

Ballarat's new-age genius with wood

SEATON ASHTON reports in this, the 20th in our "Can Do" series on people and companies making things happen in the region.

Mark Wakeling wins premier points as a new-age wood-working genius.

A walk on the slow side through his Timeless Timber Gallery is a mighty memorable experience in exposure to a standard of furniture craftsmanship which is exceptionally rare in this country.

It's a blast back to a long by-gone past when furniture was crafted to endure down long generations, with a timeless "life" expectancy.

Regionally — and possibly nationally — Wakeling's work is without peer. He's set his own benchmarks in exulting in the creation of magnificent furniture. It's production is his passion.

Mark Wakeling drives himself remorselessly hard in his pursuit of excellence. He racks up a punishing work input at managing director and proprietor, working from 7.30am-10.30pm from Monday to Friday. He's also at the gallery on Saturdays and works all day Sunday.

The man is consumed by his almost demonic drive to create the finest furniture possible.

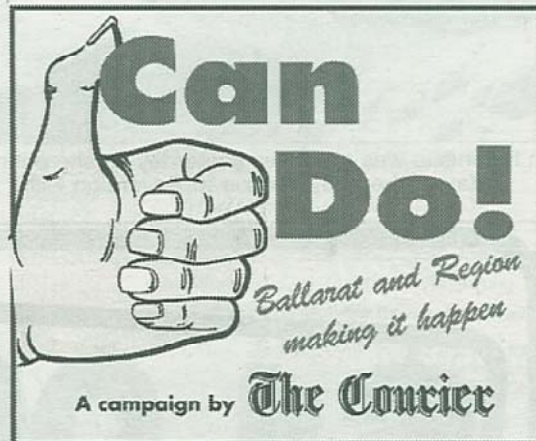
"I'm motivated by pride and by the product. People are saying we are making the best solid timber furniture in Australia. We have the 'Can Do' and it's growing".

On the day I chatted with Mark he was giving the final polish to a superb African



Mark Wakeling gives the final polish to a magnificent French dining table hand-made for a local doctor. After 18 coats of French polish, the table was gleaming with the lustre of a freshly cut gem.

Picture: HERMAN RUYG



mahogany French dining table which was to be delivered to a local doctor later in the day along with 10 dining chairs upholstered in a rich and royal-style brocade.

It was the 18th coat of French polish that table had received. And it gleamed with the lustre of a freshly cut gem.

Measuring more than 2.7 metres in length and more than 1.2 metres wide, the table presented a glowing

aura of master craftsmanship projecting from what we thought was a by-gone age.

Mark was also planning to meet representatives of the big Melbourne department store David Jones that day for talks on making some dining room furniture for them.

Little wonder then that an English tourist from the town of Lee-On-The-Solent who visited the gallery recently wrote in the

visitors' book: "This (the furniture) is 200 years behind the times. I didn't think anybody could produce this quality today. Magnificent! Magnificent!"

Mark said: "The gallery's name is like the product... timeless". But he emphasised that the gallery was also making contemporary, along with heritage style furniture.

He said 40-50 per cent of the furniture made at the gallery, which opened about four years ago, was being sold to Melbourne clients. "But people in the Ballarat region have been extremely good and very supportive". Mark has also been negotiating with US contacts for possible sale of his furniture in California, and the Colorado region. A lot of gallery furniture has been sold to clients in Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide. "We've have had one of our toughest years, with the industry in

deep recession. But we've come through... and looking forward to a brighter and better new year". The gallery opened about four years ago, with Mark employing two tradesmen. It now employs 12 tradesmen, including two apprentices, three full-time sub-contractors and three casuals.

Mark personally supervises the hand-crafting of every piece of furniture.

Well-known interior designers regularly ask him to design the furniture for houses. And he has a completely free hand in the designing.

"The furniture designs are all my own. My greatest flair is for design," said Mark who plans to consider opening a furniture retail outlet in Melbourne.

Mark Wakeling lives up to his name, figuratively stamping it on every beautifully crafted piece of furniture which leaves the gallery.