

# BESPOKE QUALITY and Style

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After 13 years as a visual merchandiser, it's clear Alison Raine has an eye for detail and a passion for design. And what caught her eye more than 20 years ago were the warm, tactile tones of wood.

Alison is one half of the creative spark that inspired Wildflower Furniture, a locally owned furniture manufacturer that has been operating in Newcastle since 1994.

She and co-founder John Skoumbourdis initially began their business at home, drawing on their individual backgrounds to hand craft their own unique line of furniture and homewares. But the hobby soon expanded into a full-time job, with the duo taking the leap of faith to launch Wildflower Furniture as a bonafide business.

"Wildflower has been operating since 1994," Alison said.

"I had spent 13 years as a visual merchandiser, as well as doing new shop fit-outs and refurbishments for Angus & Coote jewellers, while John has a background in carpentry.

"The business started as a home-based hobby producing handmade products to sell at markets.

"But as popularity for our products grew it inspired us to explore the option of it becoming a viable business."

Alison and John started off small to ensure they could build a foundation for their business as solid as the timber they work with.

But in the past 24 years, Wildflower Furniture has grown significantly to become a popular option for both homeowners and businesses seeking quality, style and something a little different when it comes to their furniture options.

"From the days at the markets selling handcrafts and giftware we have evolved into a full-blown furniture manufacturer, starting small and growing slowly over the years," Alison said.

"Our main aims are to streamline our production and offer more pieces on our showroom floor as well still providing our custom orders. We have also done several commercial jobs which is something we enjoy and wish to pursue further."

Those commercial jobs have seen Wildwood Furniture

collaborating with local architects, designers and construction companies to complete projects at the Toronto Workers Club café, Raymond Terrace Bowling Club and Marketown Medical Centre.

However, the bulk of their business remains in helping homeowners looking for high quality, locally-made pieces that are built to last and designed to enhance the beauty and style of their interior spaces.

From bathroom vanities, sideboards and bookcases to hallstands, entertainment units and bedroom furniture – not to mention one of the most comprehensive ranges of dining tables in Newcastle – Wildflower Furniture has a stain and style to suit every taste.

Located in the Warners Bay industrial area, Wildflower Furniture has an extensive showroom, with all items handcrafted in their factory at Cardiff by fully qualified cabinet makers. The business has grown to include ten staff, with all of their tradesmen originally joining the team as apprentices.

They manufacture predominantly using the environmentally-friendly Victorian Ash, however, they also produce pieces in a range of other Australian hardwood timbers.

While colours and trends in furniture are constantly changing, Alison said timber provided a classic look that never went out of style.

"We choose Victorian Ash for its look and blonde/ash colour tones, which make it great to tint as well but also look great in its natural state," Alison said.

"It is also a plantation grown renewable resource.

"We also work in Blackbutt and other speciality timbers.

"Furniture styles have changed dramatically over the years with trends coming, going and then returning. This applies to both styles and colours.

"The hottest trend at the moment is for the natural look featuring all the character timber has to offer. Vanities, in particular, are making a big comeback in timber.

"We have also had many customers come back over the years and purchase additional furniture pieces to match their pre-existing Wildflower Furniture, which proves that beautiful timber furniture is a timeless addition to any home."

Aside from their standard stock items, Alison said they love being able to work with customers to make their furniture dreams become a custom-built reality.



Amy Pounder (L) and Alison Raine (R).

"We pride ourselves on quality, price competitiveness and customer service. We constantly liaise with clients in their homes as well as our showroom," she said.

"If you can't find what you're looking for we specialise in custom made orders.

"From built-in desks to custom media units, we can create the perfect piece of furniture to suit you and your style.

"A lot of our big custom jobs are challenging, but one small job that stands out was the side table that incorporated a pull out cooler drawer, cheese tray and remote holder.

"It was a man cave in a table!

"For those people taking advantage of apartment living, this is where we really shine. We can tailor make furniture to suit smaller areas while still incorporating storage without compromising in design.

"Whether they're living in a small apartment or downsizing into an over 55's, we can design the perfect pieces to suit the customer's lifestyle needs."

Alison said the best thing about manufacturing all their furniture locally was the convenience it offered their customers and the flexibility it allowed in terms of trying something new.

"We aim to combine quality workmanship and modern design at an affordable price," she said.

"The advantages of manufacturing means we can change styles and trends immediately based on customer demand.

"For example, if someone sees a table on The Block that they love, we can have it on the floor within days.

"We are currently working on some fantastic new designs showcasing different coloured panels by Italian company Fenix, and Synchron textured panels. With the combination of the beautiful solid timber and the modern block colours, the sky is the limit when designing your statement piece."



The boys (John Skoumbourdis second from right).