

Myths busted and questions posed as design stories revealed

Adam and Eve, and Rangi and Papa, are not the only creation myths addressed in a new book about New Zealand design. It seems that New Zealanders didn't invent the Thermette, the electric fence or the jet boat even though they made the most of them. The famous Fisher & Paykel DishDrawer was not inspired by a filing cabinet. New Zealander Jo Sinel did not believe he was 'the father of industrial design', but some colleagues in America insist he was.

"I have nothing against the myth," says Michael Smythe, the author of *New Zealand by Design: a History of New Zealand Product Design*, "after all, it's the middle of my name. But the real stories are more interesting." Smythe not only tells us the real origins of the Buzzy Bee (it was not designed by Hector Ramsey) he explains why it has become such an enduring icon of national identity. Kiwiana is put in its place along with number 8 thinking and Kiwi ingenuity. Richly illustrated stories of the evolution of quintessentially Kiwi solutions to the needs of daily life will entertain, inform and surprise the reader. Smythe identifies the inescapable fact of New Zealand's isolation as the key point of difference and celebrates its potential to distinguish our design.

Curly questions are posed for the consideration of the reader. Does Maori culture offer relevant models of creative process and quality management? Was colonisation about conquest or mutual benefits? Were public servants bothersome bureaucrats or inspired instigators in the field of design? Did protectionism mollycoddle our manufacturers or build the foundation for success in the face of competition? Did Rogernomics kill off or revitalise our originality? These questions and more engage the reader in a fascinating exploration New Zealand's manufactured culture. As with any archaeological dig, it is the products that tell the stories.



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Author: Michael Smythe

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For more information, or to arrange an interview with Michael Smythe, please contact Jennifer Balle at Random House New Zealand on 09 984 6174 or jballe@randomhouse.co.nz

The products range from Maori fishing lures and eel traps to great gumboots and better brollies; from terracotta cooling cupboards to very cool drawers; from a chair made from a whale vertebra to world-leading work chairs; from classy Expo glassware to creative Crown Lynn export crockery (considered too sophisticated for the local market!). Michael Smythe's experience and enthusiasm have delivered a lively book packed with tales of inspiration, entrepreneurial vision, significant successes, glorious failures and lost opportunities that show us and the world what we make of ourselves.

Reaching right back to the earliest days of human settlement in this young country, Smythe looks at products designed for domestic, industrial, medical, agricultural, scientific, recreational and communications use, from the wool presses, gold dredges, timber jacks, spinning wheels and ceramic bed-warmers our grandparents may have encountered, to petrol cans, bicycles, stoves, washing machines, electric jugs, TVs and radios, chairs, refrigerating drawers, office furniture, outdoor seating, rubbish bins, children's toys, heaters, electric fences, stock vaccinators, buses, boats, aircraft, amphibians ... the list goes on and on.

The author's underlying quest is to identify ways in which New Zealand product design might be distinguished. His findings are designed to stimulate conversation rather than deliver the final word on the subject. Readers are invited to engage as active participants in the product development process – as powerful purchasers and end-users. *New Zealand by Design* will interest anyone who interacts with designed products.

about MICHAEL SMYTHE



Michael Smythe is a designer of longstanding and is widely published on, and also lectures in, the subject of New Zealand product design. He lives in Auckland.



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