

Tony Wolfenden (born 1935, London, U.K.) studied art at the Hornsey School of Art and Crafts, and later, industrial design at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, graduating in 1957 with the National Diploma in Design (Industrial Design) and Central School Diploma (Distinction).

At art school Tony threw himself enthusiastically into his studies, inspired and developing new skills, finding a direction where it had not been in earlier years, and experiencing a creativity that would sustain him for the years to come. His particular interest in sculpture and pottery led him to further studies in the more specific area of applied industrial design.

On completing his studies, Tony moved to Toronto, Canada, until 1961, working with a number of architects and interior designers. At this time he received two design awards from the National Design Council for furniture design. It was in Canada that Tony lived on commissions for painting and for sculpture, concentrating on the medium of welded steel and contributing to an exhibition touring Canada and the U.S.

Visiting Australia by chance in 1962, Tony found employment as a collaborative designer, joining first the Melbourne architectural firm of Bates Smart and McCutcheon and then that of Yuncken Freeman Architects. Both offices were engaged in designing some of the most exciting and finely-wrought large scale architecture – institutional and commercial – in Australia at the time, winning numerous design awards from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. Tony played a significant role in interior and furniture design of these buildings.

After deciding to settle in Australia and establishing his family there, Tony commenced practice as a consultant designer in 1971 as Tony Wolfenden and Associates, with varied design projects in the areas of

both industrial design (notably domestic products, light fittings, furniture and colour consultancy) and in interior design for institutional and commercial clients with the Federal Government of Australia being an important client. The large range of domestic products has earned a national reputation for quality within a given market, as well as a still-growing number of design awards from the Design Council of Australia, being 66 at the last count.

The practice has consistently operated with a committed and personally expressive approach to all projects, aimed always at attention to detail, whatever the scale of work involved. Tony believes that “the same efforts and energies are required in the designing of a wrist watch as in a complete building”. This attention to detail is based on a personal love of materials and exploration of fine manufacturing processes, on the smaller scale, and on the larger scale, a deep love of architecture as an art.

In keeping with this concern for thoroughness, the practice has always been small by choice, as a form of quality control and for personal enjoyment. Tony has always chosen to design at the drawing board, rather than delegate this process.

The “modus operandi” of the office is to explore the design requirements by constant sketching from all angles, “moulding facts and intuition”, and aspiring to an aesthetic of dynamic form, as if to appear effortless and timeless. (This always to a background of music.) All drawings are highly considered. The quality of pencil line is as valued as is the junction of forms, whether in microns or metres.

A more recent and private pursuit of Tony’s is in the designing and making of kites. This divergence to a painterly kinetic form, combines an interest in colour, graphics, sculpture and aerodynamics while providing for a need to be involved in the making of things.

Tony thinks that his best design – whether a kite, a chair, an interior, or a mass produced product – is still to come.

Louise Green (1992)