

PROFILE  
ARCHITECT, ARTIST, FURNITURE DESIGNER

# GERARD DOMBROSKI

SASHA BORISSENKO TALKS TO GERARD DOMBROSKI,  
AN ARCHITECT, ARTIST AND FURNITURE DESIGNER BASED  
IN THE OUTSKIRTS OF TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA WELLINGTON.

PHOTOGRAPHY  
LEWIS FERRIS

In Gerard Dombroski's workshop, a six-metre piece of metal, destined for a maroon powder-coating and long life as the Whangārei Art Museum's front counter, lays patiently on the floor near a blindingly all-blue sofa. The sofa, aptly named the 'Big Blue', was hand-crafted in its entirety by Gerard in 2019. The base is constructed by hundreds of hand-welded steel rods—that are impressively reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower's complex latticework—and the cushioning handmade with an equally spirited matching blue. This man is not afraid of colour or pushing scale. Its proportion generously swells and its enveloping corner curvature inviting of social interaction, almost a conversation pit but above terra firma. "It's big; it's exciting. It feels more like a place than a *thing*."

Delving deeper into his workshop, amongst a myriad of other smile-inducing objects—such as a 4.9-metre length spoon and 3.8-metre tall bullet-shaped jewellery vanity/wardrobe (with a reference to gothic cathedrals)—I come across a set of stairs leading up to an office space lined with curved timber panelling. Inside sit some of Gerard's favourite designs, including 'Oodles of Noodles'—a seating project that originated in concept by the procurement of a bunch of pre-used pool noodles. Now they duck and weave around a minimal steel frame to form the structure of a two-seater sofa. Elsewhere, a life-like banana, but made from iron and some 1.4 metres, beckons for attention. "Everything I do probably appears really shambolic and jumbled, but underlying it all is careful planning and direction. I've always followed my own interests and I want to make the world a little more playful and exciting."













Growing up on farmlands in the Waikato and Waihōpai Invercargill, Gerard was destined to combine his two rapidly evolving obsessions—conceptual thinking and physical manifestations. “My mum always nurtured any sort of creativity but my dad also influenced me because you have to be a jack-of-all-trades to work a farm. He’d build fencing, plumbing and drainage, and he’d be tinkering with machinery or welding things. There’s a level of osmosis because I picked a lot of those things up. And architecture was always on the cards, largely due to my old man drilling into me the freedom you have when working for yourself.”

After high school, Gerard attended the Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka which he found particularly liberating. Five years later, including a thesis on perceived thresholds between secular and sacred spaces (think breweries in churches), he graduated with a master’s in Architecture in 2014. “I think people lose sight of endless possibilities. I’m constantly trying to trick myself into coming up with new ideas.”

From experimenting with pallet furniture as a student to now designing works for some of Aotearoa’s most significant public institutions, Gerard’s career has playfully teetered a balance of residential and commercial builds, alongside incredibly playful furniture collections and one-off object designs.

Perhaps his most-celebrated project to date, Gerard’s ‘Picolo’ cabin is the result of a month-long residency at Driving Creek Railway & Pottery [DCR] with only one rule: the build “had to be made from what I could find around DCR.” The unconventional-looking but high-functioning hut sits beneath a canopy of kānuka, features “an old steel frame whose past life was a zipline platform”, was recently long-listed in the ‘Small Building category of the Dezeen Awards and was nominated for the Arch Daily ‘Building of the Year’ award.

