



# ON THE WATERFRONT

The Apple Isle continues to inform the work of designer Brodie Neill, even in his London studio. But in his native Hobart, the imminent arrival of his first outdoor sculpture is set to change the tone of the waterfront.

WORDS CATHERINE SIDWELL

## SCULPTURE HOBART

### LONDON-BASED FURNITURE DESIGNER

Brodie Neill considers himself lucky to be able to return to his hometown of Hobart every six months. For the much-in-demand expat, it is an opportunity to recharge creative batteries and reconnect with family and friends. His most recent visit combined business and pleasure, balancing meetings regarding two Hobart commissions with the occasion of his late-summer wedding.

At his London studio in the heart of Shoreditch, Neill, 35, has been preoccupied with major projects for Australia's most southerly city. Twelve of his Tristar benches are now in place at the new Brooke Street Pier and, later in the year, *The Portal*, Neill's first outdoor sculpture, will be installed nearby on the Hobart waterfront. The 8m landmark, depicting a falling loop frozen in time, provides seating for six to 10 people and will function as a visual gateway for day-cruise and ferry passengers travelling from Brooke Street Pier to David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) or across to Peppermint Bay.

The idea was sketched on a Qantas flight from Sydney to Melbourne. "I remember gazing out the window, wondering what would catch people's attention – a really simple gesture, but on a huge scale."

After considering materials, Neill chose what he terms "Henry Moore bronze. It will get better and better with age. It's going to have that robust, lifelong quality."

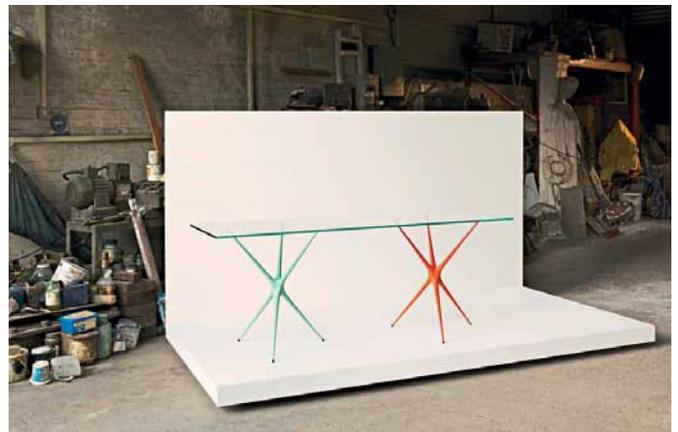
Since 2007, Neill has progressively established his bold, sculptural aesthetic, blending a deep understanding of materials with advances in digital design and technology. Fascinated by organic forms with a continuous line and shape, he produced the E-turn bench for Kundalini, and Jet table for Swarovski. In 2008, his @ chair featured in *Time* magazine's annual Design 100. In 2009, Alexander McQueen commissioned Neill's furniture for his New York show.

Collaborations with London's Apartment Gallery for Super Design launched his limited-edition pieces for private collectors: the Remix *chaise longue*, Pop table, Reverb wire chair and the Glacier glass *chaise longue*. They were presented alongside work by Zaha Hadid, Ross Lovegrove, Tom Dixon and Philip Michael Wolfson. Neill's designs have been shown at Salon del Mobile (Milan furniture fair), London Design Festival and the Stockholm Furniture Fair.

Neill gained his design training at the University of Tasmania at a time of strong government funding. Lecturers included Kevin Perkins, whose work graces the Prime Minister's suite in Canberra's Parliament House as well as museum and gallery collections across the country. Neill credits Perkins with teaching him to think in 3D, but it was an animation program rather than CAD (computer aided design) software that provided the freedom to design the forms that he creates.



From top: *The Portal* (computer-generated image); Neill with his Tristar bench; Supernova desk



"The digital tools were as fluid as my ideas and I found that designing in virtual 3D space was a visual extension of my imagination. Of course, you have to have a sturdy foundation of what is physically possible before you can really push the limits."

In 2004, Neill honed his skills at the Rhode Island School of Design (US). Now he pares back his designs to their simplest forms using digital modelling. He works with diverse materials – metal, glass, wood, Corian and plastics. Environmental sustainability is also a factor.

Sometimes the resources are right where he needs them – the Brooke Street Pier benches were made in Tasmania. "We looked at all options from Melbourne to Sydney, Singapore, China and Europe." In the end, Neill got a company in the north of the island – which normally manufactures trucking components – to produce them. ➤

## SCULPTURE HOBART

Scrolling through installation photographs, Neill is clearly thrilled with the outcome. The innovative floating pier, designed by Circa Morris-Nunn Architects, references Hobart's maritime history and architecture. This new water-transport hub includes cafes and stalls selling Tasmanian produce. The white and black glass fibre-reinforced plastic benches resemble whale vertebrae scattered across the polished concrete floor. The Tristar bench will now join Neill's product range.

Neill is enthusiastic about the extent to which his old stomping ground has transformed into a cultural destination. "Hobart's nickname used to be 'Slowbart', but that has all changed. Now it is attracting the entire world with its food, design and art." Restaurants and bars he likes to visit include Franklin (established by chef David Moyle and Ben Lindell) for its open kitchen interior, warm environment and fresh local seafood; Tavern 42 Degrees South (locally known as T42), a classic "after art school" bar; and Peppermint Bay "for the scenery".

Following an introduction at The Conran Shop in London, Neill's popular Made in Ratio range is available at Living Edge (Australia)



Cowrie chair

and The Future Perfect (US). Supernova has a dual function as a desk or coffee table, while the Cowrie chair and rocker are informed by classic mid-century-modern plywood furniture by Eames, Saarinen and Jacobsen, and the concave folds of a cowrie shell.

Next on Neill's agenda is the launch of a new stacking chair in Milan. He is discussing further Australian projects and is keen to work with Design Tasmania in the near future. He continues to draw inspiration from nature and the Tasmanian wilderness. Neill will return soon to see *The Portal* in place on Hobart's waterfront and revisit the places that first stirred the inspiration for his designs.

## HOBART'S HOTTEST ACCOMMODATION

### AVALON CITY RETREAT

152 Macquarie Street, Hobart.  
1300 361 136. [avalonretreats.com.au](http://avalonretreats.com.au)  
Cantilevered off each end of a 1960s office block, this designer "omnipod" is all luxury inside, with elegant minimalist interiors, cashmere throws and a pillow menu. There's a 10-seater dining table, a barbecue on the deck and a full kitchen with Royal Doulton crockery and plenty of provisions to get you started on dinner. For stargazers, there's an illuminated moon lounge on the deck and a Huon pine bath. A full breakfast is included, dinner can be delivered from nearby Astor Grill, and there are two bikes and helmets for guests to use. From \$500.

### LENNA PENTHOUSES

Runnymede Street & Salamanca Place, Battery Point.  
(03) 6232 3900. [lenna.com.au](http://lenna.com.au)  
Perched atop Lenna, a magnificently restored 1874 waterfront mansion,

the penthouses offer views of Salamanca Place, the waterfront and Mount Wellington. The bedrooms and living spaces all open onto a wraparound balcony. The penthouses can be configured as two-, three- or five-bedroom suites, and come with a full kitchen, large living area and automated control of lights, blinds and sounds. Lounge on the deck or chill out inside, the view is the same either way – spectacular. From \$1000.

### ARTHOUSE SALAMANCA

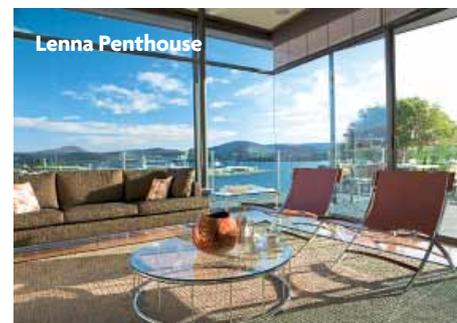
104 Salamanca Place, Battery Point. 0457 750 035.  
[arthousesalamanca.com.au](http://arthousesalamanca.com.au)  
Built in the 1880s as sailors' quarters near the waterfront, in spite of its heritage listing this is a modern reflection of the owners' love of art, design and architecture. Offering two queen bedrooms and bathrooms, the open living space leads to a sandstone walled terrace – the oldest sea wall in Australia – capturing views

of the Derwent River. The two-storey house, in a quiet cul-de-sac next to Princes Park, is moments from galleries, restaurants and Salamanca Place markets (Saturdays). From \$700.

### MONA PAVILIONS

655 Main Road, Berriedale.  
(03) 6277 9900. [mona.net.au](http://mona.net.au)  
There's something very special about staying at the 3.5ha home of Australia's largest private museum. Alighting at the MONA jetty after a ferry ride up the Derwent is the way to go. Dangling over the water, the eight guest pavilions are named for Australian artists and architects: the Brett, Charles, Arthur and Sidney pavilions each have a painting by their namesake on display alongside other artworks from the MONA collection. Spread over two or three luxurious levels, the retreats offer uninterrupted

✈ For airfares and holiday packages to Hobart call Qantas Holidays on 1300 339 543 or visit [qantas.com/holidaysaustralianway](http://qantas.com/holidaysaustralianway)



Lenna Penthouse

river views. There are fluffy bathrobes, bathrooms with spa baths and underfloor heating, and kitchens with wine fridges stocked from the on-site Moorilla winery and Moo Brew brewery. Wireless touch panels control temperature, lighting and entertainment. There's also an infinity pool, gym and sauna shared between pavilions. MONA entry (and breakfast) is included in packages. The Source, the on-site restaurant run by chef Philippe Leban, does exquisite French-inspired food. From \$550.