



social catalyst.” It’s not just a box any more, it’s a

MATT BUTLER

PHOTOGRAPHY MATT REED

One of our writers sent us an email one day suggesting Matt Butler might be an interesting person to profile, and when we learned that his Zaishu project was based on the principles of creativity, collaboration, evolution and sustainability, we agreed. Just over two years ago, Matt, a successful furniture designer from Melbourne upped sticks and moved to a small town 1.5 hours south of Byron Bay, NSW. The influence that 'going bush' has had on his work is fascinating. While living there Matt has developed the Zaishu project which has since been exhibited in Milan, Melbourne, Tokyo, Seoul and Sydney to much acclaim. Rarely does a design product have the power to act as a catalyst for change such as this. Since doing this interview Dumbo feather has also collaborated on a Zaishu project with Matt (see page 8), but enough about us, here's Matt... Df

Df Do you get that a lot... Random people coming up to you who want to know all about the Zaishu?

Matt Yeah. When I was naming it Zaishu I thought, "Maybe no one's going to know what a Zaishu is..." Then someone said, "But that's a good thing because straightaway people are going to say, 'What's a Zaishu?'" When they ask the question you get the opportunity to explain it.

Df How did you come up with the design?

Matt The way it came about was that I was invited to be in an exhibition called *The Tyranny of Distance* in Tokyo. It was an exhibition that RMIT [University] was curating for Australian design to go to Japan, and part of the brief was looking at the tyranny of distance. That's why I came up with the idea of something that could be flat-packed and easily posted overseas. Normally when we have furniture exhibitions it's very expensive. Just to send a chair to Tokyo costs \$1000. But with Zaishu, the exhibition in Milan [in April 2005] for example, I took the whole exhibition on the train with me from Milan to Paris, and just posted it back by normal post to Australia – it was very easy.

Df When you were invited to do the *Tyranny of Distance* exhibition do you already have the idea for a seat?

Matt I didn't know what I was going to do at all. Then at the same time I was asked to be a part of the State of Design Festival, which involved having an installation at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art [ACCA]. I started to morph the two briefs together. It turned into this slot-together seat and it was almost at the last minute that we [Christopher Kaltenbach, the curator, Jenny Ford and Kate Jackson, R and D assistants] decided to apply some kind of print or artwork to it. We had just seen it as a pine box until that point. So about two weeks before the installation opening, I phoned a guy called Andy Mac who runs an organisation called Citylights from Melbourne. He's a curator with a good network of stencil artists (*see page 78 *A Wall near you*) and he became the art director. Two days before we did the painting I phoned up Dulux and they sponsored the paint. Then we needed to find somewhere to do the artwork, so we just decided to do it in a laneway in Melbourne, behind Misty Bar, where Andy has his office. We lined the laneway with about 15 sheets of cheap ply, and over the course of three or four days all the artists came along. There were 25 of them – some of these street artists are starting to do quite well. Phibs has just done the latest Absolut Vodka campaign with magazine ads and billboards, and Panderosa have just returned from a hotel project in Copenhagen. With the painting, there was this beautiful layering process. I thought they would just have a panel each, but instead they all swapped panels as they painted. It was really good to see this collaborative sort of thing happening and the layering over time. They said to me, "Matt, when it all gets cut up make sure it's all just cut up by chance." At first I was worried that they might be offended if their artwork was cut in half. Then they also said, "When they get assembled make sure all the panels are all mixed up and we have one piece of artwork here and another there."

Df A true collaboration.

Matt Yeah, which resulted in each Zaishu having artwork from up to ten different artists – something that couldn't be easily replicated. I began to like the idea of the Zaishu being an art storage device to record visual information from a particular time and place and culture. I went down to the laser-cutters the day before the installation opening and I asked them to keep the off-cut bits as well. Just by chance, I happened to be at there when everything was coming out of the



Zaishu assembly. Sydney Esquise design festival. 2005. Photograph Helen Punton



Zaishus at Gallery 1000 Eventi, Milan 2005. Photograph Matt Butler

machine and they were grabbing the Zaishu pieces and placing them back in the off-cut template, almost like putting a jigsaw puzzle together and constructing the artwork again. Then I thought, “Wow, imagine if at ACCA I have the pieces of plywood in a pile in the middle of the room, nothing else, and then people can come and actually pick the jigsaw bits out and make their own Zaishus.” Instead of having rigid plans we let the project reveal itself to us right up until the last minute.

Df Did you start one off for people at the exhibition?

Matt I made one, yep, just so people could get the idea. It got me thinking, “It’s more than just a seat now, it’s got this sort of community/collaborative thing happening. It’s more than just a static exhibition where you go into an art gallery and just look at what’s on the wall, because

with the Zaishu, people can actually participate. They can transform the space,

just a square, concrete room into this vibrant space... And not just colourful, but also socially vibrant and interactive.” It took a bit of convincing to explain to the other organisers that the gallery would initially be bare and the installation would be built by the guests. Once all the seats were made, we had a DJ, and being an exhibition opening there was free alcohol. Over the course of three hours this blank room was transformed into a vibrant gathering space. All of the artists, the painters, came and I gave them a Zaishu each and then the rest were sold to pay for the project. Then I thought, “I’ll do another project”, so I phoned up a friend, Adam Dunn, who’s a youth worker at St Vincent de Paul. We ended up having a workshop at St Vincent de Paul where we taught some of the kids at the youth project how to make stencils. They went on the Internet, and downloaded images of like Inspector Gadget and cut them into stencils.

Df So you essentially curated that one?

Matt Kind of, yeah. Two friends and ex-students of mine, Emma Luke and David Griffin, helped to run the workshop. We then had a barbeque in the car park at St Vincent de Paul in Fitzroy and the kids did the artwork. To get paint, I just asked people to get old tins of paint out of their garages. That was a nice element of chance because the whole colour pallet just happened organically and also the types of paint, whether it was acrylic or enamel, fused together to create interesting textures. It also stops tins of old paint from polluting landfill sites. Again, half of the Zaishus were given to St Vincent de Paul for their youth drop-in centres and the other half we took to Space Furniture [in Melbourne]. Just like at ACCA where people put them together, we had an assembly event on a Sunday afternoon at Space. We cleared out the whole bottom floor, so it was just like concrete walls, and placed 200 painted Zaishu panels all over the floor. Being a Sunday afternoon, people came with their kids and they all just grabbed panels and put them together. They gained a real sense of personal attachment and achievement. Space bought half of them so that paid for that project.

Df What was the feedback like from the St Vincent de Paul artists?

Matt Great. Some of these kids have had a tough life and have various difficulties to overcome. The art workshop created a temporary diversion from that and a social occasion to build friendships and develop social skills. They appreciated the opportunity to be expressive with stencils and spray cans because it’s a culture they relate to. I started to realise that the Zaishu became like a catalyst to join two parties who wouldn’t normally get together: St Vincent de Paul, a charity organization working with homeless people, and Space Furniture, a high-end design retailer. It was very worthwhile for them, they both got lots of publicity. I thought, “It’s not just a box anymore, it’s a social catalyst that gets people together.” At that point I decided to actually sit at my desk and think, “What have I created here? What does it actually do? Where’s it going? What sets it apart from other products?” It was a very organic project at that point, which was

*A wall near you By Christel Escosa

Graffiti is growing up, and like a teenager in the throes of puberty, it is an art still largely misunderstood, frustrated at the world and trying to be seen and heard.

Viewed by more than 300,000 city pedestrians weekly, the Citylights Project is a public venture utilizing light-boxes in public streets for the display of art exhibitions. Citylights focuses on collaboration, digital and street art, and has exhibited work by more than 300 Australian and international artists.

It is testament to the changing status of graffiti that Andrew Mac, the creator and curator of Citylights, has been commissioned to collect works for the National Gallery of Australia, and by the Museum of Australia to produce and curate street art film presentations. He is also widely consulted by government bodies and the media on issues relating to street and public art.

When the 'graffitist' becomes recognized as an artist by a body such as the government, potentially the very institution that he or she is railing against, does that validate or annul the intention of the graffiti and its maker? Isn't it the nature of graffiti to give the finger to those who look to confine and limit youth and all its volatility and verve? In August 2004, in an unprecedented collaborative public art project, more than 18 artists worked on over

170m of paneling in the Outside the Square project. Curated by Citylights it featured stencils, painting and graffiti and was situated in the heart of Sydney's World Square in the CBD. The panels in the World Square event are to be auctioned in mid October 2005, with 70% of the proceeds going to Youth off the Streets and Open Family, and 30% to the artists.

Graffiti's coming of age has

brought opportunities for it to be elevated to platforms where many can see and challenge or appreciate it as an art form, not just a street-wise few.

Art challenges ideas and graffiti has always challenged ideas about freedom of expression. As it makes the transition from vandalism to recognized art movement let's hope it continues to do so. Street art. Coming soon to a wall near you.



Melbourne laneway stencil workshop. 2004. Citylights artists: Amac, Blead, David Campbell, Dens, Dlux, E3, Micheal Fikaris, Tom Gerrard, HaHa, Ash Keating, LTMP, Kieran Mangan, Monkey, Aaron O'Donnell, Pandarosa, Phibs, Prism, Reach, Reks, Rone, SRX, Vexta. Photograph Matthew Butler

great, but you need some core principles to hold it together.

The first principle is participation, the second is creativity, the third is sustainability and the fourth is evolution.

Those four principles don't say that it has to be a plywood box or that it has to be artwork. I've deliberately separated Zaishu from Bluesquare, my furniture company, so there's no company agenda behind it or anything. The whole idea about participation is that people see what's happened so far, and then they're given the opportunity to take an element of it and take it off into a new direction. I'm getting lots of people saying, "Matt, I've got this idea... Can we do this or that?" I had a meeting yesterday with an Indian woman called Shalu. She assists Australian companies to work in India and has been supporting an orphanage called Samparc [www.samparc.org] near Mumbai for the last 15 years. The idea is that we can set up a cottage industry with this orphanage and an NGO to employ artists in India. The problem there at the moment is that a lot of the original craft and art is being lost because there's no market (*see page 24 *At the coalface*). A lot of women who do beautiful artwork are going to work building railway lines instead. I haven't been to India, but Shalu was explaining their beautiful traditions of sign-writing and street art, and traditional decorative techniques such as Henna, Rangoli and Warli. We'll employ sign-writers and orphans and street kids as well, who know how to write in Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati. You know, not only will this provide employment, but also act as an educational tool to inform about Indian traditions and publicise the work of the orphanage.

Df It's amazing how suited to this the Zaishu's design is, yet it wasn't your original intention.

Matt That's why 'evolution' has become a core principle for the project. Having Zaishu as an open-ended project in the public domain allows access to an unlimited pool of skills and ideas (*see page 81 *1+1+1...=much more*). It's like a constantly flowing research and development department. The India project also follows the Zaishu idea of documenting visual information from other cultures. In a year or so, I'll exhibit all of the best Zaishus from all of the projects in the one room. We'll also invite photographers, film-makers, writers and artists to come to India to use the project as an entry point to India for their own work. The stories of the Indian artists and kids from the orphanage will be very strong subject matter. We've pencilled in the last two weeks of February in 2006 to go over. Another opportunity that has presented itself is working with Space Furniture in Sydney to do a project with Odyssey House (*see page 83 *Connected by design*). It's almost like the Zaishu has become this sort of experiment in sociology. We've even got a woman in France, in Paris, with a PhD in Sociology in Business who is looking at how the Zaishu's working - all the connections that get formed and then how it grows - creating a 3D model of the whole thing.

Df And that's what you mean when you term it a 'project' rather than a 'product'?

Matt Yeah.

Being a project invites all types of people to be involved.

It also creates its own momentum and personality. You can nurture a project... Like teaching a kid to ride a bike, you can run behind them and only hold on when there is a danger of them falling off. The rest of the time they think you are holding on but really you have let go - you want to see how confident they get and what direction they go

in. My ideas with Zaishu have followed on from what I have learnt from my commercial furniture company, Bluesquare. With the furniture I design through Bluesquare, there are so many materials, production processes and skills involved just to make one chair, and even to transport the chair from Melbourne to Sydney adds to the cost. I wanted to create a design that really rationalised the production. I thought the best way would be to use the cheapest material I could find: plantation grown and readily available in any country...

Df So that's the sustainability element?

Matt Yep. And apart from the artwork, there's just one production process: the laser-cutting. There is no sanding or finishing required, no fixings like nails, glue or screws needed and the flat pack kit holds together with two rubber bands made from recycled car inner-tubes. It's also a product that's got minimal factory involvement. It takes an hour to cut out 40 Zaishus. The rest of the production, such as painting and assembly, can be performed at socially-interactive community events instead of in a factory. The normal way of running commerce is you have production, and then consumption, and the product is quite static. It sits on a shelf in a retail environment, you come in, you buy it, you take it home and that's it. So I thought it would be interesting to add a few more ingredients to that, to set an example of how commerce can be done in the future. So those four principles are the extra ingredients that I added.

Df They don't actually seem like extra ingredients, they seem like fundamentals, more like the four legs of the Zaishu.

Matt Yeah, yeah.

Df What is also quite beautiful is that although you have a high degree of ownership over it, you also seem to be extremely open to letting it go.

Matt Which is important. Bluesquare is my personal project that I set up seven years ago to get my own designs off the drawing board. Bluesquare produces, distributes, markets and everything, so I haven't worked closely with anyone at all. I've taught myself the graphic design, the photography, to design the furniture. It's been very much my little blinkered thing, which has been great. With Bluesquare, I'm my own client and I just do exactly what I want to do. But it's got to a point where Bluesquare is not going to get any bigger because it is just me. I've set Bluesquare up so rigidly it doesn't invite anyone else to be a part of it. Now because I live in such a remote area, if I'm just working by myself at home, I'm going to go insane. So that's why it was important to set up a project that is completely in the public domain and is very open-ended. Basically for me, Zaishu becomes a calling card that invites introductions and opportunities to meet people, to even be here today, talking to you.

Df But you didn't sit there in your little beach house in Angourie saying, "Oh okay, I'm not going to have much social interaction if I just sit here, so how about I create this new project."

Matt No, it just happened.

Df In retrospect it's easy to say how perfectly it's all turned out.

Matt I guess there was always this little thing in the back of my head that said, "Okay, I need to address a few things and work with more people." When I moved to Angourie two years ago and told people where I'd moved to, they said, "You always said you were going to do that when you set up Bluesquare." Back then when I had this idea to set up my own business and people asked, "What are you going to do? How's it going to work?" I apparently said, "I want to get it to a point where

it can run by itself and I can go and live up near Byron Bay

on the beach." My actual move here was quite by accident. I had forgotten about my plan to move to the beach, but it must have been in my subconscious. The same way the ideas behind Zaishu

Left to right: Leash (2003) Lori Jean Kirk, Rose Banksia (2000) Holly Story, Portrait of a History of Modern Art as a Sanitary System (1993) Margaret Morgan.



* 1 + 1 + 1... = much more

By Kate Bezar

In issue 5 of *Dumbo feather* an article titled '1 + 1 = 3' discussed how more often than not great collaborations can produce something far better than just a lone operator can. What is so interesting about the Zaishu project is how Matt has pushed this concept even further, past collaboration to something much more. He has created a forum in the shape of a small stool for all sorts of people to participate and which generates important dialogue between individuals and disparate groups of society.

Abi Crompton has done a similar thing with Third Drawer Down, but instead of a small wooden stool, she uses the humble tea towel as her canvas or gallery. Just as Matt's

simple wooden stool becomes so much more as a result of other people's input, Abi's tea towels can hardly be described as tea towels once they've been Third Drawer Down-ed. In her desire to "place art into the most domestic of circumstances", Abi invites artists from around the world to use a linen tea towel as their canvas. The resulting works are then reproduced in limited edition multiples, available to you and I for less than the price of a *Dumbo feather* subscription. Third Drawer Down products succeed in stimulating discussion about art and its place in everyday life.

The creative possibilities are endless and really only limited by the imaginations of those involved.

This is when something becomes more than just a product, but a project instead, and the initial instigator takes on a role more like that of a curator.

We have 20 of Melbourne artist Peter Tyndall's *Third Drawer Down* works for new subscribers - see page x.

www.thirddrawerdown.com

Third Drawer Down products are available from these and other stockists:
 NSW. Chee Soon & Fitzgerald, Surry Hills +61 (0)2 9360 1031
 VIC. Safari, Prahan +61 (0)3 9510 4500
 QLD. Queensland Art Gallery Store, Brisbane +61 (0)7 3840 7290
 WA. Monde, Claremont +61 (0)8 9284 4141



I share this workspace with swimwear designer Meredith Barry.

Shelves & tables

These have been salvaged from derelict buildings and are full of production folders, art books, fabric patterns, general office supplies etc.

View

My view of trees blocks Spooky Beach which is just beyond them, but I can still listen to the waves as I work.

Room

The room is 60m² in total and you climb a spiral staircase to get up to it. Its best feature is a free-standing claw foot bath in the other corner.

Chair

This is a Robin Day chair I bought for \$5 at the Camberwell market.



*Connected by design By Heidi Dokulil

When Brazilian brothers Fernando and Humberto Campana launched their first chair made from 500m of rope in the early 1990s it struck a note. By scouring the neighbourhoods of Sao Paulo for scraps of materials and inspiration, their work provided a voice for the poorest of the city, connecting to the *favelas* and the sheer inventiveness of the people who build with whatever is available on the street. Around the world the public was drawn to their stories of real life in far off communities. This is design as a catalyst for positive social change and as a way to rethink the future, and it is fast taking shape in all sorts of ways around the world.

One very vocal and high profile proponent of design's role in fostering change is Canadian designer Bruce Mau. His studio's agenda is *Massive Change* which is also the name he gave to his travelling multimedia exhibition (currently on show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago). The exhibition is a global catalogue of many of the world's most innovative projects. Its message: Design can reframe the world in unfamiliar and meaningful ways to help solve the problems – social, economic, environmental, political – that stand in the way of progress. Similarly, Brisbane-based design group Imports Africa have established

sustainable design initiatives with communities in South Africa. Their handcrafted collection of homewares includes products by British designer Tom Dixon who travelled to South Africa to work with traditional Zulu craftsmen on new contemporary designs that are now exported all over the world. The proceeds go directly back to the communities.



Community is also at the heart of Melbourne designer Matthew Butler's Zaishu project. It's a simple idea: a raw plywood board, laser cut into five pieces that are then stencilled, painted, wallpapered – the options are endless – and finally slotted together. No nails. What speaks volumes is the freedom this represents. It's not precious, it's unfinished until you put your own

mark on it, and in a world where brands are aiming more and more to define who we are, this is real design emancipation.

Zaishu's first Sydney project was held during the Powerhouse Museum's Sydney Design 05 Festival. Launched by design retailer Space Furniture the *Space Odyssey Zaishu Project* was a design initiative and auction that brought together residents from Odyssey House, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, with established and up and coming young designers and artists. A design workshop was held with 16 residents at Odyssey House. Run by designer Trent Jansen and stencil artist Wendy 'Minigriff' Murray, the work created was expressive and gave voice to those involved.

As Odyssey House CEO James Pitts reiterated on auction day, "Art and other creative and educational pursuits provide avenues for self-expression and often serve as a positive outlet for feelings residents may need to address in order to change their lives." Supported by Dinosaur Designs, Shapiro Auctioneers, Alumac, *Vogue Living* and WattyL paints, it becomes clear that design projects like these bring communities and people together in surprising, inspiring and far reaching ways that can only help to connect design to life.

were hidden until now. I was actually moving to live in Brisbane and just by accident I stumbled upon this nice little place on the beach. I've been there for the last few years and bought some land there. So it all seems very spontaneous but it's not. I guess I created the opportunity, or put myself in a position, to allow that to happen. I spent five years growing the company and having to teach design in Melbourne to subsidise my income, to be able to then get to a point where I didn't have to work from the one spot anymore.

Df So why the desire to leave Melbourne?

Matt There was no reason to leave Melbourne, I was very happy there, but I guess that was the reason. In ten years time I don't want to think that I've been just living in the same apartment, in the same kind of culture in Melbourne. Especially being interested in being creative and design and looking at ideas, it's important to be in new locations and meet new people and I guess...

Df Most people would say, "I need a new location, I want new stimulus, I'll move to Milan" or somewhere. Angourie wouldn't exactly be the obvious choice.

Matt I spent about three years off and on living in London, so I'd already done that international rite of passage. Part of the time when I lived in England, I lived on the coast in Dorset, in a little cottage overlooking the water, surrounded by national park, three hours south of London. So it's interesting that where I live now in Angourie is just like that English hamlet. There's one shop and it's surrounded by national park and it's three hours south of Brisbane. And it's ten years later, so maybe there's this kind of cycle that happens. I guess as you get older it's interesting that you start to notice parts of your history, you get to define parts of your personality and you see these patterns.

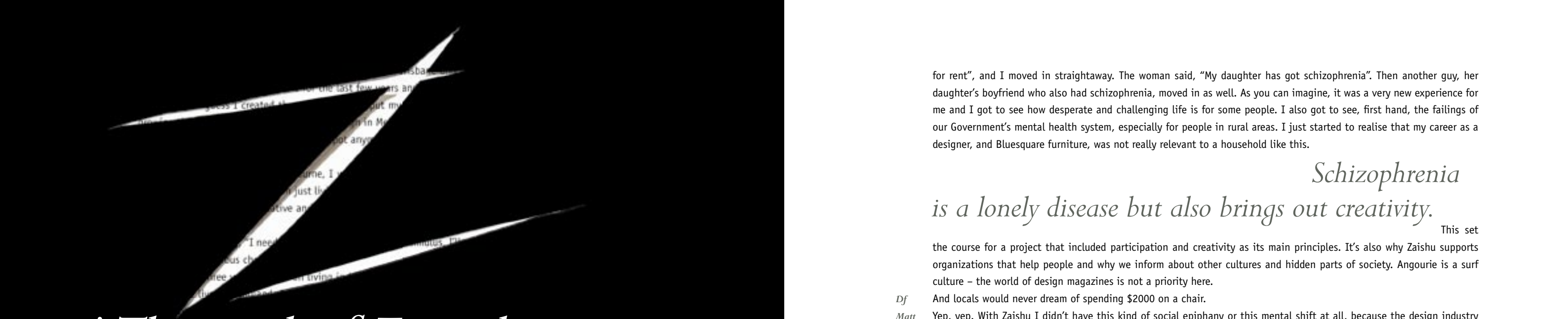
Df If you were to compare your Bluesquare work, mostly done in Melbourne, which is all polished chrome and leather, with what's now come out of your time in Angourie, the difference is immense. Your designs are that much closer to nature too. You can feel the grain of the wood...

Matt The point of difference is that a lot of modern design has decided that it needs to be shiny and smooth and precious. But it also can be damaged quite easily – the chrome can be scratched or the leather marked – so it can become obsolete quite easily and needs to be replaced. That's why I built into the Zaishu that whole idea of having the non-precious material. Even if it does get marked that becomes part of it. It doesn't look like this big scar that's screaming out like a scratch on a piece of chrome. For the Milan show, half of the Zaishus were [Florence] Broadhurst prints and the others were curated by Abi Crompton with her Third Drawer Down artists [Kat Macleod, Andrew Nicholls, Karla Pringle, Lori Jean Kirk, David Wlazlo, Chaco Kato and James Green].

*In Milan it could have either
been perceived as just a cheap piece of plywood,*

because everything else in Milan is all shiny and precious, or it could be appreciated as a nice point of difference, and fortunately that's what it was. People didn't want to see more chrome and powder-coated steel, they were quite interested in walking into this gallery space and seeing contemporary design with traditions in history and in Japanese culture. It's a simple object that's also quite flamboyant, as far as the patterns go. Again in Milan, people liked the idea of being able to participate. A married couple who came to the opening really liked the idea of buying one and decided to come back the next day with their kids. They lived an hour and a half away in Lake Como, so they did a three-hour round-trip because they liked the idea of each member of their family selecting a panel. You wouldn't get something like that in just designing a static product. So once again, that's the project part. There's environmental sustainability but I also like the idea of social sustainability. When I moved to Angourie there was a notice in the shop window saying, "Room





*The mark of Zatoichi

By Lucy Jordan

Samurai – a warrior in pre-industrial Japan bound by a strict code of honour. The sword was their most famous weapon and their symbol.

Japanese film is filled with examples of samurai that were treacherous, cowardly, brave, noble or overly loyal. One of which, a cult series, hooked Japan in the early '60s with tales of the legendary sightless samurai, Zatoichi. Set in the Edo period (1600-1867), Zatoichi became almost synonymous with one actor, Shintaro Katsu, who played the blind swordsman.

In 2003, director Takeshi Kitano's film, *Zatoichi*, breathed new life into the blind swordsman exposing audiences worldwide to the fabled character. Kitano himself stepped into the shoes of Zatoichi under the name of his alter ego, Beat Takeshi, becoming the only other actor to portray Zatoichi on film.

Kitano departed from the largely Yakuza-based themes of his earlier films (*Brother*, *Violent Cop*, *Sonatine*) to create his first 'jidai-geki' (period drama). He ventures back to 19th Century Japan to reinvent the sightless masseur, Zatoichi, who turns out to be a samurai of the highest order. Kitano tells a simple tale of bloody revenge, gang violence, corrupted youth and of a noble samurai who takes a wrong path.

The sightless and apparently harmless masseur wanders from town to town with his cane. The film unravels in a remote mountain village where Zatoichi's mastery with a sword is revealed to the audience when he is challenged by a gang of robbers. With lightning speed he pulls his concealed sword from within his cane, effortlessly defeating all his opponents.

The blind swordsman encounters many townspeople who are being tormented by the Ginzo gang, particularly two young geishas avenging the murder of their family. While the plot may sound somewhat conventional it plays out quite uniquely due to Kitano's distinctive style, pace and timing. Unlike many warrior-themed films there are no ten-minute long martial arts extravaganzas. Rather, Kitano employs almost blinding speed in the fight sequences, juxtaposing the violence of swordsmen killing with computer generated blood spurts bringing a manga-like quality to the film and an obvious updating of the original series.

The 2003 *Zatoichi* is a unique and contemporary twist on a Japanese classic. Instead of a conventional continuation of the long tradition of samurai films, it is uncontrived, upbeat and infused with a clever sense of humour.

for rent", and I moved in straightaway. The woman said, "My daughter has got schizophrenia". Then another guy, her daughter's boyfriend who also had schizophrenia, moved in as well. As you can imagine, it was a very new experience for me and I got to see how desperate and challenging life is for some people. I also got to see, first hand, the failings of our Government's mental health system, especially for people in rural areas. I just started to realise that my career as a designer, and Bluesquare furniture, was not really relevant to a household like this.

*Schizophrenia
is a lonely disease but also brings out creativity.*

This set

the course for a project that included participation and creativity as its main principles. It's also why Zaishu supports organizations that help people and why we inform about other cultures and hidden parts of society. Angourie is a surf culture – the world of design magazines is not a priority here.

Df And locals would never dream of spending \$2000 on a chair.

Matt Yep, yep. With Zaishu I didn't have this kind of social epiphany or this mental shift at all, because the design industry and its mechanisms still does have its place. My reasoning was that being my own client, I can set my own agenda and I didn't just want to plug new designs into the pre-existing Bluesquare system.

*I wanted to really
look at the whole way it worked and not just have
a design that's cool or in the magazines.*

The Zaishu is something

that can come out of the pages of a magazine and have a lot of relevance in a wider community.

Df Is it so far the most rewarding thing you've done?

Matt Most definitely.

Df And ironically, has it been far more successful in terms of general interest and coverage than anything else before?

Matt Yeah, yeah. Before, whenever I'd come up with a new design I would take it to Space furniture and they'd say, "Matt, we love your work but, you know, we've got all this other stuff from Europe we have to sell." Then one day I was walking down the street with a couple of Zaishus and the Melbourne manager of Space asked me what they were. I explained the idea and he bought them off me then and there, on the spot. Then the manager of another design store, DeDeCe, phoned me up and said, "Do you still have some of those Zaishus? I want to buy one." They were the first sales that I had. And last week the Sydney manager of DeDeCe phoned me up and he said, "Matt, we've got Giulio Cappellini [owner of Italian furniture company Cappellini] here in the showroom and he wants to meet you and see one of your Zaishus." It's a wooden box, but they loved that point of difference.

Df In terms of where it goes next, are you thinking of pushing the design any further?

Matt Yeah, definitely. The next thing I want to do is look at truck pallets... So much wood and millions of pallets just get thrown out, and you can make things out of it. They're all standard length, they're already cut, they're right there. It looks like I'm going to be doing a project at QUT [Queensland University of Technology], a residency project, so I think that's what I'll do with the students, look at this whole idea of wooden truck pallets and also tyre inner-tubes.

Df So you're using all the contacts you've built up over the years through Blue Square to help Zaishu now.

Matt Yeah. I guess I've had nearly 15 years now in the design and development thing, it's easy to come up with a new idea and get it out there. And instead of me just running Zaishu, I've asked a friend, Helen Punton, to partner with me. Her background is in graphic design and marketing and she speaks German, so the plan is that she'll go back to Berlin and she'll set up some projects there. We've got another guy, Djaffar, who's a flight attendant and he speaks five different languages and travels the world weekly, so he'll use his global network too. And then there's Jacqui Doyle from Playgroup in Sydney, who's doing the same thing and has just finished a Zaishu project with artists in Noosa. So it's almost like we're setting up these connector points that keep putting the feelers out. So in 12 months the Zaishu might not look like this, it might be a documentary about what's happening in India, and the loss of traditional craft and art in India.

Df How did your interest in Japanese Samurai culture, which then influenced the Zaishu design, develop?

Matt Where I live is a famous surf break, Angourie Point, so we get a lot of Japanese people travelling there to go surfing. A couple of years ago I was also involved in an exhibition in Tokyo. I went there for a couple of weeks and I really liked looking at how the temples in Kamakura were constructed without any nails or other fixings. The beams slotted together without glue and there was consideration for subtleties in texture, sunlight, shadow and air circulation.

*I also
saw a Kimono laying out flat on a table and liked
the combination of straight lines and broad curves.*

When you lay the five Zaishu panels on the floor you intentionally get the same effect. I thought I'd like to approach the Zaishu with consideration, something that's simple but if you want to start to dig down through the layers, there's a bit of complexity to it as well. Almost like yoga, where you think you're just stretching, but where really, 1000 years ago some monk somewhere knew that if you bent your shoulder back here, it'd going to change something there. I loved the movie *Zatoichi* (*see page 86 *The mark of Zatoichi*), which was released at the same time I was designing the Zaishu. The movie is set in 19th Century Japan and what's beautiful about that is the old traditional interiors, the texture, lots of rice paper screens with beautiful print designs on them. I guess all those things combine together to give it a sense of history, it just didn't stop and start with me right now. A design can evolve over time, but I've taken principles from the past, and added or contributed to those ideas so the design just doesn't stop and start with one designer or one person.

Df Or one culture.

Matt And the name is a good example of cultural crossover. I asked one of my Japanese surfer friends in Angourie what I should call it, or what's a name for a Japanese stool and she said, "Zaisu". I accidentally wrote it down with an 'h', "Zaishu". A few weeks later we noticed the mistake and we thought, "Well, we think that's an important part of the project, to just run with what feels right, even if it is a mistake." The naming has set the tone for the whole project. It is in complete contrast to the preciousness of Bluesquare. If there were any mistakes with Bluesquare I'd get really paranoid that it was unprofessional. But if there is a mistake with Zaishu you just use that mistake to create something new.

*The
element of chance becomes a very important part of
the evolution of the design and the idea.*

