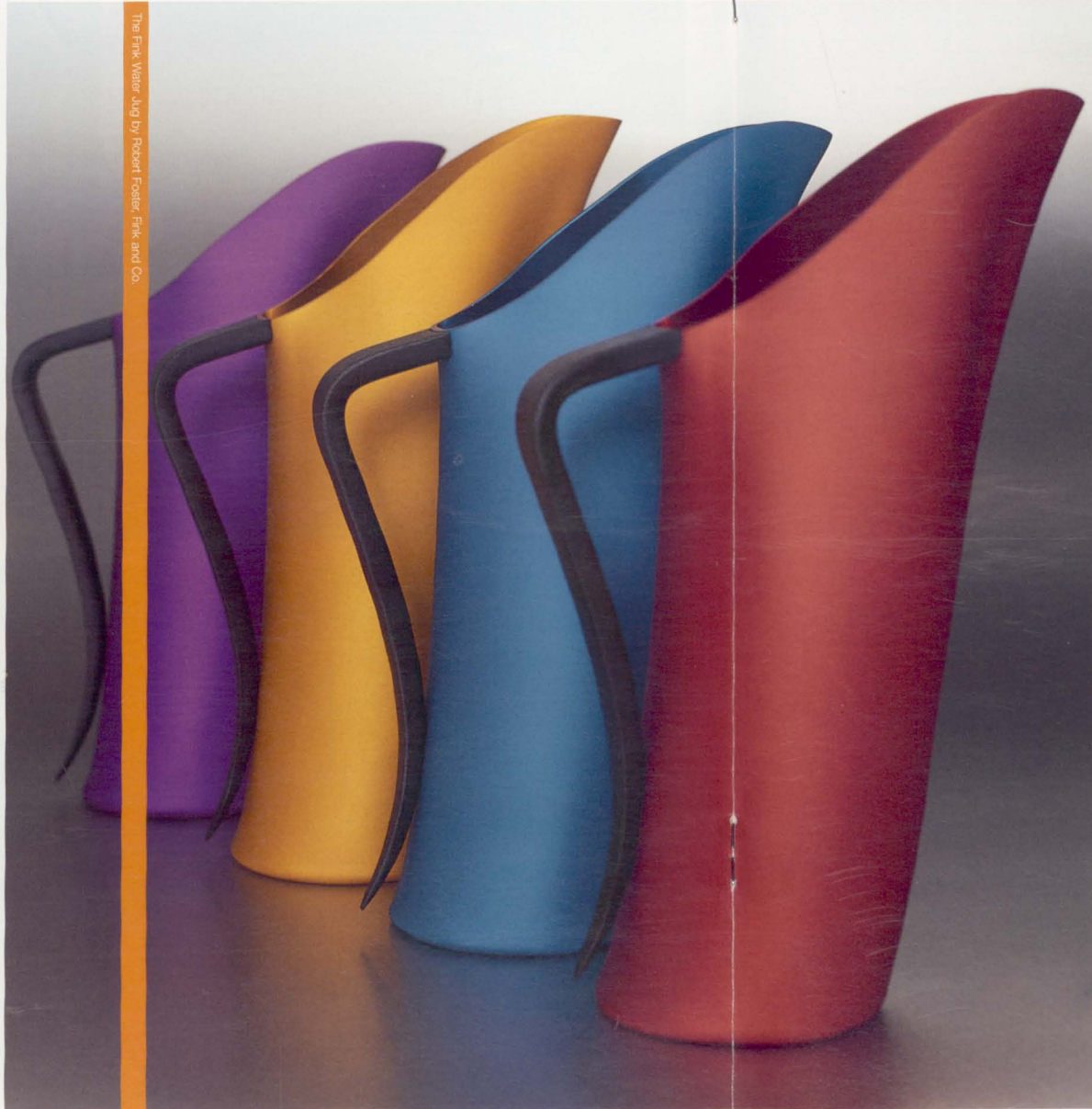
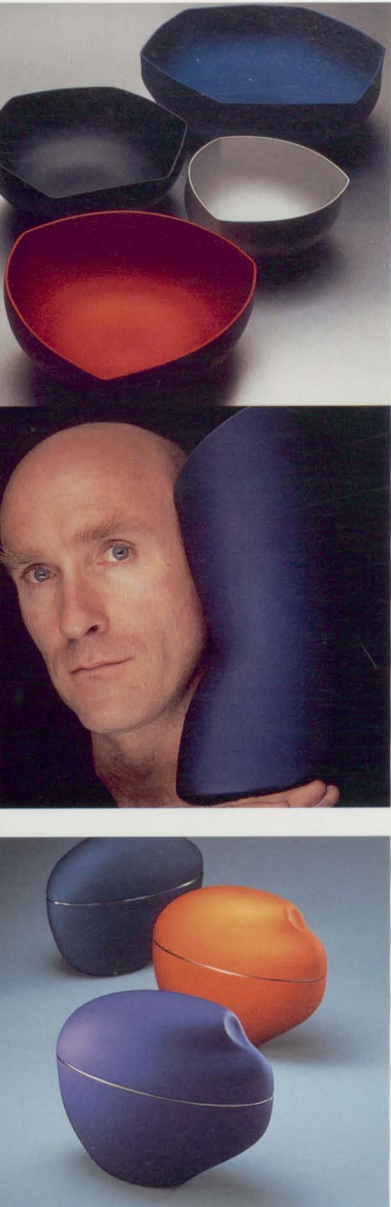


Colourways Seminar 2001

A major feature of the November seminar at the McClelland Gallery was a presentation by Robert Foster. This feature explains a little of what was presented.



The Fink Water Jug by Robert Foster, Fink and Co.

Fink and Co. – continuing to blast us.

The Fink Water Jug, by Robert Foster of Fink and Co., is one of the few vibrant colours retained in many contemporary interiors. "When the product entered the market in 1993, there was nothing like it," says Foster. However, a number of years later, the jug still stands alone, both in terms of other products on the market, and usually from other utensils in the kitchen. The pressed aluminium and anodised jug with its powder-coated aluminium handle, makes it a natural choice for galleries and museums both here and abroad (the Museum of Modern Art in New York has recently included the jug in its mail out catalogue).

For Foster, designing objects started at an early age, initially making jewellery as an adolescent in his father's shed. "My father was a potter and an art school teacher, which led me to play with ceramics from a young age. However, I was attracted to the qualities of metal, the ability to control it, together with its versatility and precision," Foster says. Continually experimenting with metal, Foster explores the endless surface treatments and processes of his craft. "There is an ironic beauty when utilising the volatile energy of high explosives to form an elegant and sensuous object. It has always fascinated me," he says.

The jug, which was Foster's first commission, formed part of a brief to design three different jugs for a restaurant, for the paltry budget of \$450. Foster, who did not have any traditional tool making experience (he graduated in gold and silver smithing from the Canberra School of Art), designed a pressing mechanism that could not be copied. "I made a rudimentary pressing tool to form part of the shape. There wasn't anything sketched out. I could see the form in my head," he says. "Each jug requires three separate pressing stages in its creation before a bottom is welded on."

While other water jugs spit water before landing in a glass, the Fink Jug is ergonomic. Even though the jug is slightly off-centred, it pours perfectly. "I think because it is easy to control and does not drip, it was quickly taken up by restaurants. Marketing the jug was not difficult. It sold itself by simply being in some of the best restaurants around town," Foster says.

While a number of Fink and Co.'s products are designed in metal, others are cleverly juxtaposed with other materials, such as granite, glass, porcelain and plastic. The Blink Lamp, which is a small table or bedside lamp, includes a perforated brass head with a porcelain shade. The satin nickel-plated stem not only supports the shade but doubles as the light switch. The porcelain shade, which is covered with perforated brass, appears almost helmet-like. "With many of our designs, there is a strong organic feel. The Blink Lamp could be compared to a flower," he says. While most products remain true to their original vision, some designs need to be reassessed, even after they are released onto the market. "I am designing a new version of the Blink Lamp. The current model has 50 components, which is causing difficulties for manufacturing," says Foster. However, those already converted to the Blink will be pleased to know that the new version will still have its unique ball joint action. "The design will be simplified," Foster says.

While Foster continues to blast us with his work, he is also exploring a new process. "I am experimenting with the pressure from water to form large voluminous shapes. The effect will be more of a gentle wave, similar to the shape at the bottom of a boat. The new shapes will be applied to furniture and to lighting," he says. Another new product, hopefully to be released before Christmas, is a stainless steel platter with its own anodised aluminium dishes. "It was designed by Rachel Bowak, a colleague at Fink and Co.," he says.

As each new product is released, the bar is raised. While each new design appears effortless, Foster is mindful of the research and development behind each design. "I would say that my work is an evolving process of continual discovery. It does not happen spontaneously. Often it is trial and error, and simply experimenting with new technologies."

Fink & Co. can be contacted on T 02 6298 1884
Text by Stephen Crafti

Far left
Robert Foster and
other designs by
Fink and Co.