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Keeping the faith

In his search for perfection, furniture maker Mark Wakeling remains true to the old ways.



Mark Wakeling (centre right) with a range of furniture from Timeless Timber; "I try to use the colour, shape and form of the house," he says of his designs.

"I've always tried for perfection, right from day one," Mark Wakeling says. It is an attitude that has guided the life and work of the 39-year-old designer and furniture maker. Twenty years ago, fresh from his apprenticeship, Wakeling established Timeless Timber Gallery in an old shed in Ballarat. Now he employs 26 people and runs two stores (in Ballarat and Daylesford), and his commitment to absolute quality still drives everything he does.

"It has been a bit of an unusual direction but it's what I have always wanted to do," he says. "Always wanted to work with my hands, always had a good eye for colour and design. And always wanted to produce the very best that I could. Which is why we do everything ourselves. A lot of companies are only as good as their suppliers, but we do everything on site, and everything's custom built."

Timeless Timber made its name producing solid-timber furniture in French and English designs, using time-honoured methods of carpentry and joinery. These days the brief includes contemporary and retro designs, and full fitouts.

"A lot of the work we do now is interior decorating, full interiors," Wakeling says. "We do period and contemporary styles. In fact we are fitting out a place in Fairhaven (on Victoria's west coast) at the moment with a retro feel."

Wakeling says one of the strengths of his company is that it does not specialise. "We 'specialise' in everything, no matter what style or what timber," he says. "My favourite is French period furniture but, for our clients, it is about what best suits them. Every house has its own personality, its own feel."

"I try to use the colour, shape and form of the house as well as the general environment. For the place in Fairhaven we

have incorporated the sun, the mountains, the trees into the designs. And we try and design around the client's lifestyle. We are not locked into any particular zone."

What they are locked into is impeccable craftsmanship. Timeless Timber pieces are not cheap (a dining table can cost between \$1500 and \$8000) but they are an investment as much as they are functional furniture, "an heirloom," Wakeling says.

An award-winning apprentice in his day, Wakeling is proud of the fact that several of his apprentices have also been declared best in the state. In the style of the old-fashioned Italian bottegas, Timeless Timber is a studio and training ground, as well as a manufacturer.

Wakeling says training in-house is essential to maintain quality. "We have to do it because I work for professional people who are perfectionists themselves. They want the best and that is what I want to give them."

He says that, in some ways, his craft — making beautiful furniture from solid timber according to traditional methods — is a dying art. "So much is made from chipboard and veneers, so much is imported," he says.

It also troubles him that the public does not always understand that paying for quality is often wiser, in both financial and lifestyle terms, than buying cheaper furniture that is shoddily made and essentially disposable.

"The public has been educated to expect to pay less for their sofas or chairs," he says. "They pay \$300,000, \$400,000, \$500,000 for a house and then skimp on the furniture. It might impress the neighbours but, when you get home from work after a hard day, you don't go and sit on the roof, do you? It's the inside that really counts."

Timeless Timber Gallery, Ballarat phone 5341 8318, Daylesford phone 5248 4823.