



MAKING THINGS BETTER:
Marc Newson and his iconic
Embryo chair. The Sydney-born
designer, who studied jewelry and
sculpture at art college, says he's
always liked making things and
his motivation is to improve on
whatever is already out there.

Designing the 21st century

The ultimate IMPROVER

From interiors and furniture to watches and kitchenware, Australian-born Marc Newson has become one of the world's leading design artists. **Emma Westwood** checks out his cutting-edge curvy creations

Those pocketing a first-class ticket flying Qantas to Sydney or Melbourne are in for a real treat. Confidently labeled by the airline's general manager as "simply the best in the world", Qantas' first-class lounges have been given a spit and polish that would bring a smile to even the world-weariest traveler, especially one who likes curves.

The sculptural blond wood of huge American oak separates the space of the Sydney lounge into clearly defined areas. Hard edges are softened and muted colors speak of serenity. The outdoors merge with indoor, thanks to a magical "vertical garden" sprouting more than 8,400 plants – designed by international botanist Patrick Blanc, who is also behind the spectacular green wall at the new Musée du Quai Branly in Paris – creating a lush vista for treatment rooms at the Payot Paris day spa, where the "haul" from long-haul travel can be massaged away. And these are just a few of the starting features that take air-travel luxury to beyond cloud nine.

Unveiled in May this year, the first-class lounges in Australia's two most-frequented airports are the creation of world-renowned designer Marc Newson, who, along with the Qantas brand, is one of Australia's greatest cultural exports. It seems serendipitous that the two should join forces, with Newson taking the title of creative director for Qantas.

"I wanted to achieve a consistency in the design DNA – carrying right the way through to the aircraft and everything on-board," says Newson of his work on the first-class lounges. "Ultimately, I wanted it to look timeless – very, very slick, very understated, very, very cool – and to make it the best first-class lounge in the world, which we appear to have achieved by order of magnitude.

"From the lounges through to the aircraft, we have used the finest materials and products made by companies from various countries with the highest reputa-

tion for their artisanship evoking a sense of timeless quality," he continues.

"Examples are the stone used in the spa – quartzite – mined exclusively from a small quarry in Vals, Switzerland; Carrara marble from the Furrer Company in Carrara, Italy; cutlery from Alessi; china from Noritake; and FIDS [flight information display systems] from Italy."

Newson's work with Qantas began with his tender for their international business-class sleeper seat, now known as the "Skybed". Four years on, the pod-

SMALL COMFORT: The Embryo chair, which was originally designed for the Take A Seat exhibition at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum in 1989.

KEEPING IT OPEN: The Rock Doorstop, below, designed for Magis in 1997. Made of blow-molded polyethylene, it is filled with either sand or water.





LUXURY LOUNGES: Qantas' first-class lounges designed by Marc Newson have been labeled the best in the world. The sculptural blond wood of American oak breaks the length of the Sydney lounge into defined areas. Newson says he wanted the lounges to look timeless – very slick, very understated, and very cool.

designed by a number of different people – they look completely incoherent. We really wanted to make sure that, this time, all the cabin elements worked together – each one should be like a piece from the same puzzle.”

While the “Marc Newson” brand is the stuff of design legend these days, this boy from Sydney – the product of a single-parent household – comes from humble beginnings. At age 44, his achievements have come through innovation, persistence and what Australians traditionally call “hard yakka”. Even when the media were cottoning onto Newson’s genius in his early career, he was still struggling to eke out a living.

“I have always liked to make things,” muses Newson on his major influences. “I studied jewelry and sculpture at art college and, I suppose, it was a natural progression to design bigger pieces, such as items of furniture, but with the same attention to detail. Design for me is primarily a job. It’s a job I love to do, creating things, building things, conceiving things... It’s a lot to do with problem solving. I like to improve on whatever is already out there.”

▶ like seat is still a market-leading product with a number of design awards under its belt. Since then, Newson has been named by *Time* magazine in 2005 as one of the Top 100 Influential People in the World and was awarded the prestigious Design Miami 2006 Designer of the Year prize.

Flying smoothly

Newson offers “a contemporary style that fits very well with the Qantas vision,” says Lesley Grant, Qantas group general manager for customer product and services.

“The Australian association is also obviously an added bonus,” Grant says. As well as the Skybed and first-class lounges, Newson has led the design for Qantas’ A380 aircraft interiors, and recent domestic and international seat-fabric refurbishment programs, as well as many inflight products, including soft furnishings and amenities.

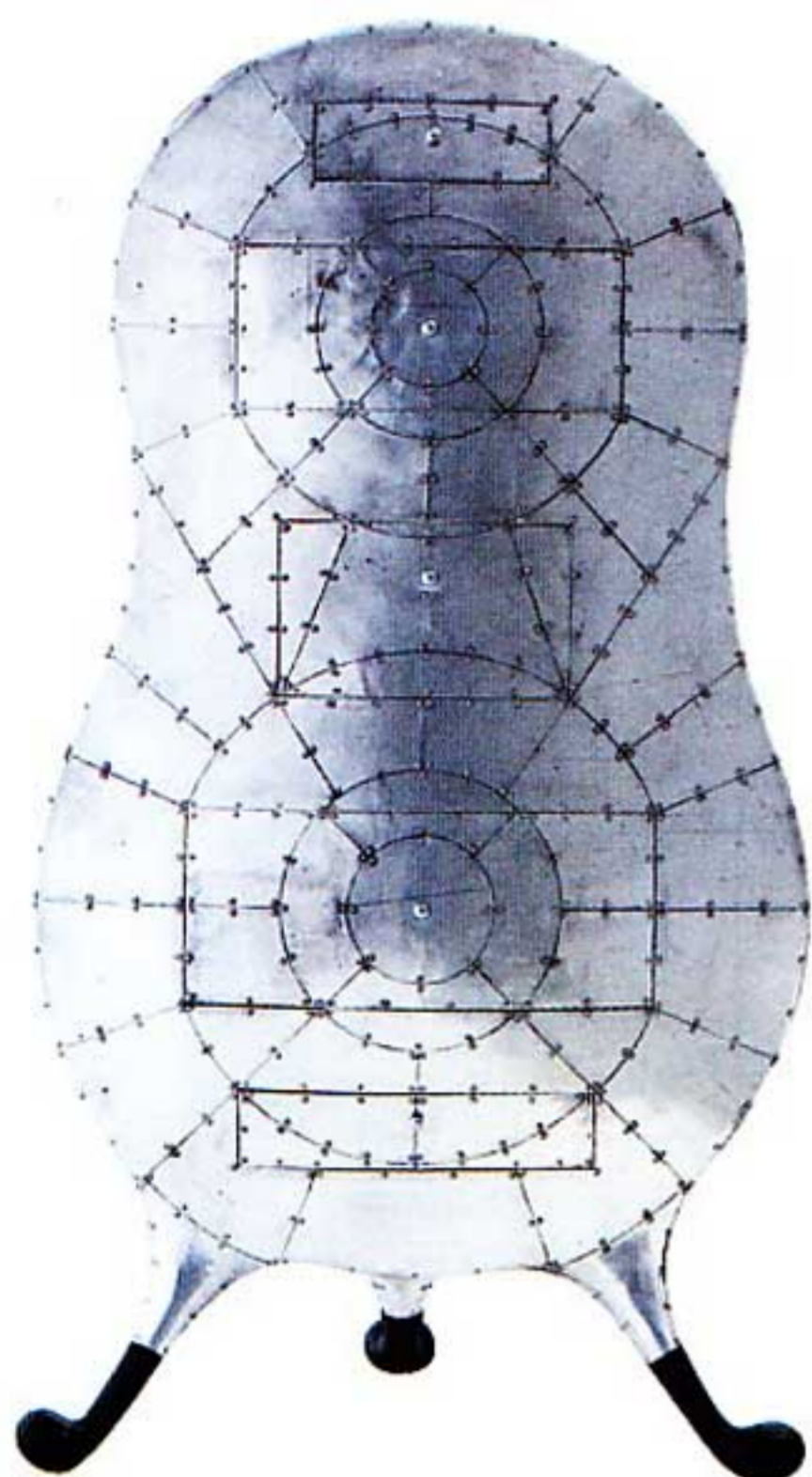
For Newson, the objective of his work with Qantas is to restore a sense of

romance to air travel. “I spend well over 100 days a year in the air,” he says. “So I felt uniquely placed to address all the issues that bothered me about flying on a commercial airline... aircraft seats, interiors and the overall ambience.

“I was mindful of the fact that people sit on a Qantas flight for probably longer than any other long-haul carrier,” he continues. “So it had to be comfortable and the environment had to be sympathetic. A lot of designers’ ideas of making an aircraft interior look nice is to make it look like something terrestrial, to make it look domestic. People have this weird conception that airplanes should look like their living room. Too often aircraft cabins give the appearance that they have been

AWARD-WINNING SLEEPER: Marc Newson’s relationship with Qantas began with his tender for their international business-class sleeper seat, known as the “Skybed”. The pod-like seat remains a market-leading product that has won many design awards.





PRICEY FURNITURE: In May this year, at a Christie's auction in New York, Marc Newson's Pod of Drawers piece from 1986 sold for a then-record US\$1.05 million.

Record bids

One of Newson's biggest breakthrough pieces was the Lockheed Lounge, a three-legged, aluminum-clad seat that resembles a big blob of mercury. Following its exhibition at a Sydney gallery in 1986, the lounge popped up in magazines across the world. Madonna reclined on it for her 1993 music-video for *Rain* and, recently, one was sold at a Christie's auction in New York for a staggering US\$1.5 million – a record for any work by a contemporary designer. (Although the prototype of the Lockheed Lounge was reportedly traded for US\$2.5 million in a private sale in London.) In May this year, at another Christie's auction in New York, Newson's Pod of Drawers piece from 1986 sold for a then-record US\$1.05 million.

It goes without saying that, from humble beginnings in the '80s, Newson has come a long way – from Sydney to Tokyo to Paris to London. His résumé reads like a veritable who's who of top clients with items ranging from furniture, cookware, timepieces and restaurant interiors to bicycles, automobiles and aircraft (not only for Qantas but also one of his dream projects, a Falcon 900B private jet, in 1998).

Newson hit pay dirt in the mid-'90s when he took on commissions for the likes of design-and-production houses Alessi

"Design for me is primarily a job. It's a job I love to do, creating things, building things, conceiving things... It's a lot to do with problem solving. I like to improve on whatever is already out there."

and Magis. This would eventually see him stand alongside Philippe Starck as one of the luminaries of the international design scene. Consumers not attuned to the Marc Newson name will still know him through his designs like the Orgone Lounge (made in 1989 for Cappellini), SeaSlug Watch (in 1993 for Ikepod Watch) and Rock Doorstop (in 1997 for Magis).

Ask Newson about his greatest achievements, though, and he immediately becomes coy. "It's a little difficult for me to talk specifically about any of my creations," he says. "I guess, for me, it's very much a case of not being able to see the wood for the trees. I am surrounded by everything I do all the time, so it's difficult to step back to look at the things I do and be objective about them.

"As for being remembered..." Newson pauses. "Well, it's incredibly important to me that the things I design stand the test of time."

In 2001, Sydney's Powerhouse Museum held the world's first major retrospective of Newson's work comprising over 200 pieces. However, the museum's relationship with him stretches back somewhat further than that, with Newson designing the now iconic Embryo for their Take A Seat exhibition in 1989. Understandably, curator

Anne Watson considers Embryo her favorite Newson design. "Because I watched the design evolve and had a very personal association with the whole project," she says.

Raising Australia's profile

Watson sees Newson's design aesthetic as being a "consistent curvy fluidity – that is what makes him such a significant designer and what attracts people to his work."

She explains: "It's like he designs a bit of himself into everything and it's this that people connect with... I do, anyway.

"Marc has undoubtedly helped raise the profile of Australian design globally and perhaps contributed to the belief overseas that there is an Australian design style," she continues. "I'm not sure about this, but at the very least, there is a freshness and 'cool' to Australian design that is quite distinctive. Marc has, I'm sure, been a strong role model for local designers and has provided an intro for a number of designers to over-

CATHEDRAL OF COOL: Using marble and an almost monochromatic palette, Marc Newson transformed the Marmo Bar on the ground floor of the Hotel Puerta America in Madrid into an oasis of hipness. Newson also designed the sixth floor of the hotel, which also includes works by a stellar cast of contemporary design: Arata Isozaki, David Chipperfield, Jean Nouvel, Norman Foster, Ron Arad and Zaha Hadid.



Photo: Courtesy of Hoteles Silken



REACHING FOR THE STARS: Marc Newson, who is a self-proclaimed space nut, has designed a new "spaceplane" – part airplane, part rocket – for manufacturer Astrium. With commercial space flights expected to start in five years, space tourists will be able to purchase a return ticket for about US\$265,000 in a cabin custom-designed by Newson.

Orgone Lounge will reveal its affinity to a surfboard.

"We have many talented designers and are slowly building a relatively strong design industry here," Watson says. "It's certainly better than it was 10 years ago, but we still need to encourage the manufacturing sector to collaborate with designers and to see design as a means by which both the quality and market reach of products can be improved.

"A number of our designers are forging productive links with manufacturers in China and the US, so it could be that Australia will build a reputation as a resource for highly talented, creative designers – even if their designs aren't produced here."

If anyone is going to be an inspiration for Australian designers, then it has to be Newson. As well as his celebrated work with Qantas this year, Newson, a self-proclaimed space nut, made news as the designer of a new "spaceplane" – part airplane, part rocket – for manufacturer Astrium. With commercial space flights expected to start in 2012, space tourists will be able to purchase a return ticket for about US\$265,000 in a cabin custom-designed by Newson.

Obviously, as far as Newson and his design vision are concerned, not even the sky is the limit. ★



Value-added views.

Go to www.marc-newson.com for the official website of Marc Newson. To see some of his designs and products, visit www.iikepod.com for his watches, www.magisdesign.com for the Rock Doorstop and portal, cappellini.it/pls/portal for the Orgone Lounge.

► seas manufacturers. Fortunately, the time has passed when many designers expected the kind of high profile that Marc has achieved. It's all settling down a bit now, which is a good thing. Possibly the days of the design 'superstar' are over."

David Robertson, national president of the Design Institute of Australia, echoes Watson's sentiments. "There is no doubt that designers of the profile of Newson act as role models for young designers," he says. "The story of discovery, patronage, international success and celebrity exposure has the same lure in design as it has in music or art. It is a model to draw inspiration from, but a very difficult model for any designer to emulate."

Asked if there's a flavor to the current Australian design culture in the light of Newson's influence, Robertson hesitates to pigeonhole the industry. "Just as Newson has become international, Australian design taps into international influences," he explains. "So, no, in Australian furniture or object design, there is no identifiable flavor. It is always possible to find thematic collections of objects that seem to prove a trend for the purpose of a particular story, but the diversity of designers and influences in Australia ensure an eclectic mix.

Newson himself is quite equivocal about his Australian connection. "[It] probably affected my career in the early stages, although it doesn't have any effect on what I do right now. It seems that other people's perceptions of what being Australian

is affects their attitudes to us rather than recognizing any indigenous creativity. Australians are not afraid to travel. Maybe that's what being Australian is all about – the ability to go from one place to another seamlessly. Personally, I feel more like a citizen of the world."

Home inspiration

In a 2005 report by Annabel Moir from the Object Museum in Sydney, she identified what she called "a growing confidence" in the design industry over the preceding five years. "A recent trend in Australia has been a focus on sustainable and eco-friendly design for houses, interiors and objects, with many designers inspired by the unique environment and landscape in Australia," she says.

Appraising the organic lines and inherent fluidity of Newson's designs certainly does suggest a certain affinity with nature and, therefore, with "Australian-ness". For instance, a close look at the

WORTH A RIDE: A closer look at the Orgone Lounge, made in 1989 for Cappellini, reveals its affinity to a surfboard, an oblique reference to Marc Newson's Australian roots.

