

(inside)

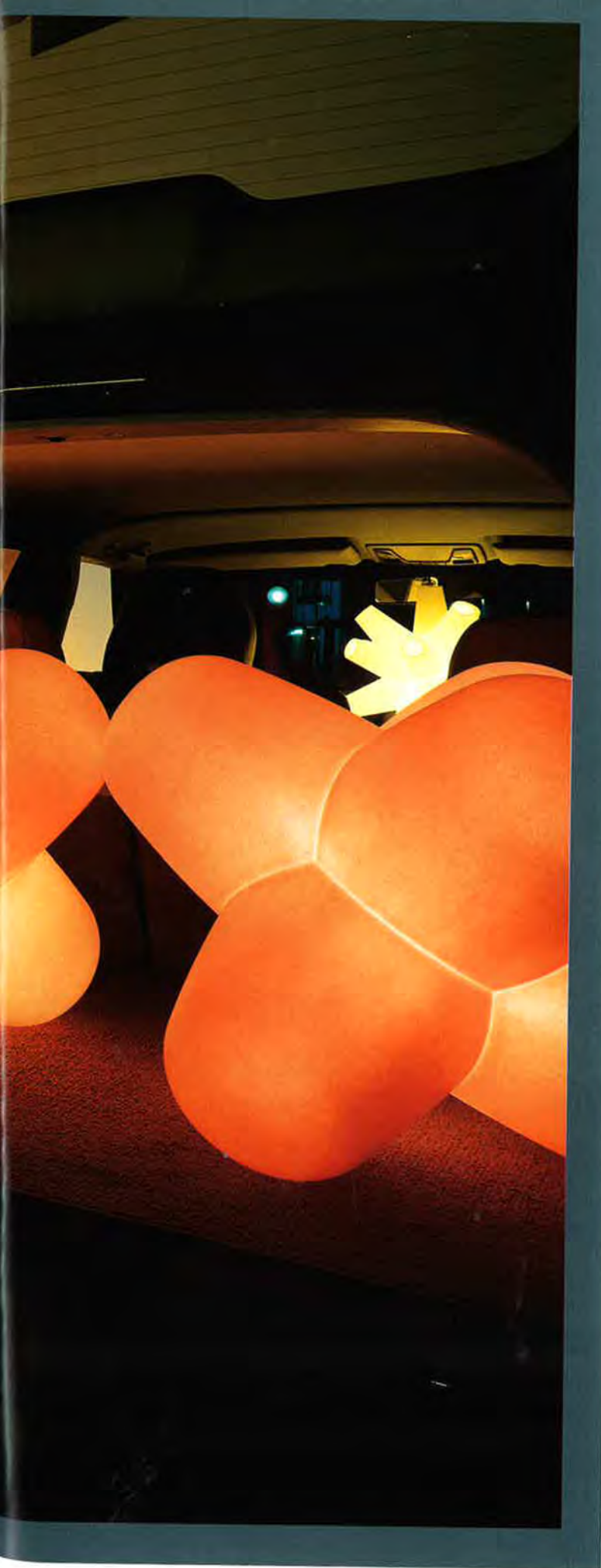
interior review



INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / STYLE







TEXT LUCY DENHAM PHOTOGRAPHY ROSS HONEYSET AND RUSSELL PELL

VOLVO GALLERY



THE SLEEK WHITE LINES AND HIGH TECH
FUNCTION OF **LANDINI ASSOCIATES**
VOLVO GALLERY CHALLENGE THE RICHLY
COLOURED ORGANIC SHAPES
OF TOM DIXON'S EUROLOUNGE PLASTIC
TO PERFORM IN SYMPHONY.







FOOTNOTE 1: P.5 THE ALISTAIR MCALPINE GIFT,
TATE GALLERY PUBLICATIONS,
PUBLISHED 1971, BERIC PRESS, LONDON.

OPENING PAGES: JACKS IN SCULPTURAL FORM
WITH STARS, STUMP, BAR STOOLS AND TUB CHAIRS.
FACING PAGE: STAR AND MELON LIGHTS WITH 3D ANIMATION.
THIS PAGE TOP: JACKS IN VOLVO WITH TUB, STUMP AND STAR.
ABOVE: STAR LIGHTS WITH JACKS IN BACKGROUND.

→ Volvo Gallery heralded its arrival with an exhibition of Euro lounge Plastic by leading British furniture designer, Tom Dixon. The 39-year-old designer is one of Europe's most exciting and influential furniture designers, with work on display in museums and galleries around the world such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo and the Museum of Modern Art in London.

Located on the corner of York and Barrack Streets in the heart of Sydney's CBD, the 320 square metre Volvo gallery was formerly a banking chamber. It now functions as "both a display area for one or two cars, and an exhibition and event space, challenging the conservative perception of the Volvo brand," says designer Mark Landini of Landini Associates, which for two years has worked on developing the corporate image and dealer showrooms of Volvo.

The exhibition area is a split-level, L-shaped space addressing both street frontages, with the entry located along Barrack Street. A sleek, restrained character is achieved through a palette of finishes which features rock-maple timber flooring and aluminium-framed opaque glass wall panels contrasting with grey limestone bar, stair and seating elements.

A retractable wall to the right of the entry offers the flexibility of creating separate spaces, as demonstrated in the Euro lounge furniture exhibition where a darkened room – suggesting the ambience of a night-club – showcased a 3D animation of the products which was synchronised with a lighting display and audio track.

The multifunctional 'Jack' – a plastic module which can be used as a light, a chair or to support a table top – forms the basis of the exhibition and as explained in the exhibition catalogue was "inspired by the children's toys of the same name, and can be interlocked in a glowing wall of light". Other pieces on show include plastic 'Tub' chairs, 'Star' and 'Melon' lights, 'Stump' bar stools and 'Knob' coat racks, all in colours ranging from bright red, green, blue and yellow through to white and fairy-floss pink. Commenting on the manufacturing process, Dixon notes that "rotational moulding is a technique rarely used for interior products and it is possibly the first use of phosphorescent pigment in a large piece of furniture."

The idea of modular plastic furniture is certainly not new, however the reinterpretation and development of the concept by Dixon appears to draw more inspiration from the New Generation group of sculptors, who studied under Anthony Caro at London's St Martins School of the Art in the early 1960s, than from modular furniture design of the 60s and 70s. Sculptors from this era such as Tim Scott and William Tucker experimented with different types of plastics, especially fibreglass, allowing them to produce a wider range of forms. Their liking for semi-organic imagery, brilliant resonant colours and even the bizarre choice of titles for their works is evident in this collection by Dixon.

It is the sculptural, more than functional, possibilities of the Jack module that have been explored in this exhibition. The visitor is guided through the space by a series of furniture groupings, utilising the component parts of products displayed in such a way to create abstract assemblages. This abstraction of the product into a sculptural grouping recalls a 1995 exhibition of Capellini furniture in Cologne, where Achille Castiglioni presented Tom Dixon's Loop armchair as an assemblage of six pieces, ingeniously stacked to form a sensuous tower. ●

[PROJECT SUMMARY / VOLVO GALLERY]

Architect Landini Associates **Interior architects** Landini Associates **Project design team** Mark Landini, Paul Gates **Project manager** Paul Gates **Builder** Gomax Constructions **Sub-contractors** Window Systems; Glass Stax; Border Stainless **Client** Volvo Car Australia **Size** 350sq.m **Time to complete** Design 6 weeks; construction 8 weeks **Council** Sydney City Council **Materials:** Windows York St frameless operable glass wall by Glass Stax; internal framed operable glass wall by Window Systems; other glazing by Gomax Constructions **Flooring** Rock Maple supplied by Chadwicks Timber, installed by Gomax Constructions; grey limestone supplied by Artisan **Wall linings** Blockwork by Gomax Constructions; grey limestone supplied by Gomax Constructions **Stainless steel** Border Stainless **Tiling** Purcell Tiles square white glazed wall tiles (kitchen only) & square non-slip grey floor tiles **Paint** Dulux 'Berkshire White' **Lighting** Modular; Reggiani; Staff; Bega; Kreon; Thorn **Seating** Y's chair by Cappellini & Fritz Hansen Series 7 upholstered in white leather from De De Ce **Tables** Landini Design **Signage** CNC cut stainless with opal acrylic by Designcraft **Audio visual systems** Dolby pro logic surround sound system, LCD projector, CD by Intervention **Air-conditioning** Seair





ABOVE: TUB CHAIRS, MELON LIGHTS AND HANGING STARS WITH 3D ANIMATED JACK.
 FACING PAGE: GALLERY ILLUMINATED BY DIXON EXHIBIT.
 RIGHT: DIXON ILLUMINATED BY GALLERY EXHIBIT.

- MAIN ENTRANCE 1
- LOWER LEVEL 2
- HIGHER LEVEL WITH INFORMAL SLATING AND LOW TABLES 3
- RECEPTION DESK / COFFEE BAR 4
- INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCE ROOMS WITH MOVEABLE DIVIDING WALL 5
- LOCKER ROOM 6
- KITCHEN 7
- WC FEMALE 8
- WC MENS 9
- OFFICE 10
- TECHNOLOGY CURBOARD 11
- STORE 12
- REAR ENTRANCE 13
- ILLUMINATED DISPLAY CASE 14
- MAIN JAMES HARDIE HOUSE ENTRANCE 15



JAMES HARDIE HOUSE ← → VOLVO GALLERY



IN-DIALOGUE

ON THE ROAD WITH MARK LANDINI AND TOM DIXON. DESIGN, CRUMPLED SUITS, SELF PERCEPTION AND IMPRESSIONS OF AUSTRALIA.

ML: So you're saying you've been inside Downing Street (Number 10)?

TD: It's an extraordinary thing because you know it so well.

ML: The little black door?

TD: Yeah. You see it on television every night. You know the approach. You know it to the point you get to the other side of the door.

ML: And then what happens?

TD: Well it's like the Tardis right? It's vast with several rooms and a garden out the back.

ML: Now tell me Tom did you do a Noel Gallagher?

TD: A what?

ML: did you sneak into the Queen's cabin in rock and roll style?

TD: On no, I didn't even think of doing that. What happened is, with Tony it's 'Champagne Socialism' at work. So I'd run a long way down the Mall to get there. I was very, very late and hot, and unfortunately I had three too many drinks. He was on his way out and I thought I've got to do something so I just barged in and said, "Can I have your autograph Tony?"

ML: Tom! You didn't did you?

TD: Yeah, everyone was trying to hold me back, which was really

uncalled for. Then suddenly behind me was this queue of autograph hunters.

ML: What did you get him to autograph?

TD: Um, the invite: "to Florence and Gracie (daughters), love Tony". So I've got that.

ML: Were they impressed?

TD: What? the kids?

ML: Yeah.

TD: No, you know they're only three and five... but in years to come!

ML: So Mr Modern addressed the design nation?

TD: Yeah. The corridors of power, its compelling, it's a fascinating thing! You know, it's like when you leave Downing Street, it's like 'well where do we go now?'

ML: [Laughter]

TD: You know you're standing there trying to think which bar... you know you want to go out with your mates to talk about it. You just don't know what a suitable address might be.

ML: So what do you think about Australian design?

TD: Well, you know food design and architecture

is very exciting. I think it's way ahead of England in terms of architecture.

ML: Really, how?

TD: Well in terms of being able to build stuff. I know it's difficult to get permission, but at least it seems to eventually happen. If you're trying to do something contemporary in Britain it's very, very rare.

ML: I think you're right. One of the reasons I like working in Australia is because we don't have any constraining architectural history. It's a young country so it can afford to be experimental, and in many ways is. So of the Australian designers that you've seen who do you like?

TD: Well, Landini Associates of course!

ML: Yeah, right.

TD: Well I like that thing we saw the other night.

ML: What the Siedler?

TD: Yeah, I love that. Very organic. But Mark you know for me it's the food. It permeates everything. You know the restaurant design... It's much more sophisticated than the image you have in your mind of what you'll find when you get here. In terms of food it's a world leader. You know it's not an exclusive thing like in Europe.

ML: So how is Australia perceived from Europe?

TD: I think it's changed but people still don't understand how – I don't want to sound too flattering – how world class it is and how cosmopolitan.

ML: Talking of cosmopolitan, what's with the suit Tom?

TD: Oh this is a Paul Smith prototype called something like the 'Unlimited Traveller' and the idea is they lent it to the most crumpled person they could find [Laughter]... sort of a market research thing.

ML: Talking about crumpled what about that Saville Row suit you had on the other day.

TD: No, no you don't understand. That was meant to be crumpled. But that was the old me, this the new crinkle-free me!

ML: So what are the standard Tom top 10 questions that are asked?

TD: Well, general astonishment about taking a job. You know about having a proper job, which brings me back to how circular everything has become. I'm working in your old office (in the old Conran, Habitat Space). I've got a job and you've got your own company and you're doing your own thing. Funny...

ML: And so what about Terrence [Conran]?

TD: [Laughter] We had to bring him in at some time didn't we?

ML: [Laughter] How do you feel about being loaned 'his shoes'? Was it 'his mantle', 'his boots' or 'his shoes'?

TD: I'm wearing his 'old boots'... you had 'his shoes'.

ML: Do they fit?

TD: Um, I've yet to try them on actually.

ML: Don't you think we should focus a little on the subject at hand. You remember we were talking about how architecture today hasn't really moved forward and how this was because no real technological revolutions have taken place.

TD: No, my point was in furniture we've pushed it as far as it can go. You know plywood, carbon fibre, injection-moulded this and that, but in architecture a lot of those things haven't been taken on board. It's only in industrial building that all metal construction, pre-fabrication really happen. In domestic it really hasn't been taken on board. Although people are happy to drive the most modern and composite cars they'd never, ever choose to live in an all-corrugated iron shed building, or a pre-fabricated shack. I was just wondering why it is lagging so far behind. Effectively a Corbusier house, designed in 1924, is as good as anything we see today. So that's what I said. What did you say?

ML: I think I said that the technology of building buildings hasn't really changed. Nothing new has happened. Those buildings were invented and look like they do because of steel.

TD: But the technology has happened for aircraft and ships. You know the way you make a fibreglass-hulled racing boat is a technique that could quite easily be used in building construction. No? Am I wrong?

ML: I don't know, I haven't explored it.

TD: Exactly, that's right. That's my point, my case, my thing! But you started me off on this with your theory about how lighting design hasn't changed much since the low voltage revolution.

ML: Yeah, well when low voltage came along you were able to pass a current through something other than wire and that changed the possibilities for the design and shape of lights.

TD: We're all hanging on waiting for wireless technology, you know microwaves, aren't we? 'Cause that's the big problem now isn't it? Cable management. I mean what do you do? I'll tell you what I do.

ML: Shove them under the table?

TD: No. I put even more on and try and pretend it's a decorative element. [Laughter] I plait them... macrame!

ML: So you're not making any more chairs then.

TD: No, I'll never get bored with chairs. I just think it's very difficult to do anything new with the chair. You're almost pushing it stylistically rather than functionally.

ML: Excuse me!

TD: Oh yeah, never one of my big concerns right? But you know we get to the stage when if you put a carbon fibre chair outside it blows over in the wind right. So I mean how light do you want it?

ML: So you think all the good chairs have been done?

TD: Well, I don't know if they've all been done. That would be self-defeating. I mean you can get small incremental advances.

ML: So has anyone actually copied any of your stuff yet?

TD: That's one of the nice things about travelling with Habitat. In the Philippines I saw a little chair that has been taken to bits for copying.

ML: Which one was that?

TD: The 'Baby Fat' chair. There's been a few copies but they've not been commercially successful.

ML: So, anyway are you happy with the show and the way it's gone?

TD: I was happy with the way it worked architecturally in the space.

ML: What, no British Council carpet?

TD: Yeah, all too often I'm showing in spaces that weren't designed to show stuff. So what it taught me was the value of working in a proper environment I guess. I mean in the end it really is, like, worth making the effort because people appreciate it much more than they would say in somewhere like Milan where people have become somewhat blasé. But I think what I like about it is that people are much less um... what's another word for blasé?

ML: They're fresher. Probably happier to see you.

TD: Fresher, yeah, that's a good word.

ML: It's not that we get bombarded with stuff here



so anything out of the ordinary is nice to see.

TD: But people over here are much better informed than they are back home. You know they tend to have done their homework and they know what's going on in Europe. That's something that always astonishes me. You know the further you go afield the more people know about you.

ML: Yeah, well we certainly have to do our research.

TD: You're talking like an Australian now!

ML: Am I?

TD: Yeah.

ML: Well I am an Australian. A citizen.

TD: Are you?

ML: Yeah. Dual nationality mate.

TD: Well, you're not talking like one. Where's the accent? (Laughter)

ML: Someone told me I had an Australian accent the other day. I was most miffed.

TD: Oops! Mind what you say, they might eject you. (Laughter)

ML: That's a point. I'm not sure I've got editing rights on this piece. Now I know what I was going to ask you. I remember about 10 years ago we had a conversation about whether you should market yourself as a sculptor or designer. Have you resolved that dilemma yet or are you now something else?

TD: No, it's an irresolvable dilemma. In fact it doesn't bother me at all. It's quite nice to be called all the names under the sun. My official

title [at Habitat] is 'Senior Key Manager'.

It's one I quite like you know.

ML: Really, not creative director?

TD: Yeah. It's the first official title I've ever held.

ML: 'Key Manager'? You manage the keys... some kind of job-share scheme?

TD: No 'Key' as in 'within the organisation' I think Mark if you don't mind.

ML: So is that on your business card then?

TD: No, no that's my position within the organisation.

ML: So what's on your business card?

TD: Design director UK, or design director... I don't know, I don't know what it is.

ML: Have you got a business card?

TD: No, I've been meaning to get one for ages!

ML: (Laughter)

TD: But it's um... I mean it doesn't matter does it? It's nice to be all things.

ML: So, so much of your work to date has been consumed by stylists and style magazines, the Habitat thing must have a greater focus on content? Real things for real people?

TD: Yeah, well it would be nice to think you had a real influence on what, you know, what people buy. You can only ever do that if you reach a pricing that allows you to compete with things on the high street.

ML: Well, if you make the Jack here, like we were talking about earlier, that will make it accessible won't it?

TD: It will make it an Australian product

as well, won't it?

ML: Suppose so. So now we're approaching the airport, I suppose we should sign off so we can talk about...

TD: Girls?

ML: Our wives. So is there anything else you think the reader will be interested in?

TD: I'll email you something. No, I know: "I'll be back."

ML: You think you will?

TD: Yeah, I kinda... I love it here. Everything you said about it is true. You should be working in a tourist authority publicising Australia shouldn't you?

ML: I tell you what I'd really like to do - the next World Exposition for Australia, 'cause having done the one for Great Britain in Seville, I was shocked when I had a mooch around and saw the Australian pavilion there.

TD: Why?

ML: Well, the main show was a 'theatre in the round' and someone had covered all the seats in sheepskin. Given that expos are meant to address all the negative associations people have of a country they weren't really giving it their best shot. What do you think?

TD: Sheepskin's coming back though Mark!

ML: OK, so the next time I come to England you can lend me your jacket.

TD: Right then, so what? I do the chairs and you do the exhibition stand? OK, come on Markie, I'm ready. ●



I'LL NEVER GET BORED WITH CHAIRS. I JUST THINK IT'S VERY DIFFICULT TO DO ANYTHING NEW WITH THE CHAIR. YOU'RE ALMOST PUSHING IT STYLISTICALLY RATHER THAN FUNCTIONALLY OH YEAH NEVER ONE OF MY BIG CONCERNS RIGHT?

