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DESIGN FOR LIFE: GRANT AND MARY FEATHERSTON

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**Design for Life:
Grant and Mary Featherston**



Expo Sound Chair Mark 11, 1967, photographer unknown, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Design in Practice
VCE Visual Communication Design

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VCE Visual Communication Design

The following content aims to support teaching and learning programs for VCE Visual Communication Design 2018-2022.

This resource is designed to support both students and teachers of VCE Visual Communication Design Study Design Units 1-4. The resource addresses specific aspects of the Study Design, although teachers can easily adapt any aspect to different outcomes and key knowledge according to the needs and interests of students.

The guide links content to the Melbourne-based furniture designers, Grant and Mary Featherston to support student's understanding of; historical and contemporary local design, Environmental, Industrial and Communication design, and professional industry practice.

The stages of the design process are illuminated through case studies specific to the three areas of design:

1. Industrial Design (Furniture): Contour Chairs R152 and R160 (1951)
2. Environmental Design (Interior): National Gallery of Victoria interior fit-out (1968)
3. Communication Design (Graphic): Obo Chair advertisement (1975)

Unit 1:

Area of Study 1 – This area of study references the invention of the Contour Chair, Idea generation and the function of objects. An exploration of structures using manual and digital methods suitable for creating drawings is investigated.

Area of Study 2 – Design elements and principles are addressed in tasks referencing the study of the Contour Chair, requiring students to observe, reflect and analyse.

Area of Study 3 – Visual communication in context is addressed through tasks exploring global twentieth century historical and cultural practices in design and how these affected the Australian design landscape.

Unit 2:

Area of Study 1 – Technical drawing in context is explored in relation to three-dimensional, manual and digital techniques used to refine drawings.

Area of Study 2 – Type and Imagery in context is addressed using techniques analysing the relationship between typography and imagery of an Obo Chair newspaper advertisement from 1975.

Area of Study 3 – The design process is investigated with a design brief task aimed at advertising the Obo Chair to contemporary audiences. Key knowledge areas are examined in relation to the role of the brief in Outcome 3.

Unit 3:

Area of Study 2 – This area of study considers methods, materials, constraints and limitations in relation to the design and interior fit-out of the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968.

Unit 4:

Area of Study 3 – Evaluation is introduced through tasks and activities that offer models to support the presentation of a pitch.

Content and tasks in this resource can be used to focus the VCE teaching and learning program and/or provide students with reflective practice in preparation for the VCE VCD examination.

Design for Life: Grant and Mary Featherston



Grant and Mary Featherston c.1973, photographer unknown, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

How did I become a designer? The answer to that is: One never knows how one begins in designing. It just happens.¹

Best known for his Contour series of bent plywood chairs produced in the early 1950s, Grant Featherston was a highly successful Melbourne-based industrial designer. Grant's talent and love of design saw him create many things but, between 1947 and the mid-1970s, he focused on chairs and furniture. During this time, he developed hundreds of designs, many of which are highly sought after today.

Grant met Mary in the mid-1960s and they worked in partnership from 1965 until Grant's death in 1995. Mary was an English-born RMIT Interior Design graduate. Together, they formed a creative partnership in life and business. Over the span of thirty years, the pair would design many acclaimed pieces of furniture together. They also completed interior fit-out commissions, including the interior design of the National Gallery of Victoria between 1966-68. Mary still lives and works in Melbourne. Her primary area of focus is in the design of early childhood learning environments. Together, Grant and Mary leave an enduring legacy with many of their designs recognised today as significant achievements in Australian design history.

¹ Grant Featherston as quoted in 'Furniture Fashion Time: An Argus Souvenir', *Argus*, 19 October 1955, p. 6.

Excerpts from
Design for Life: Grant and Mary Featherston
by Denise Whitehouse



Numero IV Lounge 1974, photograph: Grant & Mary Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

The story of Featherston Design begins with Grant Featherston, who was at the height of his career when he and Mary married and established their partnership. It also begins with the question of what makes a designer and, more specifically, what made Grant Featherston 'one of the foremost and most discussed men in his field in Australia?'² What factors shaped his famous intensity and drive, his desire to excel, his urge to innovate and make, and his belief that design could shape and change the world? What inspired a young man living in rural Australia in the 1930s to dedicate his life to the development of the relatively unknown practice of industrial design? Shaped his perception of technology and materials and his drive to convert them into meaningful objects and experiences? And stimulated his interest in the international phenomenon called modernism, and with this a passionate humanist belief in the social responsibility of design?

Grant Featherston: Childhood

Born on 17 October 1922 as the first child of Eva and Stanley Featherston, Grant Featherston had a quintessential Australian childhood. He grew up in Geelong, a regional country centre within the shadow of Victoria's capital Melbourne. A thriving beach town and an industrial port, Geelong serviced the interests of Victoria's prosperous Western District, the home of the merino wool industry on which the nation's economy was built.

² Featherston, 'Furniture Fashion Time', p. 6.



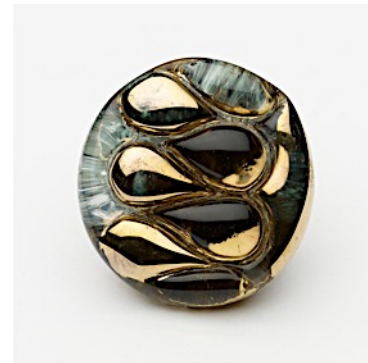
Spiral fern (1950s), photographs: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Eva and Stan built their marriage around an ethic of self-sufficiency and social responsibility. Ardent gardeners, they grew their own produce. Stan made the children's wooden toys and much of the family's furniture and Eva made the family's clothes and furnishings with a touch of style... Stan was also an enthusiastic photographer who captured the family's activities with his camera. Snapshot after snapshot reveals a childhood full of exploration and adventure, beginning within the big backyard and the spare block next door, and stretching out into the countryside and down to the beach... Grant would return to the landscapes of his childhood, to the bush and the beach, photographing them time and again, studying the natural order of form and pattern in seashells, driftwood, trees and rocks in a quest to find 'the simple solution'.

Discovering Industrial Design and New Materials

Winsome (Grant's sister) remembers that when Grant turned sixteen their parents were approached with the proposal that, given his drawing skills, he should take up an apprenticeship with the Melbourne glass manufacturer, Oliver-Davey Glass Co. This involved the big step of Grant moving to Melbourne in late 1938 where he worked with Oliver-Davey designing decorative motifs for sandblasted glass doors and panels before moving on in 1939 to work for the domestic and architectural lighting firm Newton & Gray in South Yarra, where he would first encounter plastics production.

The extensive use of glass walls and mirrors was bringing light, spaciousness and the language of reflection to the recovering industrial and commercial sectors, in which the influence of American marketing was strong. The building, architectural and decorating magazines of the time overflow with new glass products, especially structural and decorative—glass bricks, tiles, coloured, sandblasted and etched wall surfaces, bent glass, shop fronts and milk glass light-fittings.



Glass necklace c., 1947-50, and Darian button c., 1947-54, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

These were the formative years that shaped Featherston's lifelong fascination with the plasticity of materials and modern manufacturing's use of different technologies to transform materials into new products which, like the glass that brought sunlight into Melbourne's new hospitals, could be significantly life-changing. Young, curious and searching for his place in the world, Featherston was captivated not only by the manner in which modern materials were driving progress but also by the adaptability and new properties of glass and plastic made possible by advances of industrial science.³ He was taken by the aesthetic and functional properties of glass—its organic flowing forms, its translucency and ability to hold light and space—and it would become an expressive medium that he used to develop his distinctive visual language.

Besides firing his passion for modern science and manufacturing, Featherston's time in the glass industry introduced him to the nexus between Melbourne's modern architects and manufacturers and placed him at the centre of an emerging design profession. When he arrived in Melbourne the possibility of war combined with the flush of post-Depression prosperity was stimulating nationwide government and industry interest in the development of large-scale manufacturing for the home market and export, the flow-on effect was a demand for designers.

In these early years individuals working as commercial and industrial 'artists' had no professional code, no standing, and no copyright protection. With the concept of the industrial designer relatively unknown, those working as designers in industry like Featherston were generally known as draughtsmen. Their commercial activities came to an end as the energies of Australia's architects and designers were absorbed into the war effort. Nonetheless, when he enlisted in the Armed Forces on 14 August 1941, two months before his nineteenth birthday, Grant Featherston, perhaps with an eye on the future or in a show of professional pride, listed his employment as 'industrial designer'.

Postwar Reconstruction: Design for Social Change

Dr H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs, Director-General of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, was visionary in his promotion of cultural intellectuals as key players in the reconstruction of Australia as a modern democratic nation. Australia's war effort had stimulated a greater confidence in technology and manufacturing and increased respect for the Americans and their industrial intelligence. As Australia took a prominent role in the formation of the United Nations, the overwhelming sentiment was that postwar Australia would no longer be a British colonial outpost, but a young and modern nation with its own manufacturing base and distinctive culture.

³ *The Alliance of Art and Industry; Toledo Designs for a Modern America*, Toledo Museum of Art and Hudson Hills Press, New York, NY, 2002: John Heskett, 'The Emergence of the Industrial Design Profession in the United States', pp. 67.

Social and Cultural Factors Influencing Design

Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany (2005) Architect: Walter Gropius

As Coombs saw it, architects and designers, with their roots in the Bauhaus, European avant-gardism and democratic socialism, would bring ‘intelligence and understanding... to the day to day problem of living in a way which will not merely increase comfort and convenience but will also incorporate simplicity and grace in design.’⁴ Importantly they would help house Australians by using the principles of modernism to translate the lessons of mass production into the home and drive the industrialisation of the building and furniture industries.

Post World War II – New Beginnings

Featherston would have no tolerance for war: he seldom spoke about his experiences and those who knew him spoke of his distress over the bombing of Hiroshima and deeply held pacifism.⁵ The war did, however, fire his ambition to shape a new and better world.

As a member of the Australian Military Forces’ Cartography Company, Featherston was stationed in Darwin during the Japanese bombing in February 1942 and found this experience traumatic and life-shaping. With his health affected he spent the following year or so in and out of military hospitals before being medically discharged with a peptic ulcer in September 1944. He then spent time with his parents in Mortlake in country Victoria experimenting with lighting design before returning to Melbourne in early 1945, where he found rooms in Walsh Street, South Yarra, and began work at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) at Port Melbourne, as a production illustrator drawing maps and aircraft parts.⁶ Working there, Featherston encountered American-influenced manufacture at its best as engineers, scientists, technicians and designers collaborated on research and development projects. He also began to develop a heightened interest in American manufacturing design—information about which was relatively accessible—collecting books by American industrial design pioneers such as Harold Van Doren and George Nelson, and articles pulled from American design, business and fashion journals.

⁴ Nugget Coombs, ‘Foreword’, in Walter Bunning, *Home in the Sun: The Past Present and Future of Australian Housing*, W.J. Nesbit, Sydney, p. 4.

⁵ Eunice and Kevin McDonald, interview with Denise Whitehouse, August 2005. Bruce Anderson, interview with the Denise Whitehouse, August 2005. Max Didier, interview with the Denise Whitehouse, February 2017.

⁶ Winsome Plumb, letter to Denise Whitehouse, 26 November 2005, and email, 22 February 2013. Gwen Atkinson, ‘Grant Featherston: President of the Society of Designers for Industry’, *Australian Furnishing Trade Journal*, March 1955, p. 57.

The Relaxation Series



Relaxation chair, webbing and cord, 1949-51

Returning home from the war and moving to Melbourne, Grant released his first range, the Relaxation series in 1947, which was announced with an endorsement by architect Robin Boyd in *The Age*. The Australian public loved it.

Featherston's Relaxation Chair was original and simple in form, constructed from laminated plywood and upholstered with either webbing or sponge rubber. The webbing chair had an ingenious rubber cord to fix the tension and allowed the occupant to sit firmly while moulding to 'fit his figure.' The sponge rubber chair had a removable coloured slipcover with a laced back and came in five colours. These simple light frames and flexible upholstery allowed for body movement and gave expression to the Featherstons' belief that a chair 'is best but no more than a resilient support following the contours of the body'.⁷

The Contour Chair (1951)

Though invented in an intuitive moment, the Contour Chair was, in fact, the culmination of several years of experimentation after Featherston's return from war service.

The story of the invention of the Contour Chair stands as an archetypical illustration of Australian design ingenuity and process. Understanding the power of the press, Featherston used the launch of the chair to outline the principles and process of Bauhaus-inspired functionalist design, beginning with the obstacles he faced when seeking to introduce new materials and technologies to furniture manufacture. The Contour Chair evolved, he explained, when, during his search to develop more efficient furniture types, he began experimenting with plywood, a material that was inexpensive, light, flexible and readily available. He knew of Marcel Breuer's and Ray and Charles Eames's research into comfort and modern sitting habits, and of their attempts to develop moulded plywood furniture for mass production. But as was often the situation in Australia, the moulding technology was not readily available—the cost of dies and presses were prohibitive. Featherston, always resourceful, looked for other ways to manipulate plywood into graceful, body-supporting forms.

⁷ Robin Boyd, 'New Furniture', Small Homes Section, *Age*, 26 November 1947, p. 5.

The breakthrough came, as journalist Gwen Atkinson reported to the furniture industry, when ‘travelling citywards one morning, he absently twisted and folded his tram ticket—and suddenly the answer lay in his hand, in the small, torn piece of paper’. During the new few days, ‘he ruined a lot of plywood experimenting, but finally produced his first chair shell’.⁸



Left: Grant Featherston, Photomontage of R152 Contour Chair components, *Australian Home Beautiful*, May 1952
 Right: R152 Contour Chair, 1950, hardwood, plywood and linen, National Gallery of Victoria

In Featherston, Australia had a young entrepreneur whose ‘creative impulse’ and passionate pursuit of new ideas was, like that of the modern artist, contributing to the development of a new aesthetic order...⁹ Australia’s love affair with the Featherston chair officially began with the spectacular launch of the full Contour range at the Hotel Federal in Collins Street on 6 July 1953 when, in a blaze of press cameras, Featherston lowered a young woman into a plywood chair shell lined with wet plaster to illustrate the form-fitting qualities of his designs.



Space Contour setting (B210H, BS211H and C21 table) at Hotel Federal Exhibition 1953, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

⁸ Gwen Atkinson, ‘Grant Featherston; President of the Society of the Designers for Industry’, *Australian Furnishing Trade Journal*, March 1955, p. 56.

⁹ Joan Leyser, ‘An Industrial Designer and the Creative Impulse’, *The Arts in Australia*, Department of Information, March 1952, original transcript, press clippings book 1, no pagination, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.



Television Space Contour setting (B230, BS231H, B230H and C21 table) at Hotel Federal Exhibition 1953, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

With its demonstrations by photogenic, fashionable women, the opening proved a clever device for capturing the public imagination while illustrating the practical simplicity of the chair's plywood construction, its strength, lightness and flexibility—and the principles of Contour comfort in everyday use. The medium-height TV Space settee and chairs, for example, were ideal for apartment living and could be easily moved and arranged for TV viewing—when television arrived in Australia, that is. Similarly, as the press also explained, the taller Space suite was light and space saving and came with or without cut-out holes. A first for Australia, the beautifully formed holes were intended to allow for movement and to accommodate the body's natural curves while bringing a feeling of open spaciousness to the small home. Also coming with or without holes, the flexible and soft Curl Up Chair included cutouts that allowed you to relax and dangle your legs and arms without looking ungainly.

In the months, following the story of Featherston and his chair's invention took on cultural significance as evidence that Australia finally had a 'genuine' contemporary designer capable of inventing not only a new language of form but also a new system of production. Returning to the theme of his 1948 article 'Chairs that are Made to Fit You', John Drake joined Gerald Stewart to write an article timed to coincide with the mid-year furniture festivals, to announce that the tide was changing for contemporary furniture. Due to Featherston's pioneering efforts, they proposed, Australia now had not only a scientifically researched, comfortable chair that was a near-perfect negative of the body, but also a market for contemporary design.¹⁰

Explaining the significance of Featherston's achievement the duo recounted the story of the Contour Chair's invention as the exemplar of design practice, beginning with the process of experimentation that led to the light-bulb moment when, playing with a tram ticket, Featherston had made a creative breakthrough and discovered that he could make complex curved forms by bending rather than moulding laminated plywood. This unprecedented approach was now the basis of a family of twenty-odd chairs that was leading an expanding contemporary furniture market not only in Australia, but also in New Zealand and Singapore. Apart from being a functional and aesthetic triumph, the Contour Chair was a model for mass production, with the potential to set the foundations for a design-led industry. In 1965 Grant Featherston married Mary Currey and established the Featherston design partnership which would see them produce some of Australia's most technically and aesthetically sophisticated furniture designs.

¹⁰ John Drake and John Stewart, 'Chairs that are Made to Fit You', AM: *Australian Monthly*, 4 August 1953, press clippings book 1, no pagination, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

Grant and Mary Featherston: A Design Partnership Part 1: 1965–69

Grant and Mary Featherston c.1973, photographer unknown, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

The only child of English migrants, Mary Currey had an innate commitment to shaping a better future. Her parents had come to Australia seeking a better life than that in post-war England where they had worked long hours at their trades of butchery and hairdressing for little return. Settling in East Burwood they enrolled Mary in the Presbyterian Ladies College, renowned for its social democratic ideals though not its arts education. Mary's creativity was instead developed by her socially outgoing parents, who, taking pleasure in beauty and style, would transform their small suburban home into 'glorious' Christmas and birthday installations. They fostered Mary's interests, helping to set up a small 'studio' for her and neighbouring children in the garage. Betty Currey was ambitious for Mary. Her husband, intent on distancing himself from the poverty of his childhood, would not let his wife go out to work. A vivacious, intelligent woman, Betty sought the respectable alternatives of volunteer work as a beautician and the cultivation of impeccable taste, tailoring stylish clothes to match her striking beauty. She also developed a 'good eye' for contemporary design, purchasing a black Featherston Contour Settee, which sat in the lounge room as an expression of the family's commitment to Australia and a new way of life.¹¹

When Grant and Mary Featherston married in September 1965 they signed the papers for a partnership that would bond their public and private lives and distinguish them within the field. Professional partnerships were not rare in the field of architecture but they were in industrial design, which was male dominated despite an increasing number of female graduates. The Featherston partnership was distinctive not least because of the twenty-year age gap that brought together two generational moments of change in Australian design: postwar reconstruction and the redefinition of cultural values associated with baby boomers in the 1960s and 1970s. When the Featherstons met, Grant was at the peak of his career and industry leadership. Mary was an interior design student yet to find her direction, but as an educated young professional would be at the forefront of change. Entering the design industry in the mid 1960s, Mary was a product of social changes that had triggered the women's movement and shifts in marriage, family and work relationships and this brought a distinctive dynamic to the Featherston partnership.

¹¹ Grant Featherston, *Plastic Furniture in the World Today*, lecture transcript, 24 July 1972, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

What drew Grant and Mary together was their shared ideals and passion for design as a way of being in the world. As one friend put it; 'Design and social change were indivisible for them. For them design is... totally integrated into how you live and don't want to live. Life and work is all of a piece.'¹²

Australian Pavilion, World Expo 1967, Montreal



Hostesses at the Australian pavilion, Expo '67, Montreal – 1967. Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia. NAA: AA1982/206, 28

Late in 1965 Grant was contacted by Robin Boyd, who wanted to discuss ideas for the Australian Pavilion at Montreal Expo '67, for which he had been appointed exhibits architect. He was preparing his proposal for the Australian Exhibition Organisation (AEO) and wanted to test the possibility of integrating stereophonic sound into a chair design so Expo visitors could sit and listen to recorded talks about Australian life and culture. Expo visitor fatigue and creating a memorable experience that would capture the attention of the international press and bring in the crowds were Boyd's major challenges. His question for Featherston was whether it was possible to produce a sound chair along the lines of 'those very big wing backs' he had made in his 'formed plywood phase with the hole in the back'.¹³ If such a technically and aesthetically advanced chair was possible it would form the 'dynamic' element of his plan to convert Australia's pavilion into the 'most luxurious and civilized salon' at Expo '67.

The Expo '67 Talking Chair

The Australian government's last-minute decision to participate in Expo '67 placed the Featherstons under considerable pressure.¹⁴ The first hundred chairs needed to be ready for shipping in July 1966, before the northern winter closed Montreal's ports, giving them a short turnaround of twenty-four weeks to design and build. It is clear from the archives that Grant was well advanced in his thinking when Boyd's brief arrived on 12 January for '250 chairs, fairly snug-fitting wings with the head well

¹² Grant Featherston, 'Plastic in Furniture Design', IDCA design report, no. 59, September 1971, p. 2.

¹³ The Boyd and Featherston archives indicate discussions began prior to Boyd's official appointment as Exhibits Architect, 22 November 1965. See Expo files in Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria; Grounds, Romberg and Boyd Archive, MS 13363: PA95/128, box 85, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. For a comprehensive account see Carolyn Barnes and Simon Jackson, 'A Significant Mirror of Progress: Modernist Design and the Australian Participation at Expo '67 and Expo '70', in *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, edited by Kate Darian-Smith et al., Monash University ePress, Melbourne, pp. 19, 20.1–20; Denise Whitehouse, 'Speaking for Australia: The Expo Talking Chair: Mary Featherston interview with Denise Whitehouse', in *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, edited by Ann Stephen, Philip Goad and Andrew McNamara, Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo, NSW, c.2008, pp. 186–91.

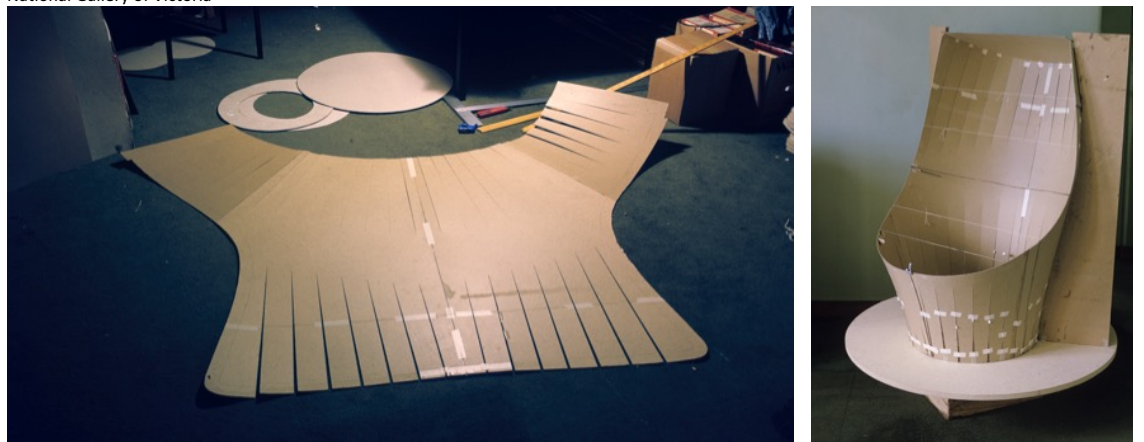
¹⁴ Barnes and Jackson, 'A Significant Mirror of Progress'; Whitehouse, 'Speaking for Australia'.

cradled, arms of course, wool fabric and a loose cushion and an aluminium base as you suggested.' The chair was required to seamlessly incorporate wiring that would activate a central bank of tape players in the basement of the Pavilion as well as stereo speakers close to the users' ears. It also needed to be lightweight and robust—to cater for five thousand visitors a day—and suitable for batch production, transportation and installation. Finally, it was to be at the forefront of design and prototypes for acoustical testing and tenders needed to be ready by March.¹⁵

Four Weeks to Prove It Was Possible



Miniature paper and cardboard sketch models for the Expo '67 Talking Chair 1966, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria



Cardboard mould for Expo Chair prototype, 1966, Photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

The Expo project was formative for both Mary and the partnership. Working in a climate of urgency she assisted Grant in establishing the feasibility of a sound chair. Together they developed the prototype in four weeks while also researching the visitor experience and exhibition context, and testing the potentials and constraints of different materials and production techniques.

Watching Grant 'puzzling' away making tiny paper models, which developed into a form that rose from the floor like a plant stem to open out and cocoon its occupant in a curvaceous and enveloping sound-shell, she was struck by his inventive mastery of form.¹⁶ It was a chair, Featherston explained to the press, that would belong to the 'occupant, not the building, look right in any position', and bring a 'high degree of visual joy' and 'sense of play' to Boyd's 'quiet, gracious salon'. Though simple in appearance, its production and functionality were dependent on advanced plastic sand sound technologies.¹⁷

¹⁵ Grant Featherston correspondence with Robin Boyd, beginning December 1965, particularly 11, 18 January; 8, 9 February 1966, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

¹⁶ Denise Whitehouse, 'Speaking for Australia'.

¹⁷ Featherston, 'The Designer of the Expo Chair'; Boyd correspondence 2 March 1966 to W. Worth, Executive Manager, AEO, Grounds, Romberg and Boyd Archive, MS 13363: PA95/128, box 85.



Left: Polystyrene prototype for the Expo '67 Talking Chair, 1966, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria
 Right: Expo '67 Talking Chair 1966, photograph: Grant & Mary Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Working in their tiny Quamby studio, the Featherstons set about prototyping a polystyrene chair in a process that took close to five hundred hours.¹⁸ They built a full-size corrugated cardboard form into which they layered fine strips of polystyrene to create a shell from which the aluminium mould would be made. On the advice of expert mould-makers they spent hours laboriously sanding and refining their model to ensure its measurements and flowing forms were millimetre exact. Grant then produced the specification drawings for what would be the largest moulding of its kind produced in Australia at the time. Simultaneously Grant began working with the Commonwealth Acoustic Laboratories on sound delivery, a solution for which was a headrest embedded with small speakers that brought sound close to the ears with the help of the chair's wings, reducing outside distraction. With wiring embedded into the chair-shell a trigger cushion was developed so that when someone sat on the chair the 'sound story' would be activated via tape players in the pavilion basement.

When the Montreal Expo opened in April 1967 Australia's serenely sophisticated pavilion with its 'softly spoken' chairs 'selling Australia' was an outstanding success, attracting one fifth of Expo visitors at the rate of fifteen thousand visitors a day.

A manifestation of the electronic revolution that media guru Marshall McLuhan argued was converting the world into a global village, Featherston's sound chair captured the imagination of Canadians and Northern Americans, who swiftly released commercial versions, 'straight from Expo', onto the market. At home it won a Good Design Award and Featherston immediately began work on the Expo Mark II chair which, launched onto the market in October 1967, was playfully promoted as a 'private home-listening chair' and 'personal discotheque'. It was, according to one enthusiastic Melbourne journalist, 'the swingingest chair of [the] decade'¹⁹

¹⁸ Grant Featherston, storyboard and film script sheet, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

¹⁹ Untitled article, *Age*, 20 October 1967, press cutting book 1, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

The Interior Furnishing and Fit-Out of the National Gallery of Victoria (1968)


National Gallery of Victoria. Architect: Roy Grounds

No sooner had the Featherstons finished the Expo project than Grant was invited in September 1966 to take over the troubled fit-out of the prestigious National Gallery of Victoria, designed by Roy Grounds.²⁰ The Featherstons were aware of ongoing problems that had seen the Gallery trustees insist that an experienced designer be appointed to work with the gallery staff and architect on preparing for the transfer and installation of the National Gallery of Victoria from Swanston Street to the new building in St Kilda Road. As Australia's first purpose-built, modern state gallery and the first stage of the Victorian Cultural Centre, the new National Gallery of Victoria was Melbourne's answer to Sydney's Opera House and a pioneering project for which there were few international precedents. Expectations were high that Grounds's modernist masterpiece would draw the international spotlight onto the National Gallery of Victoria's important collection and meet the promise made by its director, Eric Westbrook, that this would be a people's gallery: a 'living museum' designed not for 'the high-brow elite', but for 'the community it has to serve and who will use it'.²¹

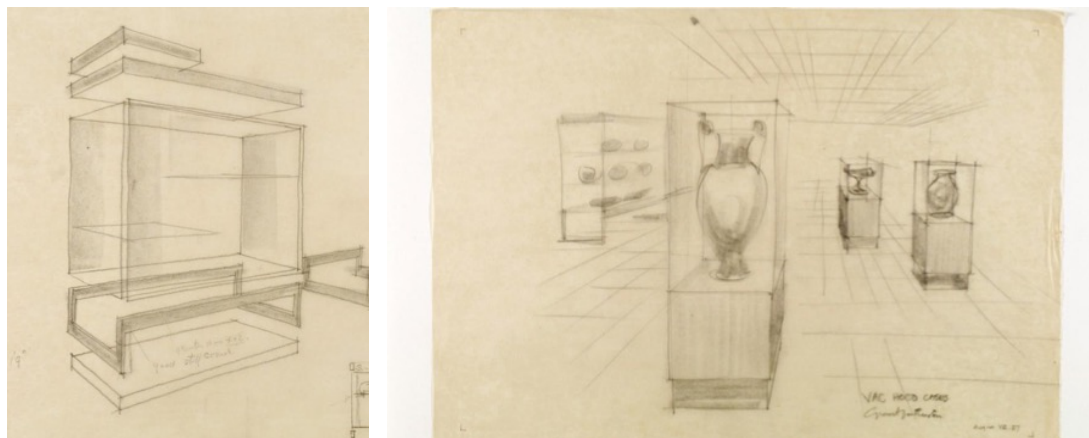
When the Featherstons joined the project in mid October 1966, the gallery's interior had been set. Their task was functional and this, they told the press, involved 'every moving fitting but the phones'.²² They promptly interviewed everyone, from the director to the security staff, asking about their expertise and the activities they envisaged would characterise their practice in the new building. This immersion in the organisational culture enabled them to map the gallery in its entirety and shape a brief covering everything: from the intricacies of collection management; to library, publication, education, photography and conservation services; to the design of public amenities and the finer details of signage, labels and tableware. Using systems thinking to identify usage patterns they developed an all-purpose system for furniture, materials and finishes that, applied holistically, would identify the National Gallery of Victoria as a modern organisation.

²⁰ For a comprehensive account see Denise Whitehouse, 'Encountering Art in the People's Gallery: Grant and Mary Featherston and the Interior Furnishing and Fit-out of the National Gallery of Victoria, 1966–1968', *Art Journal of the National Gallery of Victoria*, no. 54, 2015, pp. 9–23.

²¹ 'Cultural Centre to Attract All: "Not Designed for Highbrow Elite"', *Age*, 22 February 1961, National Gallery of Victoria fit-out files, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

²² Christine Andrews, 'Everything But the Phones', *Sun News-Pictorial*, Sun Arts Centre Supplement, 20 August 1968, p. 10, National Gallery of Victoria fit-out files, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria; Grant and Mary Featherston, 'Victorian Arts Centre', press release, National Gallery of Victoria fit-out files, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria, c.1968.

Modular Solution



Drawings for the module system of the island display cases, including lighting boxes, NGV 1967, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria



Display cases, internal lighting and furnishings, Oriental Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria, 1968, photograph: Mark Strizic, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

The components of their modular system of desks, tables, chairs and cabinetry could be configured according to need. Their minimalist aesthetic blended seamlessly with Grounds's interiors of steel, bronze, concrete and glass, softening them with mountain ash and gold carpeting while setting a unifying 'good design' aesthetic that evoked business efficiency and professionalism. A survey of each department's largely uncatalogued collection revealed a pattern of design problems not least of which, the Featherstons told the press, was the sheer number of objects. While the European and Australian painting collections were straightforward, the vast decorative arts collection presented a raft of problems: the 10 metre Trinitarias carpet, bark paintings, 1500 European ceramics, 2100 Oriental ceramics, glassware, costumes, chairs, chandeliers, lace and so on. Organised into historical eras (Antiquities, Greek and Roman) and regions (Oriental, European) each section had special presentation and display requirements complicated by issues such as susceptibility to light and dust. Put simply, the design challenge was how to develop a system that would best display the bewildering diversity of the objects involved.²³

With one third of the collection going on permanent display a secure yet accessible storage system was also needed for consultation and study. Here the consistency of the issues—size, lighting, material conservation, accessibility, protection, security—suggested the development of a modular system of display cases, storage furniture and hangings screens that could be applied with variations across all

²³ Denise Whitehouse worked with Mary Featherston on the Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects, 'The School: Designing a Dynamic Venue for the New Knowledge Environment', 2007–10, and has firsthand knowledge of these projects.

areas. But, as Mary recounts, Grounds insisted that the art be viewed without protection, prompting discussions about electric fields, glass screens and barriers—before the decision was made to consider the possibility of display cases. She also recalls how Grounds set the challenge, telling the Featherstons: 'I don't want to be able to see the furniture; it is the Greek urn that is important, not the display case.'²⁴

Experimenting, they found the simplest solution in a modular system of interchangeable glass boxes, lightweight mountain ash cradles and light-boxes. A four-part system, it comprised island cases for viewing from all sides, freestanding desk cases for viewing from above, and glass wall cases that, designed to fit into the five-foot cavities within the gallery's walls, provided the basis for a proportional system that directly related to the architecture. The solution for study storage was a two-part system: 'pull-out' sliding vertical panels for objects such as bark paintings, medieval altarpieces and paintings, and drawer cabinets for textiles, jewellery and other such items.



Display cases, internal lighting and furnishings, Oriental Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria 1968, photograph: Grant Featherston

With the display cases and hanging screens providing an organisational and aesthetic logic, the Featherstons helped curators orchestrate the layout, lighting and display of the dynamic installations that would 'shock' the Age art critic Patrick McCaughey when the people's gallery opened in August 1968.²⁵ He was inspired to rapturous descriptions of the 'surprises, revelations and masterpieces' that drew one in to 'look, contemplate' and become immersed while moving through the different gallery spaces.²⁶

Together with McCaughey and an enthusiastic press he agreed the history of art had been brought alive. Briefing the media with Grant, Mary expressed their sense of privilege at being involved in the design of 'a vital living centre of the Arts', commenting that they 'found the work more demanding but also more rewarding than commercial work'. The National Gallery of Victoria fit-out was a project that would be pivotally important for Mary as an interior designer, shaping the user-based approach that she brought to her designs for children and learning environments. It also launched her into the public eye as she gave press interviews and public talks explaining the design principles involved in the project.

²⁴ Mary Featherston, interview, 2015. Anxiety was high about resolving the design of display cases. Prototyping was approved March 1967.

²⁵ Grant and Mary Featherston, 'Interior Design', *Architecture Today*, September 1968, pp. 35–41; Mary Featherston, transcript of talk to National Gallery of Victoria gallery guides, March 1969, National Gallery of Victoria fit-out files, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

²⁶ Patrick McCaughey, 'Collection in a New Light', *Age*, National Gallery Supplement, 20 August 1968, p. 20, National Gallery of Victoria fit-out file, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

1970 – 1995



Poli chair and ottoman 1972, Photograph: Grant and Mary Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

In January 1970 the Featherstons' son Robin was born. Robin's birth would take Mary away from the consumer-focused world of industrial design into the social dynamics of the women's and children's liberation movements and their demands for new home and work environments and services such as community-based day-care. But these interests had to be put on hold as she and Grant turned their energies to building a new practice in a marketplace where opportunities for research and development were scarce and the dependency on overseas licences, combined with the entry of multinational manufacturers, was reducing design to a matter of consumer styling. Rather than 'be compromised in meeting the requirements of manufacturers who were more concerned with profit-making than social need', the Featherstons, as they informed the press in January 1971, had decided to become self-employed.

Having a baby had not stopped Mary; she ran both a business and home successfully because she wanted it that way. She was, according to the Grant, bringing new purpose to their work by moving their design emphasis to other areas than furniture.

'We are caught in a ritual of design for sale, but it should be for humans, for use, for joy, for life'.²⁷

Building on their Expo chair experiences, Grant was keen to push on with exploring what he called the 'plastic of plastic', that is, its inherent aesthetic properties and potential to create shapes analogous to the human form and nature. In contrast to steel and wood, plastic offered the potential to make a chair of any shape and fulfil his ideal of science-led organic design whose vital forms and materiality paralleled fundamental life-patterns. Setting up a series of projects, including the One-shot Chair, Grant returned to the sculptural exploration of natural form in a bid to develop component furniture using moulding technologies.

²⁷ Designers at Work: Grant and Mary Featherston, *Design Australia*, p. 31.

Numero (1973) and Obo (1974)


Grant Featherston and Mary Featherston (designers), Uniroyal Pty Ltd, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (manufacturer), *Numero IV chairs and ottomans* (1973–4), polyurethane foam, ABS plastic, wool, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, purchased 2012, photograph: Sotha Bourn © Grant Featherston/Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia 2018

The Featherstons' breakthrough into Numero (1974) and Obo (1975) came not while working with furniture manufacturers but with South Australian Rubber Mills (SARM), a manufacturer of moulded automotive components. A small entrepreneurial company, SARM was the first in Australia to produce polyester and polyurethane foam and moulded foam car-seats.

Grant won their interest with a series of coloured sketches that illustrated their idea for a system of modular lounge units for informal living/rumpus rooms. Numero, he explained, was to be as simple as could be; it would comprise moulded forms with pull-on stretch covers that fitted like a glove. Production could begin as a system of three or so components and be extended as required. Grant also floated the possibilities of total furniture environments and kindergarten and children's play furniture made from cut foam, adding that they were developing potential ideas in these areas.²⁸ But the item that won the day, according to Mary, was the hollow, spherical, one-piece Obo. The idea 'had sprung fully formed into Grant's head one day as he was experimenting with forms to exploit the plasticity of the moulded urethane. He formed a prototype from sheet foam, cut and glued to simulate a hollow sphere, which he partially filled with polystyrene pellets before setting off for Adelaide with it over his shoulder in a large drawstring bag, looking rather like a bundle of laundry.'²⁹

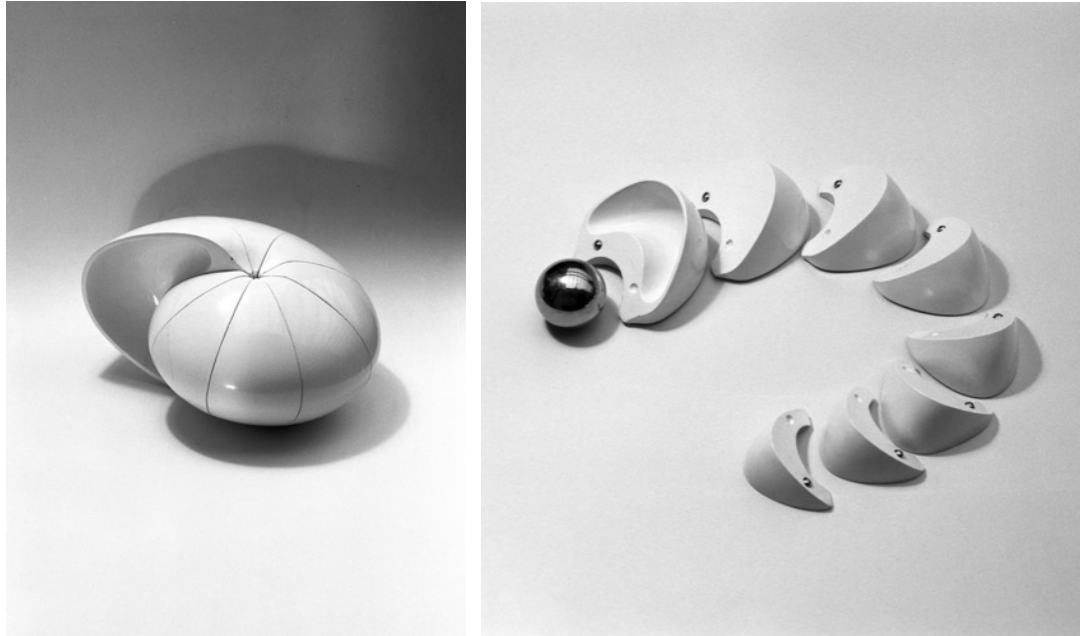


Left: Numero IV Lounge 1974, photograph: Grant & Mary Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria
 Right: Obo Chair with Mary Featherston 1974, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

²⁸ Grant Featherston, correspondence with Uniroyal, South Australia, July 1971, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

²⁹ Mary Featherston, Mould to ????: The Numero Series.

Design for Life



Nautilus Puzzle 1984, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Grant Featherston's last work, the Nautilus Puzzle (1982–84), was a variation on Rubik's cube designed to open children and adults to the biological order of design, the importance of which stretched far beyond fashion, ego and the market. Talking of his parents' passionate wonder at the world of science and nature, Julian Featherston spoke of the depth of his father's respect for nature—'he just loved it'—and his intellectual fascination with the infinite mathematical permutations of 'the world of living. Based on the nautilus shell, a living fossil and 'one of the world's most beautiful natural objects', Featherston's game invited players to explore the mathematical properties of natural systems: the 'log spiral, exponential function, Fibonacci Series, Golden Mean etc.' And to find the parallels, as he had done, in other spirals of nature: 'fronds, tendrils, spider webs, shells etc. including the ancient relatives of the nautilus, the ammonites', and in so doing develop an understanding of evolutionary nature of design.³⁰ He would argue that design, like life, should be ever-changing and responsive to human need.³¹

What is distinctive about Featherston design is the way it prompts us to intuitively respond to line, form, light and space, and to wonder about the nature of things and how design can transform materials into beautiful, functional everyday objects.

Featherston's design graciously challenges us to engage with ideas about what it means to human and consider the contribution design could or should make to the world as it becomes increasingly dehumanised. Good design in the purest sense, as Mary Featherston is often heard to say, is both beautiful and functional: 'One does not exist without the other. The brief starts with human need and grows out from that. The quintessential expression of that is in nature, where nature through evolution generates exquisite forms that are also structurally efficient.'³² 'The object is, as the Featherstons and their friend Robin Boyd tell us 'to say or do the essential as simply and directly as possible' and that 'essential thing is the higher quality of living ... the something that turns [an object or] a building, however slightly, into an expression of the human spirit.'³³

³⁰ Grant Featherston, Nautilus Spatiological Puzzle, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria.

³¹ Rachel Faggetter, interview with Denise Whitehouse, 2016; Judy McKinty, interview with Denise Whitehouse, 2016; see also Children's Museum of Victoria, Report of the First Year, 1985, Judy McKinty Children's Museum collection.

³² Denise Whitehouse, Grant and Mary Featherston: The Partnership 1965–1970s, video, Design History Australia research network, dharn.org.au/grant-mary-featherston-the-partnership-1965-1970s.

³³ Robin Boyd as quoted by Mary Featherston, transcript of a discussion about the Featherston–Boyd collaboration, Philosopher's Zone, 24 ABC Radio National, October 2005, Denise Whitehouse Archive.

Student Tasks

Case Study 1: Industrial Design

Contour Chairs R152 and R160 (1951)

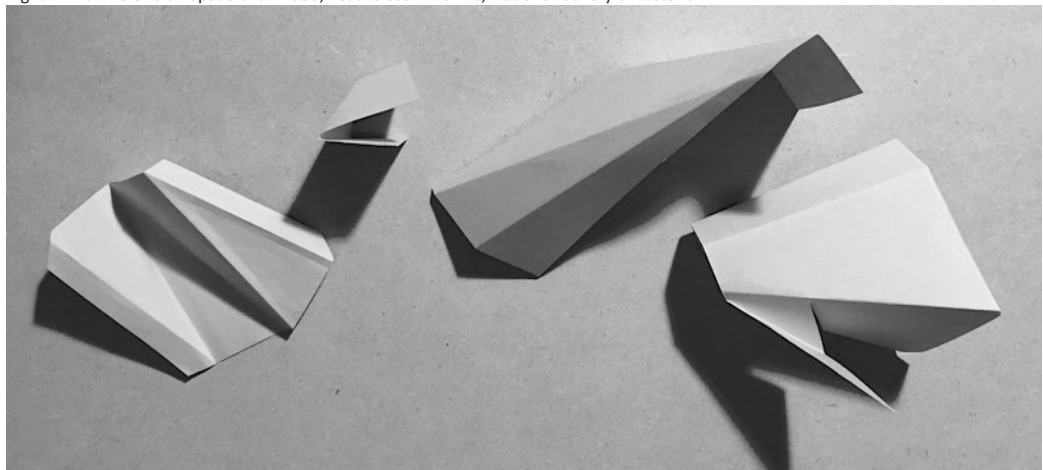
Unit 1

Area of Study 1 – Drawing as a means of communication

When folding a tram ticket on his way into the city of Melbourne, Grant discovered a method for bending two sheets of plywood. With this ticket, he formed a simple curve shell that would later be developed into the Contour Chair. This was the beginning of a process that led to a series of iconic Australian designs known as the Contour Range.



Left: B210H Television Space Chair shell 1953, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria
 Right: B210H Television Space Chair 1953, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria



example sketch models

Many designers begin by folding paper as a starting point for generating ideas. Folding paper or card to create quick three-dimensional design concepts is known as sketch modelling.

- Using folded paper, create a series of your own sketch model chairs. Think about how your designs might contour the body. What materials will you use?
- Using a strong light source, photograph the sketch models to create shadows. Think about a suitable backdrop, such as a white box, to simulate a room.

Using your sketch model objects or photographs, complete a set of representational drawings of your chairs including:

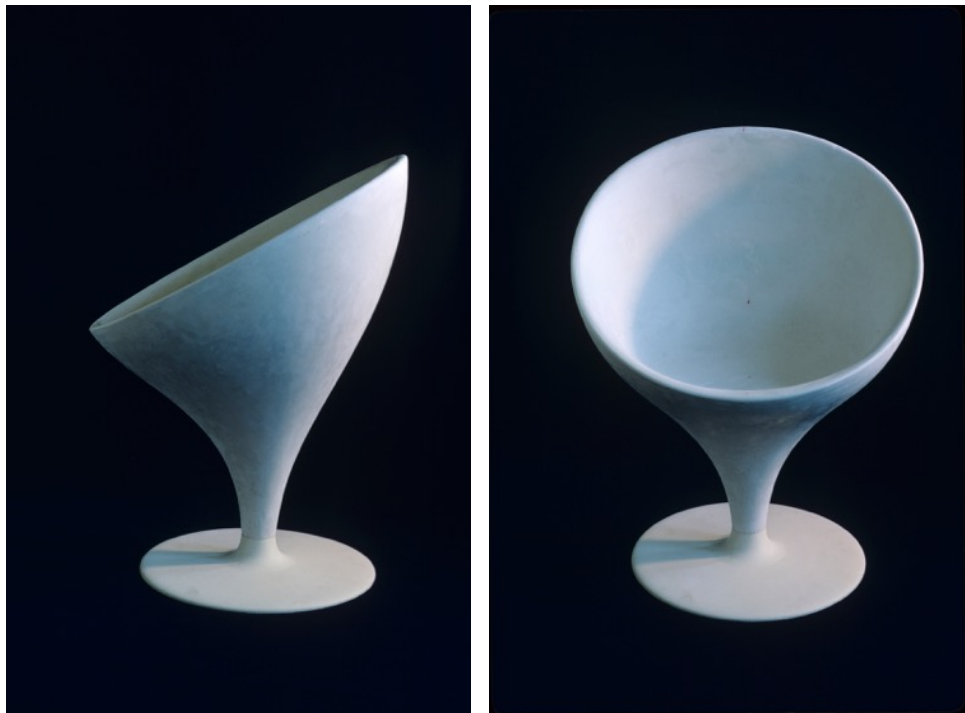
- a two-dimensional orthogonal drawing and
- a para-line drawing (either isometric or planometric)
- a one- and two-point perspective drawing

Using rendering techniques, add shade and shadow to depict the direction of light. Add surface textures.

Unit 1

Area of Study 2 – Design elements and design principles

Both Grant and Mary Featherston were inspired by nature and passionate about the environment. Many of Grant's early designs drew inspiration from natural forms such as bones, seashells, driftwood, trees and stones. The use of organic shapes is evident in the Contour Range, and many other designs, which appear to have grown naturally while being unmistakably twentieth century in character.



Stem Chair, 1969, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

- Identify four Featherston chair designs that have an organic aesthetic.
- What design elements in these chairs might be commonly found in nature?
- Identify and discuss the use of design elements in these chairs.
- How has the design principle balance been used to support an effective design aesthetic?

Area of Study 1: Analysis and practice in context

- Write a short appraisal of a chair from your environment. This might be a couch at home, a park bench or a desk chair at school. Sit in the chair for a minute with your eyes closed.
- Pay close attention to where the chair comes into contact with your body. Where is it supporting you? What posture does the chair encourage? Does it allow movement? How do you think this chair is encouraging you to sit? How does it make you feel?
- Consider the brief for the designer who designed this chair. What do you think their intentions were? What did they need to consider when designing this chair?

Area of Study 3: Developing a brief and generating ideas


Left: *Tension resolves (seated figure)* 1950–51, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Right: Aristoc Christmas advertisement c.1963–64, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Using your analysis of both Featherston designs based on the natural environment and chairs in your own environment, design your own chair inspired by an organic shape, and develop a brief.

Use the three stages of the design process: development of a brief, research, and the generation of ideas.

- Research and generate ideas based on organic forms. These could be macro or micro forms or shape found on land or sea, such as an organism not visible to the naked eye, a twisted shell or a fanned leaf. Make a series of drawings of these shapes.
- Using these drawings, design a chair. Consider how the human body might conform to this piece of furniture. You might strip the organic shape back to its bare essentials or make additions for the head, arms or legs.
- When writing your brief, you should propose two distinct communication needs for an imaginary client. For each need, consideration must be given to the target audience and the purposes of the chair design.

Area of Study 3 – Visual Communication in context

The aftermath of World War II profoundly altered established ways of life in Australia. The war years had been a time of hardship, rationing, scarcity of materials. After the war, Australians began to see the rise of national reconstruction that set the nation on a path of economic growth. Optimism and innovation were high.

At this time, post-WWII design in Australia was influenced by movements such as the Bauhaus and the International Style. The Bauhaus was a school founded in 1919 in the city of Weimar by the German architect Walter Gropius. The Bauhaus sought to unite the arts with crafts by closing the gap between art and industry. The Bauhaus style combined elements of both fine arts and design education. It became one of the most influential movements in modern design, architecture and art. In architecture, the Bauhaus influence can be seen in the International Style, characterised by the use of lightweight, mass-produced, industrial materials. Typically featuring repetitive modular forms, the use of flat surfaces and large areas of glass, the International Style rejected ornamentation in favour of practicality. Examples of modernism in both architecture and design at this time embraced socially informed ways of building spaces and objects for living according to need and function.

- Research the International Style and the Bauhaus movements. How do Featherston designs reflect the key characteristics of these movements?
- In addition to furniture what other design disciplines are shown in the work of Grant and Mary Featherston?
- How did Featherston design embrace new technologies and materials?
- How did Grant overcome the obstacles of cost to offer ordinary Australians affordable access to his designs? Why was this important to his production methods?
- Make a list of all the materials used in Featherston design in the exhibition.

Grant was aware of international design directions, and the creative partnership between iconic husband and wife designers, Ray and Charles Eames. The Eameses are among the most important American designers of the twentieth century and they made significant historical contributions to the development of modern architecture and furniture. They pioneered technologies, such as moulded plywood, fibreglass furniture and plastic resin chairs.

Charles and Ray Eames married in 1941 and moved to Los Angeles, where together they began experimenting with techniques for three-dimensional moulding of plywood. The aim was to create comfortable chairs that were affordable. In addition to their work in furniture design and architecture, they also regularly turned their hand to graphic design, photography, film and exhibition design.

Early in his career, Charles Eames was greatly influenced by the Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen. Eliel's son Eero followed in his father's footsteps and became an architect. Eero and Charles became friends and collaborated on the prize-winning Organic Chair for New York's Museum of Modern Art 'Organic Design in Home Furnishings' competition in 1940. Their work showcased the new technique of wood moulding that Eames would further develop in many products, including chairs, splints and stretchers for the US Navy during World War II.

- Research the Eames/ Saarinen Organic chair from 1940.
- Compare and contrast this chair with the R160 design of Grant Featherston from 1952.
- What innovative mid-century technology did these chairs share?
- Why was this technology important to the Australian marketplace?



Left: Eames & Saarinen The Organic Chair, 1940 Photograph by Rama, Wikimedia Commons, Cc-by-sa-2.0-fr
 Right: Television Space Chair, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Case Study 2: Graphic Design

Obo Chair Advertisement (1975)

Unit 2

Area of Study 2: Type and imagery in context



Obo advertisement, designer: unknown, *Herald* Melbourne, 1975

Look carefully at the Obo advertisement from the *Herald* newspaper in 1975. The designer has used multiple images to communicate to the audience. The accompanying text conveys information about the product itself and how it can be used.

The body text reads:

As well as being found in an orchestra an Obo can be found in Myer City and suburban stores & Furniture City/ Because an Obo is a new casual chair made by Uniroyal/ It is made from high resilient polyurethane foam/ part filled with polystyrene beads/ & covered in colourful, hard wearing fabrics/ It can be sat on/ squared on/ curled up on/ sprawled upon/and counted on to bounce back into shape every time.

- What is the key message?
- What is the relationship between image and text?
- Identify the target audience. What did you base this on?
- List the information this advertisement conveys other than how to use the chair.
- Would the advertisement communicate the same key message without the text? Discuss.
- What typographic and layout conventions assist with readability and legibility?
- The layout uses a grid to break up space. Why is the grid a useful tool in graphic design?

Type and imagery in context

The typeface Gill Sans Medium has been used for both the header and footer text. Gill Sans is a key historical typeface which was created in 1928 by Eric Gill. With its classical proportions, clean lines and high legibility, Gill Sans was an immediate success when it was created in 1928. It continues to be widely used today.

**MAN
SITS ON OBO.
EXCLUSIVE
PHOTOGRAPHS!**

Gill Sans Bold
Gill Sans Medium
 Gill Sans Light
Gill Sans Medium
Condensed

Gill Sans Condensed

Font Family Gill Sans

- Research Gill Sans and its applications since the early twentieth century.
- Identify the features and characteristics of this typeface family.
- Is Gill Sans Medium a suitable type choice for the Obo advertisement? Discuss.
- Find five graphic design examples using the typeface Gill Sans (including at least two contemporary designs).



Obo Chair with Mary Featherston 1974, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

Area of Study 3: Applying the design process
The Brief: The Obo
Iconic Australian design, reissued.

Featherston 2016 is a reissued collection of 17 iconic Featherston furniture pieces, manufactured locally to Featherston's original specifications by Gordon Mather Industries. The project was facilitated by Gordon Mather with Grazia Materia of Grazia & Co, in close collaboration with Mary Featherston.

Background: Grazia Materia created her own furniture business Grazia & Co after working with Gordon Mather Industries for 10 years. Mather approached Mary Featherston with the idea of aligning with Grazia & Co to introduce new pieces from the Featherston archive and relaunch what would become Featherston 2016. Mary Featherston did have one condition: the re-launch should include her favourite archived Featherston piece, the Obo, a spherical foam ball chair with reflex memory.

The Brief: Grazia & Co and Gordon Mather Industries have selected you to design one print and one online advertisement for the reissued Obo Chair. The advertisement will appear in a variety of Australian magazines dedicated to youth culture, art and design. These magazines include *Fête*, *Kinfolk* and *Paper Sea*.

The Client: Grazia & Co are a Melbourne-based furniture design and manufacturing company, dedicated to the values of authenticity, integrity and community. Grazia & Co are collaborating on Featherston 2016 with Gordon Mather Industries and Mary Featherston. Since 1987 Gordon Mather has manufactured and designed furniture for the commercial and residential markets.

Target Audience: People between 20 and 35 years of age who are interested in design and contemporary culture. The audience is predominantly from middle-class socio-economic backgrounds and is well educated.

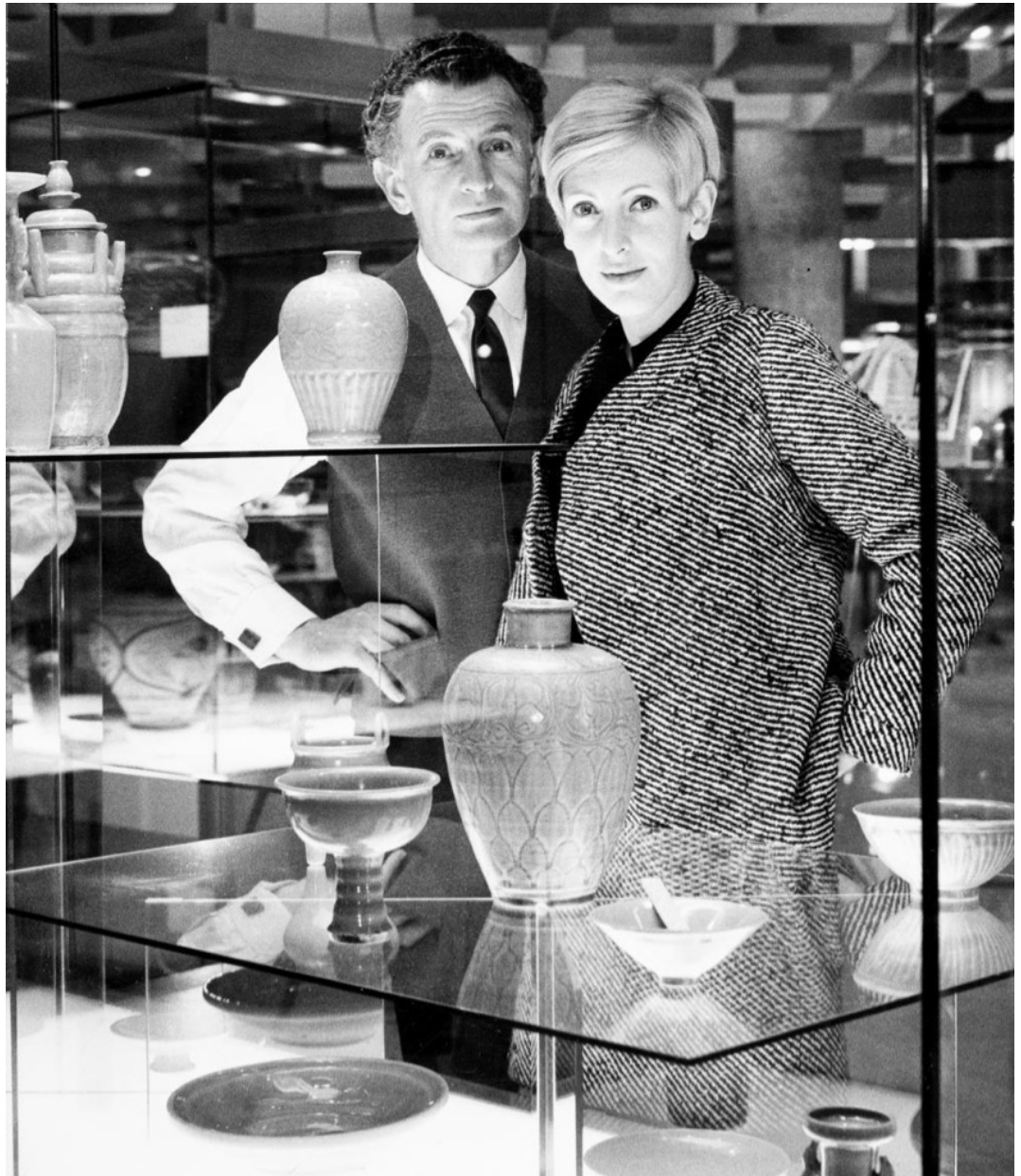
Purpose: To promote the Featherston 2016 range of classic furniture to younger audiences.

Communication Needs:

1 x full page print advertisement	1 x small online magazine advertisement
Colour: CMYK	Colour: RGB
Dimensions: w 210mm x h 275mm	Dimensions: 150px x 125px
Resolution: 300ppi	Format: gif or jpg
Format: Adobe PDF Press Quality	File size: 50kb

Expectations and Constraints

- The advertisement must state that the Obo will only be available for purchase at Grazia & Co
- The advertisement must mention the use of contemporary materials: a foam ball chair with latest technology reflex memory.
- The advertisement will run in multiple magazines simultaneously, both in print and online
- The look and feel of the advertisement should appeal to younger audiences.

Case Study 3: Environmental Design**National Gallery of Victoria Design Fit-Out (1968)**

Grant and Mary Featherston in the National Gallery of Victoria's Oriental gallery 1968, photograph: Mark Strizic

Commissioned to design and create the fit-out and furniture for the National Gallery of Victoria's new building designed by Roy Grounds, the Featherstons worked intensively on the project from 1966 to 1968. The fit-out involved systematic consultation with gallery staff to identify the practical needs of multiple users who included administrators, curators, scholars and the general public. It also involved the development of an extensive, modular furniture system that shaped the visitors' engagement with the collection while solving problems of storage of a vast collection. This experience introduced Mary to the depth of Grant's commitment to public education and consultation. Within the context of this project, Mary's public persona as a design professional began to take shape.

Mary Featherston recalls:

In this project, I came to understand Grant's rigorous and logical approach to the design process. Investigating the need: the practical and psychological needs. Having done the detailed analysis of need, it was a question of how we could solve the display needs in the most efficient way because, as ever, the budget was very limited. This is where Grant's approach to modular thinking and systems thinking really comes in: this ability to sift through and see ways to solve the needs in the simplest way possible. So quite rightly the architect and the director said that they really didn't want to see the display cases. They just wanted to see the Greek urn, not the case that it was held in. What we came to was a system of free-standing cases on timber bases. There was a minimum number of units that could satisfy the complex needs. So that involved many technical challenges in terms of glass, adhesive, lighting. All sorts of aspects that had to be investigated before coming to a solution.

Unit 3 Area of Study 2 – Design industry practice

Watch Mary Featherston discuss the partnership including the process of the National Gallery of Victoria fit-out:

<http://dharn.org.au/grant-and-mary-featherston-the-partnership-1965-1970s>

- Describe the innovative design decisions made by the Featherstons.
- What constraints and limitations did the Featherstons face with the design brief?
- How did they create innovative design to overcome these issues?
- What were the needs of the clients (National Gallery of Victoria) in this large scale fit-out?
- Discuss the environmental and cultural factors that might impact a re-design of the National Gallery of Victoria today. Consider the storage and display of digital, installation and ephemeral artworks.



Staff assembling the full range of display cases for installation in the National Gallery of Victoria's new building on St Kilda Road, Melbourne 1968, photograph: Grant Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

VCE: VCD The Pitch - The Expo Chair (1967)
Unit 4 Area of Study 3 - Evaluation and explanation



Expo Sound Chair Mark II 1967, photograph: Grant & Mary Featherston, Featherston Archive, National Gallery of Victoria

This task simulates the study outcome requiring students to prepare a pitch for their own visual communication presentations. Working in pairs, students are to devise a short 10-minute pitch of the Expo Chair which could be presented to potential contemporary buyers. The development of the task should be completed in one lesson, as all information required is available in this resource and the accompanying catalogue. The presentations are to be succinct and should provide an opportunity to both practice and become familiar with key knowledge and skills required by the outcome.

The most succinct presentations addressing the criteria are to be presented to the whole class as a model practice.

A preceding class discussion and evaluation offers an opportunity for the teacher to highlight the expectations of the future independent task students will undertake as School Assessed Coursework.

Discussions may be based on a critique of the following:

- The degree of clarity in the explanation of how ideas have been conceived and developed. This content could draw on the culture and context of the time, the interests and experience of the designers and the design in relation to client needs.
- The presentation of key design features and the degree of clarity used to explain how these features address the requirements of the Robin Boyd brief.
- The appropriate reference to aspects of the design process including, client needs, purpose, constraints and refinement of ideas evaluated against the brief. Students are encouraged to use appropriate terminology, present clear and succinct information and provide appropriate visual aids to support the presentation.

Students will draw on the following to support the preparation of the pitch:

- Aspects of how the design process has been addressed including client needs, research, development of concepts and resolution.
- Explanation of the thinking behind the design of the Expo chair.
- Present appropriate visual material to support the presentation.

Expo Chair Brief Requirements:

- A chair for foot-weary visitors to relax.
- A chair with inbuilt speakers.
- A chair to inform visitors about Australia.

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- greatly benefits students who learn best through kinaesthetic activities
- nurtures creativity and enables social learning
- provides learning through experience and interaction which encourages students to build on prior expectations to create new realities
- is a cultural experience for all students to enjoy

Looking at original works of art with a suitably trained educator encourages the development of the following skills:

- **literacy:** by encouraging discussion and extending vocabulary
- **observation:** by learning to notice visual detail and becoming aware of visual conventions
- **critical thinking:** by encouraging questions, analysis and informed conclusions
- **reflection:** by considering new modes of thinking

All education programming and resources at Heide align with the Australian Curriculum, AusVELS curriculum frameworks and VCE Study Designs.

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