hook or a small something, that's just how it is. But sustainability in a way is just supporting South African markets.

**18. In your opinion what role does artisanal product design play in the local and the global industry of product design? So what is the actual role of these designers?**

I think the role of artisanal product designers needs to be just to shape creativity, to shape perception of what something should look like, or must look like, or have looked like before, and changing it ever so slightly. It doesn't always have to be the same, it doesn't have to be cookie-cutter... so the role we need to play is... it sounds very serious because we don't take ourselves so seriously actually. But the role that we need to play is just change perceptions, and that things don't always have to be perfect in a way; it can be handmade, and it can be different, and it can be less mainstream.

**19. Moving more towards gender in the industry: what is your view, and experience of, working as female designers in the industry, specifically in Cape Town?**

Working as two female designers, it has a benefit here and there... I actually can't think of one, to be honest, it's quite tricky. Especially working, like I mentioned, because we outsource in a very male-dominated supply chain. Is that we don't always get taken so seriously the way we want to, so we start off... we do most of our communication on email, especially since Christa and I are separate, so that we're both communicating to one person. Because if I pick up the phone, it's highly likely that if they hear a woman's voice on the phone they will think I'm the secretary, or the PA, or the something-something, so I do keep it quite black-and-white and on email so that I do get taken seriously. But I don't think there's a... I don't really think there's a divide or a discrimination, I haven't felt... well if I have, which I have on one or two occasions, then I just remove myself from the situation, because then they don't get my business. But I haven't felt a massive discrimination, I think we all work quite well together. But it is male-dominated, especially the products that we design... I don't know of one female-head of one production company... no. It's boys, it's a lot of boy bosses. So it is nice, I do feel very proud of being a female business owner and doing all the hands-on work, the two of us are managing it, I feel very proud to be able to do that. And I'd like to employ more females in the future, definitely, and to grow our business.

So you wouldn't say there's actually a massive comparison if you compare, or difference between male and female owners.

Owners... I'm having a really tough time to think of other artisanal product design, female business owners and designers. I can think of lots of product designers, I can think of lots of textile designers, and business owners. There's a lot of beautiful female entrepreneurs, but product design, or furniture designers... I actually... in Cape Town very few. In Joburg there's



a lot. There's Monique Vee, there's... oh Christine Jacobs is local... there's Mash.T, there's a lot of African, nice... black African female influencers... ja, but there's not a lot.

**20. And then how would you say... do you think that it differs quite a lot to the international market - the ratio of male and female?**

Hmmm... I would think it's quite equal. If I had to think of the small little bubble of people that we follow and that we draw inspiration from, and that we like to be inspired by... yes, it's male-dominated definitely, but there is a balance. I think we maybe look for more female, I think we try and find more female inspiration because we are one. So we like to draw from what other women draw from. So in our personal point of view, I think if you really be fair it is equal, there's no reason it shouldn't be anymore, actually. It's a fair playing field.

**Appendix H:**  
**Artisanal designers' research exercise questions**

## Artisanal designers research exercise questions

Company name:

Your name:

Date:

Time:

1. Which 5 words would you use to describe the type of work you do; the practice you are working in?

2. What are the different steps of the general design process used? Feel free to use numbers and/or arrows where needed.

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved are you personally with each of these process steps? Please provide a rating for each step.

4. On average, what percentage of your work is done:

- By hand alone = %
- By machine alone = %
- By hand, with the help of hand-tools = %

5. Please complete a SWOT analysis of your experience of your type of practice:

Strengths (internal):

Weaknesses (internal):

Opportunities (external):

Threats (external):

**Appendix I:**  
**Research exercise card quotes**



"As we get more rootless,  
we crave more to discover  
our roots. Crafts, in many ways  
connect us to our roots."  
Amrita Panda



"You can't use up creativity.  
The more you use, the more  
you have."  
Maya Angelou



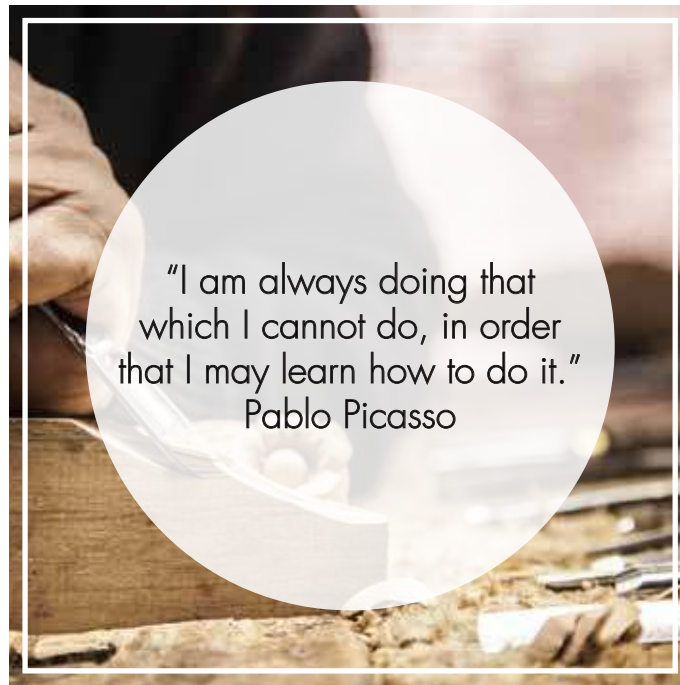
"Curiosity about life  
in all its aspects, I think,  
is still the secret of great  
creative people."  
Leo Burnett



"We dream,  
we risk,  
we create."  
Erwin Raphael McManus



"Design creates culture.  
Culture shapes values.  
Values determine the future."  
Robert L. Peters



"I am always doing that  
which I cannot do, in order  
that I may learn how to do it."  
Pablo Picasso



"If you do it right,  
it will last forever."  
Massimo Vignelli



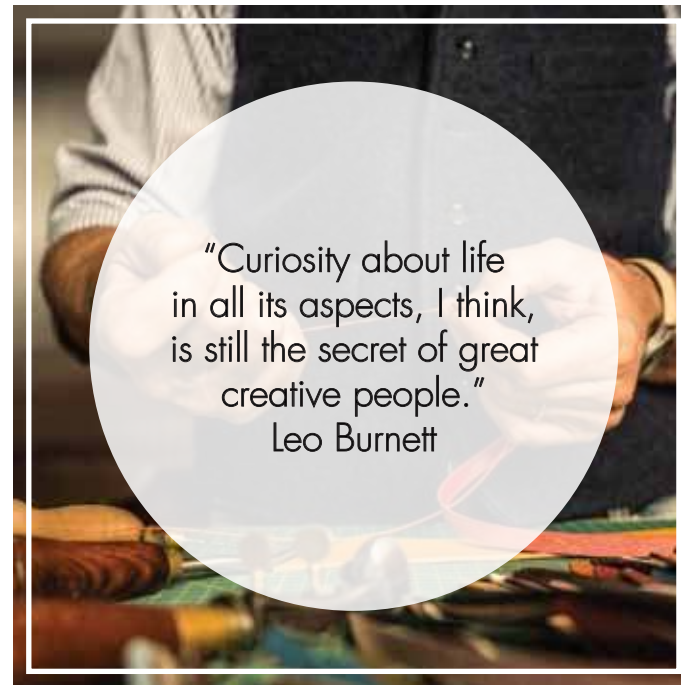
"Make it simple,  
but significant."  
Don Draper



"As we get more rootless,  
we crave more to discover  
our roots. Crafts, in many ways  
connect us to our roots."  
Amrita Panda



"You can't use up creativity.  
The more you use, the more  
you have."  
Maya Angelou



"Curiosity about life  
in all its aspects, I think,  
is still the secret of great  
creative people."  
Leo Burnett



"We dream,  
we risk,  
we create."  
Erwin Raphael McManus

**Appendix J:**  
**Artisanal designers' research exercise transcriptions**

## **Research exercise booklet transcription**

**Business name:** Wiid Design

**Date:** 06/04/2018

**Code:** WD2

### **1. Which 5 words would you use to describe the type of work you do; the practice you are working in?**

Creative

Marketing

Management

Originality

Practical

(Manufacturing)

### **2. What are the different steps of the general design process used? Feel free to use numbers and/or arrows where needed.**

- research
- drawings/concepts
- refinement of chosen concepts
- prototyping
- final manufacturing
- marketing
- feedback from clients/market
- sales

### **3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved are you personally with each of these process steps? Please provide a rating for each step.**

- research: 8/10
- drawings/concepts: 8/10
- refinement of chosen concepts: 10/10
- prototyping: 10/10
- final manufacturing: 10/10
- marketing: 10/10
- feedback from clients/market: 10/10
- sales: 7/10

### **4. On average, what percentage of your work is done:**

By hand alone = 30%

By machine alone = 5%

By hand, with the help of hand-tools = 65%

### **5. Please complete a SWOT analysis of your experience of your type of practice:**

#### **Strengths:**

- commissions on quality

- originality/unique mindset
- exclusive agreements with suppliers (some suppliers) - cork
- create new markets/opportunities
- South African/ Cape Town based - creates an edge regarding international markets
- Collaboration with designers or manufacturers

**Weaknesses:**

- Difficult to penetrate international markets
- Takes time to build a desirable & reliable brand
- Product development is very expensive
- Not all products/designs are successful
- Constant pressure to create new products or product ranges

**Opportunities:**

- International retail outlets & collaborations with international brands
- Multiple business opportunities if products are original and unique
- Growing the industry locally via showcasing new products & exhibiting new & exciting work
- Employment of more staff therefore increasing turnover/ or specialising in bespoke pieces

**Threats:**

- Companies or brands developing similar pieces - focussing on handmade aesthetics
- Not being able to feed the demand, due to lead times required to manufacture certain pieces
- Manufacturers moving on and closing their companies - therefore breaking the bond between designer & manufacturer



## **Research exercise booklet transcription**

**Business name:** Louw Roets Design

**Date:** 27/02/2018

**Code:** LR2

### **1. Which 5 words would you use to describe the type of work you do; the practice you are working in?**

Design oriented

Traditional

Contemporary

Experimental

Exciting

### **2. What are the different steps of the general design process used? Feel free to use numbers and/or arrows where needed.**

1. Flash of inspiration

2. Rough sketches

3. Research

4. Sketch & Refine

5. CAD/prototype

6. Test

7. Manufacture

### **3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved are you personally with each of these process steps? Please provide a rating for each step.**

10 for all.

### **4. On average, what percentage of your work is done:**

By hand alone = 20%

By machine alone = 5%

By hand, with the help of hand-tools = 75%

### **5. Please complete a SWOT analysis of your experience of your type of practice:**

#### **Strengths:**

- Design oriented
- Small, can easily adapt
- Range of skills
- Own manufacturing & quality control
- Good location of showroom & factory

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Not competitive on price
- Small working capital
- Small product offering
- Short staffed due to shortage of skilled labour

**Opportunities:**

- Nando's (wholesale orders)
- CBI (international exposure)
- New showroom (can go into retail)
- Growing tourism sector in Africa

**Threats:**

- Larger competitors manufacturing capabilities
- Interior designers & other designers copying your ideas, have it made cheaper

## **Research exercise booklet transcription**

**Business name:** James Mudge Furniture Studio

**Date:** 10/04/2018

**Code:** JM2

### **1. Which 5 words would you use to describe the type of work you do? So the type of practice you are in. So the specific practice you are working in.**

Wood, design, passion, industry

And then the specific practice, like... in product design, so the specific... maybe artisanal or...

I don't want to lead you to specific words, but...

Ya, artisanal. Exactly, ya.

### **2. What are the different steps of your general design process, so just like bullet points.**

So it would be concept, design, prototype, like, make, finished product.

### **3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved would you say you are personally with each of these steps?**

10

10 with all of them?

Ya

### **4. On average, what percentage of the work is done by hand only, by machine only, and then by hand with the help of hand-tools?**

I mean, I'd say it's all a combination; machine and hand... machine and hand, hand and machine. Because you know, like you can't... they're not automatic machines. So you need to guide it through the process. So you are using it, it's not doing it, you are using it to do what you want to do. So it's all a combination.

**Okay, so would you say it's about like 50/50 or...**

Well, I mean what is a tool, is a chisel a tool? Yes, so you know... everything, we use tools for everything. Like, that's what separates us from apes, or no, even apes use tools so... they're just expensive tools. So we use tools for everything, I mean there's absolutely... a tape measure is a tool, a computer is a tool, a car is a tool, I mean it's all tools, we use tools for absolutely everything in our lives and so... But you know, it needs a human to use the tools, it needs hand. So I don't know, 50/50. Ya, I'd say.

### **5. If you had to do like a SWOT analysis of your practice, so that's like the strengths, weaknesses, which are internal and then opportunities and threats, which are external. Just like bullet points though.**

Strength and weaknesses? Like, what do you mean?

**Of your company, like your experience of your practice, what you do. What has been kind of the good and the bad.**

I don't really have any bad. I mean, I've made it to be... I've created this business to be exactly what I want, you know, so... It's so sort of... it's a replica of myself in a way, like just scaled up that involves other people. I enjoy all the aspects of it, anything that I didn't enjoy, I

stopped doing. So I just cut it out of the business eventually, and slowly but surely. So you know, it's kind of... you need a bit of... I mean obviously I don't enjoy everything as much as other things, but you know, you need that balance anyway. You can't just only do the good stuff, like, the bad stuff is part of the good stuff, so I don't look at it as bad ever.

**Okay. And then the opportunities and the threats, which are more... coming from the outside.**

Opportunities and?

**Threats.**

Threats.

**Ya.**

Threats?

**Ya, so many in comparison to mass produced things, or...**

Opportunities and threats...

**Ya, so what kind of helps your business and what puts it at a risk.**

I don't really know how to answer that. I mean anything is an opportunity really, you know. And threats, I don't know. Like, we are always threatened in one way or another on our lives. You know, what like... but there's normally a solution if you try hard enough. So... I don't know, like...

**Ya and then maybe for... if you look at it from an artisanal kind of way, what would you say... like the bigger picture, what puts it at risk maybe...**

At risk of what?

**At risk of...**

Of not existing at all?

**Ya. Business going forward, or... things getting taken over, mass produced...**

I don't know, some businesses succeed, others don't, some succeed for 60 years and then fail. You know it's normally if there's a change of ownership or a son takes over, stuff dies because it maybe doesn't have that original spark of passion, or... You know, you'll see a lot of old businesses, especially in furniture, that have... that were... when I was growing up, that were really like a big deal, like the biggest guys in Cape Town, like... there's a place called Meyer and Ferreira that was always a huge company with like hundreds of people working there and like, apparently now it's just a few guys working in the corner, like in a big empty workshop. You know that workshop is probably paid for, they don't really have any real overheads anymore, but still the business isn't succeeding and why? I don't know, I think the son took over and maybe he didn't have the same vision as his father or he didn't... you know, like, I suppose if you have your own business you appreciate every single client that comes along and you know how hard it was to start the business and you never let anything slip. You never let a client go that's unhappy, like, you make sure, like, that you're a 100% dedicated because you know how hard it was to start, that you never ever let anything slip. And unless you appreciate that from the beginning, like no-one else is going to appreciate that as much as you. That's why, as the boss, I'm the most focussed out of everyone. I've also got the most at stake, you know. So maybe other people don't appreciate that as much, and that's normally what happens when businesses fail. So, ya. Threat of complacency I suppose would be the most dangerous.

## **Research exercise booklet transcription**

**Business name:** Bofred (Carla Erasmus)

**Date:** 20/08/2019

**Code:** BF2

**1. Which 5 words would you use to describe the type of work you do; the practice you are working in?**

Artisanal

Bespoke

Collectors

Design

Unique

**2. What are the different steps of the general design process used? Feel free to use numbers and/or arrows where needed.**

1. Concept

2. Drawing

3. Curation

4. Visualisation

5. Elimination

6. Simplification

7. Manufacturing

8. Prototyping

9. Sampling

10. Production

11. Quality control

**3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved are you personally with each of these process steps? Please provide a rating for each step.**

10 on all steps. Our business is solely run by 2 directors. Every step of the business is internal.

**4. On average, what percentage of your work is done:**

By hand alone = 50%

By machine alone = 50%

By hand, with the help of hand-tools = 50%

Our manufacturing is hand and machine. Hand built of hand assembly. I would say mostly hand.

**5. Please complete a SWOT analysis of your experience of your type of practice:**

**Strengths:**

- Internal designers (directors), curators
- Photography
- Strong concept driven collections

**Weaknesses:**

- Technical skills we outsource
- Time
- Team
- Venture capital

**Opportunities:**

- Export opportunities

**Threats:**

- Capital & cashflow for business growth
- Maker & sales strain and recessions
- Mass imports capping local design

**Appendix K:**  
**Employees' research exercise questions**

## Employees research exercise questions

Company name:

Your name:

Date:

Time:

1. What is your job position in the company?
2. How long have you been working in this position?
3. What are your daily work responsibilities?
4. How/where did you learn the skills to do this work?
5. How do you feel about your work for the day ahead? Please explain briefly.

1. Which materials will you be working with today?
2. What are the benefits of using these materials?
3. What challenges do you experience with the materials that you use?

1. What manufacturing processes will you be using today?
2. What are the benefits of using these manufacturing processes?
3. What challenges do you experience with the manufacturing processes that you use?

1. Which 5 words would you use to describe the type of work you do?
2. What do you enjoy about the work you do?
3. What challenges do you experience with the work you do?

1. On what product/s did you work today?
2. What would you say makes the product/s you are busy making unique or different?
3. Do you think the skills you use are unique in the local and global industry? Please explain.

1. What percentage of your day's work would you say was done:

- By hand alone = %
- By machine alone = %
- By hand, with the help of hand-tools = %

2. What are the different steps of the general design process used? Feel free to use numbers and/or arrows where needed.

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved are you personally with each of these process steps? Please provide a rating for each step.