

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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UTAS Furniture Design building opened

The Governor of Tasmania has opened the new University of Tasmania Furniture Design building, saying he believes it will play a large role in preserving and developing the skills of fine furniture craftspeople in Tasmania.

His Excellency, the Honourable Peter Underwood, said that the \$2.3m building at Inveresk would develop an industry gaining national and international recognition.

“Tasmania is an especially appropriate location for this specialist teaching facility because of its abundance of fine timber,” he said.

The Furniture Design building is part of the School of Architecture and Design. It is attached to the historic railyard building which is the home of the majority of the School of Architecture and Design.

The acting head of the School, Professor Stephen Loo, said the building is part of a new direction for Architecture and Design, incorporating the bachelor of Environmental Design (furniture design) and the Associate Degree in Furniture Design.

“Graduates may choose to work as independent furniture designers and makers or collaboratively with furniture manufacturing companies,” he said.

“The new building represents a new direction in furniture design in Tasmania because it gives us new avenues for investigating and experimenting in terms of contemporary furniture.

The Furniture Design building was designed to blend architecturally with the rest of the School.

“The design is a good example of a contemporary interpretation of a traditional large ‘shed’ and an industrial building,” Prof. Loo said.

Constructed of a laminated Tasmanian oak portal frame with fibreglass sheeting, galvanised steel sheeting and plywood, its ‘pared-back’ design incorporates environmentally-friendly innovative heating and cooling mechanisms.

The building is currently used by 25 full-time furniture design students and 40 students completing furniture design electives.

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Furniture Design facts

- The Australian School of Fine Furniture, as it was originally known, was established in 2001 to provide opportunities to train future generations of fine furniture craftspeople. Members of the local community were passionate that these skills not be lost. They saw the opportunity to add value to Tasmania's unique timber industry. Their long term vision was to provide a stimulus to the local furniture industry through producing graduates.
- It was established as an independent, specialist teaching facility to provide students with traditional and contemporary furniture making and design skills. It was based at the historic Thyne building in York Street, Launceston, offering a 2-year VET diploma.
- The School developed an international reputation through an innovative guest lecturer program attracting leading craftspeople from Australia and overseas and developing a unique teaching model based on a master craftsperson/student relationship and a relatively small cohort of students including a number of international students who were attracted by this model of teaching.
- However, the school struggled financially and in 2005 following negotiations between the stakeholders and various levels of government it became part of UTAS.
- The School of Architecture & Design now offers a 2-year Associate Degree and a 3-year Degree in Environmental Design (furniture design).
- It should be noted that the title "Australian School of Fine Furniture" has been retained on the entrance door to the new building in recognition of the history of the school. Formally, it is now a program in the School of Architecture & Design along with Architecture and Interior Design, and soon, Landscape Architecture. The combination of stand- alone programs in each discipline together with many opportunities for shared units of study among the disciplines offer students the ability to shape their own course of study according to their interests and future career plans.
- The University of Tasmania acknowledges the vision and work of the founding Board members, the Academic Directors, teaching staff and of course the students of the ASFF. (The founding Academic Director was David Uphill-Brown. He was followed by Mr Neil Erasmus.)
- The current Program Director is Mr Simon Ancher, furniture designer, maker and teacher. The programs offered are unique in Australia because of their links to both architecture and interiors, with a healthy balance of design and construction knowledge.