

# EDUCATION KIT

## F!NK: Fostering Design

27 June 2009 – 30 August 2009

# F!NK: Fostering Design

## Teachers Notes

In the field of innovative design F!NK + Co. has gained an international reputation as an iconic Australian design company. With more than 20 years experience in the arts and design field, Robert Foster, the founding member of F!NK, has gained an international reputation as a silversmith and innovative designer.

Curated by Merryn Gates for Craft ACT, *F!NK: Fostering Design* is a retrospective exhibition of F!NK + Co. which highlights the role of Robert Foster as the creative force behind the company and the partnerships he has fostered with other emerging Australian designers. Featured in the show are pieces that have put F!NK + Co.'s style on the global design map and have made it into the permanent collections of some of the world's leading galleries and museums.

The exhibition also focuses on the products that have been created as a result of Foster's formal mentorships and collaborations with Australian designers such as Elizabeth Kelly, Sean Booth, Bronwyn Riddiford, Rachel Bowak, Oliver Smith, Rohan Nicol and Remi Verchot.


*The F!NK: Fostering Design* education kit endeavours to introduce students and teachers to:

- the many different opportunities there are available for design graduates.
- the relationships and collaborations that can be formed with design companies in Australia and overseas.
- the processes and materials used in F!NK + Co.'s design studio.
- how Australian designers have furthered their careers by collaborating with internationally renowned design companies overseas.

The kit has been developed for Years 11 and 12 Visual Design, Visual Arts and Design and Technology students and includes activities, questions, research projects and links to websites.

The education kit is intended to help students focus on particular features of the exhibition; to engage with and think about the objects through looking, reading, sketching and annotating. Object hopes that the exhibition and kit will support teachers and students in expanding their knowledge of Australian design.

**Throughout the kit you will find references to symbols, they refer to;**



**Enquire**  
Investigate/research before you visit



**Experience**  
The exhibition through questions and activities



**Extend**  
Your knowledge by further research, making, creating and designing.

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All images courtesy of F!NK + Co.

Education kit was developed by Annette Mauer, Learning Coordinator, Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design Writer: Michele Morcos, Design: Emily Priddel, Photography: Various Reference material used throughout the Education kit: *F!NK: Fostering Design* exhibition catalogue by Merryn Gates, *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*, Edited by Brian Parkes & *Studio Design at Work*, Donald Williams.



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# Robert Foster & Iconic Design

In the early 1980s Robert Foster (b.1962) studied at the Canberra School of Arts – now called the Australian National University School of Art – where craft and design is well established within a creative culture. Foster studied gold and silversmithing in those early years and developed a deep understanding of hollowware with Norwegian master craftsman and lecturer Ragner Hansen.

## Buzz Words

**Hollowware:** A term used to describe objects that are shaped into rounded forms e.g. bowls, plates, tea pots etc. In contrast flat ware refers to cutlery and flatter utensils.



Hansen emigrated to Australia in 1972 and introduced a strong Scandinavian design aesthetic to his students in Tasmania and then in Canberra.

It was at university, under Hansen, where Foster started to reinterpret the design of the humble teapot. Initially using silver, Foster began to experiment with aluminium. He recognised the great potential of aluminium's capacity to be folded, pressed, blasted with explosives and sculpted with hydro-forming. Foster called aluminium 'the harlequin of metals'.



'(Hansen) drove us all like crazy and instilled in me a keen sense of aesthetics and balance and the drive to get every little nuance right. He encouraged us to make our own tools and to use our own resourcefulness.'

Robert Foster

**Above:** Robert Foster Photo: by Bewley Shaylor

**Below:** *The F!NK Jug*, 1993, Pressed anodised aluminium, Powder-coated cast aluminium handle  
Original 1993 Blue  
Production line 1994 Green  
Limited edition 1999 Black  
New colour 2008 Red

# Robert Foster & Iconic Design

Resurrecting the practice of anodising aluminium from the design pages of the 1950s, offered Foster an alternative to highly expensive silver. With his company's first product *The F!NK Jug* (1993), aluminium would soon prove to be the material that Foster would be identified with on the global stage.

F!NK + Co. and *The F!NK Jug* both encapsulated this notion of 'distinctive design with a rethinking of function and technical innovation'. Focusing on a deep understanding of Australia's natural beauty, the jug, with its classic lines and clear vision has now truly become an iconic piece of Australian design:

Many of the forms and contours of my work are derived from the Australia's extraordinary natural environment – the unique flora and fauna and the weathered features of the landscape that have been shaped by the unrelenting elements.

Robert Foster



Robert Foster with *The F!NK Jug*, 1993  
Photo: Bewley Shaylor

## Buzz Word

**Anodise:** Aluminium anodising is an electrochemical process in which an oxide (anodic) layer is chemically built on the surface of the metal. This oxide layer acts as an insulator and can also be dyed in a wide variety of colours.

**Design Icon:** an object that is well known and recognized by a consensus of experts as having qualities that demonstrate the best or most recognisable design for its time.



Look at an early design for one of Robert Foster's teapots by visiting the Powerhouse archive online at <http://www.dhub.org/object/111574,anodised>

What is the material Delrin? How has Foster used Delrin and aluminium in the design of his teapot?

Sketch the teapot and annotate. What do you think makes Foster's design contemporary?

Choose another teapot from the Powerhouse archive to compare with Foster's piece. How have teapots changed over the decades?

If you were to design the 2010 prototype of *The F!NK Jug* what would it look like and what colours would you introduce to the design? Write what influenced your design and how your design compliments the F!NK design aesthetic.

Create a flatware product e.g. a plate or cutlery utensil that would sit with Robert Foster's design for *The F!NK Jug*. Sketch a table setting with *The F!NK Jug* and your product.



Look at the work of Ragner Hansen on the webpage: <http://nga.gov.au/federation/Detail.cfm?WorkID=99135>

What are some of the characteristics of Scandinavian design? Research two other designers from Norway, Denmark, Sweden or Finland. What materials and colour palette do they explore? Compare and contrast with F!NK + Co.



Sketch the display of *The F!NK Jug*. Think of an alternate way of displaying them in the gallery space.

What Australian landscapes spring to mind when looking at the shapes and colours of *The F!NK Jug*?

Draw a jug and a related landscape.

# What does a design company do?

## Collaboration

Since 1997 F!NK + Co. has been jointly run by partners Robert Foster and Gretel Harrison (b.1968), displaying a perfect working relationship - Foster's innovative designs and Harrison's marketing, sales and distribution knowledge. The company is based in Queanbeyan, just outside of Canberra, where Foster began his career. Over a 15 year period F!NK + Co. has built a design aesthetic and a brand that is distinctive and unique.

## Production

Starting with *The F!NK Jug*, F!NK + Co. now displays a portfolio of 29 products that all carry a strong sense of F!NK design methodologies and innovative production methods. Many of the products have been designed by designers that have collaborated with Foster over the years. Some of the products have been discontinued and a few have been limited additions. Discovering new ways of designing one-off handmade pieces and new manufacturing methods for limited edition production pieces is what keeps the company's brand fresh and open to all possibilities. For Foster the

company could not work without this two-fold model:

With the company's expansion and distribution to over 50 retailers around the world the company now employs six people to help realise and maintain its vision. F!NK + Co. has also established its own anodising facility which keeps the production of its products at a uniform quality standard for distribution to the many places that commission their products, such as restaurants, design firms and its biggest client The Museum of Modern Art in New York.



‘ (F!NK) promotes manufacturing know-how with experience in coordinating projects from initial design liaison, to tooling, prototypes, manufacture, assembly, packaging, and distribution.

Gretel Harrison ▶

**Left:** Robert Foster and Gretel Harrison Photo: Anthony Geernaert from *Freestyle: New Australian Design For Living*

**Right:** *The F!NK Storage Vessels*, 2007, *Mr Squash*, *Mrs Squash* and *Junior Squash*, All pressed anodised aluminium, press-formed acrylic, plastic

# What does a design company do?



The F!NK Bowls, 2000, Pressed anodised aluminium

## Branding

This understanding of building a brand through a clear vision of its product and where it fits within the design vernacular is one of F!NK + Co.'s strong points. Another is the development and creation of a brand identity through Harrison's promotional material such as the design of the packaging, signage and website. This achievement is made possible through one of F!NK + Co.'s natural strengths which is the recognition of forming strong collaborative relationships with other Australian design and artistic talents. In this instance Harrison works closely with graphic artist Louise Scrivener and photographer Damian McDonald.



Look at the anodized lighting designs of New Zealand - based, Australian designer Andrew Last at <http://www.dhub.org/articles/899> How has nature influenced his designs? Compare the use of anodized aluminium in F!nk and Co.'s designs to that of Andrew Last.

Sketch a light design that reflects your personal style. What materials, colours and textures would you use? Would the light be used for e.g. pendant, desk, wall, installation? Create your prototype using a recycled product e.g. plastic bottles, folded paper or aluminium jar lids.

Who would they be aimed at in the marketplace and what media would you then employ to reach your audience?



Look at Australian design company Bernabeifreeman at <http://www.bernabeifreeman.com.au/>

What is their design aesthetic and how have they applied it to the design of their product lines? How have they used the new forms of communication e.g. blogging/website to market their brand?

What are the similarities between F!NK + Co. and Bernabeifreeman in terms of product design and production of their lighting pieces?



Sketch a quick layout of the show in the gallery space and discuss what the main features are and what has been given precedence. e.g. Is it Foster's *The F!NK Jug*/The collaborative pieces/The portraits of the designer on the wall? Or is every aspect given equal attention?

As a member of the viewing audience describe your initial feeling of the exhibition and what mood is it trying to portray? What type of audience will the show appeal to?

# Working in metal...processing/ tooling/ anodising

Aluminium has enjoyed the status of being a familiar everyday material. For many years it has been used to make kitchen utensils such as pots and pans and put to more utilitarian uses in the building and industrial industries. Today artists and designers are discovering the potential to challenge this preconceived notion and turn it into a valuable design material with which to produce an array of contemporary designs.

Aluminium is an inexpensive material that can be anodised into a multitude of colours - as Foster has discovered- but also manipulated into many shapes through many types of technical and innovative processes. *The FINK Explosive Vase* (1999) is produced by shaping an aluminium tube with explosives and *The FINK Cream and Sugar Set* (2001) uses a new heat fusion process to join food-grade plastic to aluminium.

Tooling takes up a large percentage of Foster's time as he remains closely connected to this part of the process to maintain the sensitivity and integrity of the design. The eye he believes is more sophisticated than machines. By keeping his hand in the making of tools, more personality and humanness is retained in the multiple.

**Merryn Gates**



**Top:** *Coolamon Tray*, 2008, Water formed and pressed anodised aluminium

**Below:** *The FINK Explosive Vase*, 1999, Explosively formed aluminium

# Working in metal...processing/ tooling/ anodising

With Sean Booth's *A.05 2005* light piece, pieces of aluminium sheet are cut-out, folded and moulded before assembling with rivets to create a structure that is multidimensional and geometrically complex. Foster aided Booth with the tooling process which is integral to the F!NK design philosophy.

None of these processes allows for the mass production of any of the F!NK + Co. products and as such each product is run in small batches of 100 to 200 units and individually hand finished. Quality control is an important part of building a small design company and Robert Foster understands that by keeping the notion of the human touch to each and every product, you give each piece a sense of individuality and integrity.



Sean Booth, *A.05 2005*, Stainless steel, 12v light

## Buzzword

**Tooling:** To equip an industry or factory with tools, machinery or instruments suitable to a particular job.

‘The business allows him to concentrate on commission work (and) product development while giving him time to make his own one-off pieces.’

Gretel Harrison



The advancement of new materials in product design has completely changed the way we interact, buy, collect and produce goods.

How has aluminium changed the face of contemporary design. What other materials have been popular to create products with?

Name some of the advantages and disadvantages of new materials.

Look at the website <http://www.ecospecifier.org/> What advancements are being explored by this environmental website in regards to new technologies and products for design?



Sketch and describe Sean Booth's *A.05 2005* light considering elements of design such as shape, line and repetition.

What type of impact does it make in the gallery space and how would that change when displayed in the home/office/restaurant/retail space?

Does Sean Booth have a similar aesthetic to other designers in the exhibition?

What makes the feel of this design architectural and industrial?



‘pieces of aluminium sheet are cut-out, folded and moulded before assembling with rivets to create a structure that is multidimensional and geometrically complex.’

Look at the repetition and folding aspect to Sean Booth's light design.

Research a shape that is found in nature e.g. a leaf/branch/shell

How could that design be recreated using repetition?

Create a hollowware product using a shape found in nature. Consider line, texture, and colour in your design.

# Collaborators and their work...

## Collaboration and the creative process

Foster enjoys the interplay between his own design mind and that of emerging Australian designers with whom he collaborates on new products for the company. Adopting a European design-studio model, F!NK + Co. engages with other designers in a way that benefits both the company and the individual. The collaborative designer retains copyright of their own design, their name remains associated with the product – seen on all advertising and packaging of the piece – and they continue to receive royalties on sales of the product.

Both Foster and each of the designers realize the strengths in establishing these collaborations for both the artists and the pieces that they create.

Oliver Smith (b.1974), a silversmith, designer and lecturer, has had a fruitful collaborative relationship with F!NK + Co. designing amongst other products the F!NK Flatware and Tray 2005. With an interest in hammerwork techniques and hot-forging, this flatware designer realizes the excitement that can be obtained from developing and nurturing a creative dialogue with another designer while producing new pieces.



‘ The explosion of ideas, all the fun of playing and pulling things together into making a product...the discipline of making multiples (and devising) a system that is built on solid research into functional and aesthetic questions, combined with an understanding of the commercial market. ’

Oliver Smith

**Top Left:** Oliver Smith with *The F!NK Fatware and Tray*, 2005 Photo: Bewley Shaylor

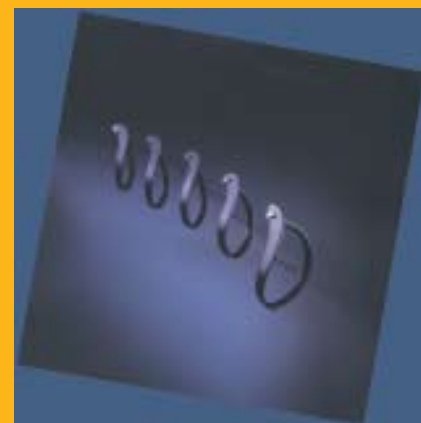
**Below Left:** *The F!NK Fatware and Tray*, 2005, Drop-forged, hard-anodised aluminium, food grade polyethylene

**Top Right:** Rohan Nichol with *F!NK Bracelet MKII Developmental Prototype*, 2008 Photo: Bewley Shaylor

**Below Right:** *The F!NK Bracelet*, 1998, Press cut, jig formed hard-anodised aluminium



Foster relishes the cross fertilisation that comes with collaborations. He is generous with his experience and willing to share, whether it is formal mentorships or by offering others to design for F!NK. One such designer that has enjoyed working on jewellery for the company is Rohan Nicol (b.1970). In 1998 Nicol designed *The F!NK Bracelet* and since then has gone on to develop many of his own designs using the industrial knowledge and skills in aluminium that he obtained at F!NK + Co. Clearly demonstrating Foster's openness to engage with designers over a long period of time, Nicol returned to the company after a 10 year period to reproduce the Bracelet MKII – Development Prototype.



# Collaborators and their work...

## Collaboration and the creative process

Another designer that was invited to collaborate with Foster in the F!NK studios is the Adelaide-based Bronwen Riddiford (b.1973). Although trained in traditional silversmithing techniques Riddiford 'preferred to use modern industrial materials and manufacturing techniques' that could be explored at F!NK + Co. such as laser cutting and anodising aluminium. Riddiford's designs for *The Wine Chiller 2003* (designed with Foster) and *F!NK Storage Vessels 2007* have translated into beautifully clean and contemporary pieces. It has also enhanced Foster's thoughts on the value of working with many young designers to bring a fresh approach to each product, which in turn, gives a new crop of Australian artists and designs much needed experience of designing for production.



**Left:** Bronwen Riddiford and Robert Foster, *Wine Chiller*, 2003

**Right:** Remi Verchot and Robert Foster, *The F!NK Feature Bowl*, 2002

What is justifiable in a one off piece may need to be taken to another level of resolution as a multiple – in this sense design makes you lift your game.

Oliver Smith



Look at the website for the Jamfactory in Adelaide [http://www.jamfactory.com.au/html/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=163&Itemid=380](http://www.jamfactory.com.au/html/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=163&Itemid=380)

What type of organisation is the Jamfactory? What type of studios do they have and what opportunities are available for artists and designers? How would a place like the Jamfactory foster the collaborative relationships of a designer?

Choose one person from your class and collaborate on the design of a product that will be functional for use in the home. The product may be a reinterpretation of an existing item from the home or a product for the future. Research an Australian company such as F!NK + Co, Bernabeifreeman or Korban/ Flaubert <http://www.korbanflaubert.com.au/> and design/pitch your product to suit their collections and range of existing pieces.



Investigate the work of Sean Booth <http://www.seanbooth.com/>

What experience does he hold in the design world?

Watch the video of Oliver Smith's talk at the Smartworks conference at the web-link: <http://www.dhub.org/articles/897>

What do you think he means when he says that he would like his work to be 'the focal point of the table'?

Name two collaborations that he has done in his career, other than working with Robert Foster at F!NK + Co. How does he view these experiences and how valuable are they to his design practice?



Choose one designer in the exhibition and describe their work. How has the designer described their experience working with F!NK + Co.?

Have they collaborated with Robert Foster on the design or the making of the piece? What processes were involved in the tooling of the materials to make the piece?

Sketch a product/ or piece of furniture that would compliment this product by F!NK + Co..

# The bigger picture...

## Australian designers collaborating overseas with International Design Companies

Celebrated for his hollowware designs, in particular his distinctive teapots and vessels, F!NK + Co. supports Foster as a collaborator but also as a solo artist.

Represented in many international museum and gallery collections Foster's work can be seen in the permanent collections of such esteemed organisations as The Victoria and Albert Museum in the UK and the Alessi Museum in Italy.

For Foster, creating a name for himself within the international design world has been as important as building up the company of F!NK + Co. Forging professional collaborative and mentoring relationships with renowned companies such as Italy's House of Alessi is seen as integral to Foster's own career but also to the future development of Australian companies and the young designers they support.

In the year 2000 Foster spent a considerable time in Europe prototyping teapots for the Alessi Company and then moving to the studio of Munich-based lighting designer Ingo Maurer for three months to design lighting products for future collections. Relishing his experiences with the frenetic Maurer and his 12-strong team of engineers and designers, Foster valued the frank and perceptive mind of Maurer and went on to assist with an installation of his work at the 2005 Milan Furniture Fair.



‘ In Australia we are less restricted by history... we tend to be risk takers and have to be both good designers as well as good entrepreneurs. ’

**Adam Goodrum**

Adam Goodrum, *Stitch Chair*, 1996-2005, Aluminium, stainless steel

Many Australian designers relish the opportunities that an international design company can offer. Two such designers are Melbourne - based Susan Cohn and Perth - born Adam Goodrum.

Adam Goodrum (b.1972) is another Australian designer that has enjoyed a successful relationship with an overseas design company. In 2005 Goodrum won the Bombay Sapphire Design Discovery Award and with the prize was able to attend the Milan Furniture Fair as an exhibitor where he was able to introduce himself to international design companies such as the Italian-based Cappellini.

Out of this introduction Cappellini launched Adam Goodrum's Stitch Chair at the 2008 Milan Furniture Fair, becoming the first Australian designer since Marc Newson to work with the company.

Stitch Chair is a multi-coloured aluminium piece that folds, origami-like into a flat two dimensional form when packed away. Similar to F!NK + Co. and Cohn's use of high coloured anodised aluminium, Goodrum's Stitch Chair has a playful and a uniquely Australian design aesthetic that this country is building a name for.

# The bigger picture...

## Australian designers collaborating overseas with International Design Companies

One of Susan Cohn's (b.1952) best known works is the Cohncave Bowl which has been mass produced by Alessi since 1992. Recalling the Australian tradition of covering or protecting food with a mesh cloth or in an old perforated meat safe, the bowl is made from two pieces of steel mesh that when joined together at the stainless steel rim, form a beautiful symmetry of form and function. Cohn enjoyed the experience of working with such a large design house which has a tradition of working with metal objects since 1921.



Susan Cohn, *Cohncave*, 1992, Power coated steel bowl stainless steel edge, Production bowl manufactured by Alessi

When I learned of the company's background I felt like they understood what I was trying to achieve. Alessi was totally supportive of maintaining the original concept and look of the bowl.

Susan Cohn



Look at the Australian company Qantas. How have they supported and promoted Australian artists and designers? What is the idea behind becoming a patron for the arts?

Mark Newson is an Australian designer who has made a career by collaborating with international design companies to create some of the world's most iconic products. Name two of Newson's designs and what companies he developed these pieces for. What type of materials does he like to work with? What are his design methods and aesthetic?

Research a design company- overseas or in Australia- that you would like to work for. What is their design philosophy and who is their clientele? Design a product that fits within their collections. Create a set of drawings by hand or on computer of this product that would form the basis of a portfolio to present at a meeting with your chosen company.



'Design should stimulate and help, our world already has too much stuff. A product should be of worth and made to last.' Adam Goodrum

Look at the work of Adam Goodrum. What are some other designs that feature in his portfolio? How are his products 'built to last'? <http://adamgoodrum.com/stitch.html>

Watch young Australian designer Trent Jansen's video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pa8Kgvq34pM>. What are some of his views on sustainable design? What was his ideology behind *The Pregnant Chair* (2008) that was shown at Milan Furniture Fair in 2008 for Dutch design company Moooi?



'...My ideas have always explored the borderline between object and mass production. And I am interested in the capacity of contemporary craft to celebrate daily routines, to give pleasure and reinvigorate cultural connectedness.'

What do you think Susan Cohn is talking about in the above quote?

What other products in the exhibition would be helpful on a daily basis? Why do you think the redesign has helped the product to become more functional or practical?