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Published 2 years ago

Studio Visit: Bespoke Plywood Furniture and the Art of Organisation With Industrial Designer Abe Hollingsworth



Hedge Furniture founder Abe Hollingsworth (far right) with Ciaran Banks (left) and Toby Dykes (centre) · Photo: Jacob Pietras

In 2020, Wellingtonian Abe Hollingsworth launched his plywood cabinetry and fit-out business Hedge Furniture. Three years later, he's solving renovation problems, one kitchen and wardrobe at a time.

Words by SASHA BORISSENKO · Updated on 23 Feb 2023 · Published on 22 Feb 2023



“We thought the workshop would be messy but acceptable, but as you can see it’s just chaos,” Abe Hollingsworth says as I meet him wearing inappropriate open-toed clogs. It’s an uncharacteristically muggy Wellington afternoon and I’m sweating bullets.

The Hedge Furniture founder and his team are hard at work creating their bespoke plywood kitchen and wardrobe cabinetry. Hollingsworth set up the company in 2020 and – over 100 jobs of different shapes and sizes later – it’s gaining momentum as a respected joinery and design business in the capital.

An industrial design graduate – and drummer in the band Mermaidens – Hollingsworth learned the ropes under Duncan Sargent of Duncan Sargent Kitchens and Furniture in Newtown. Sargent retired in 2020, leaving the workshop to Hollingsworth, who rebranded it as Hedge Furniture.

The company moved to Johnsonville in 2021, a shift that was prompted by a “crazy spike” of requests during the pandemic. What started as two staff developed into four to keep up with the demand.

“All the money that would traditionally be spent on travel or tourism was possibly being put to use doing renovations. It makes sense, as people have been spending more time at home, so they want to make it more liveable,” says Hollingsworth.

They’ve since gotten through the backlog and have settled into a team of three people – Hollingsworth, artist and woodworker Ciaran Banks, and woodworker Toby Dykes.

Even with the cooling-off period over Christmas, a looming recession and trouble sourcing materials, Hedge Furniture is busier than ever. The team designs and works on two to three jobs at any one time, completing up to

four jobs a month. Hedge is also moving into commercial fit-outs beyond residential homes, having designed and crafted Coffee Outdoors in Wellington city last year. It's a chance to express himself more creatively, Hollingsworth says.

Although he may think his workshop is chaotic, to an outsider it's anything but. It has deep blush walls, bright yellow metal tool holders on the walls, and blue concrete floors. Painting the floors was an obvious solution to getting rid of the two layers of "gnarly carpet" that existed before. "I've got a quiet obsession with blue. Colours are cool. Who wants to live a grey life?!"

The plywood comes into one end of the workshop, before being loaded onto racks. It's then cut, built and painted, with the finished plywood cabinetry waiting to be loaded onto a truck like a mini production line.

So, why Johnsonville? With the central city lacking workshops, rising rent prices and the "march of gentrification moving south of the city", the outer city suburb greatly appealed. When Hedge moved here in 2021, Hollingsworth spent hours creating little models in the form of paper cut-outs to figure out the most efficient use of time and space within the workshop.

As a kid, he would pull apart television remotes or film cameras and try "and often fail" to put them back together. His parents would call him "the engineer", as he would be tasked with solving household issues.

"I've always been interested in how things work and how things are made. I'd break things and tinker with them until I could figure it out. I guess I've always liked fixing problems, working with my hands, and also creating stuff."

Running his own operation at the age of 30 has been a learning curve, says Hollingsworth. "I always feel like I've got imposter syndrome being a young guy running a business but it's easy to only notice the mistakes you make. I think we make really good stuff, and [sometimes] I forget that."

Hedge is all about sustainability wrought by longevity, using renewable materials such as ply and aiming to reduce consumption by producing products that last. "MDF turns into garbage after 10 years. It's important to me to try and extend the life of a kitchen and to build stuff that should last a lifetime."

Hollingsworth reckons the kitchens of people his grandparents' age are outlasting those made in the noughties. "That's wrong, to me. What's even sadder is if granddad's kitchen is stripped out for a noughties one."

He refers to German designer Dieter Rams, saying "good design is invisible. It's the pursuit of creating quiet spaces that don't scream 'design' but are subtly beautiful."

Through his work, Hollingsworth has found a deep love of storage and organisation. There's nothing worse than "floorganisation", he laughs. "It's corny but I like helping people. Kitchens are the heart of the home, and although wardrobes mightn't be as glamorous or noted, having effective and quality storage can be life-changing for people."

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