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Since then, he has been refining his work, following the table with a much more delicate ply chair, sprung wooden display shelving, and, last year, a long low boxy sofa.

"During this early time, the idea was that I'd be the manufacturer of the products, designing and making them myself," explains Macdonald. "I'm getting away from that stuff now. I can get really bogged down in the manufacture and the way I'm set up here [one man in a shared workshop], I'm not extensive enough. What I want to do is make the prototypes and persuade someone else to manufacture them for me."

As part of this change of tack, this year he will be limiting himself to one or two new pieces while rethinking some of the old ones. Simplicity is the key, with each component thought out so that it could easily be made by someone else without threatening the overall design concept. The star piece will be a glass-topped table which will sit on an elegant bent laminated wooden stand – two simple elements that can be sub-contracted to other manufacturers.

So what inspires his designs? "A lot of it just comes from mucking about," he says self-effacingly. "Because I can earn money by doing stuff for other people, if I see something that I'm interested in, there isn't any pressure for me to make something of it immediately. I can store it away in my mind and when the time comes, it will coalesce into something."

All of Macdonald's pieces share the hallmark of someone who understands wood as a material and is as interested in how a piece is put together as what it looks like. The popular plywood shelves, formed from sprung uprights clamped at one end like tweezers and held apart by the horizontal shelves, underwent 15 prototypes before Macdonald found the shape and height that would bend the right amount and still be stable. A round-topped side table supported on a pole slotted into a cross base

became an exercise in how to put together a table with the simplest joint, and the ply chair painstakingly avoids any conventional mortice or tenon joints, with everything butted or screwed together instead.

Nor is he blind to practicalities. "With the sofa, I wanted to do a piece that sat lightly in a room and I wanted it to come apart because so many people have trouble getting their sofa upstairs. It comes apart and you can fit the whole thing in the back of an estate car," he says.

### Made of Waste/Jane Atfield

Made of Waste, the plastic sheeting company started up by furniture designer Jane Atfield with Colin Williamson, is one of the decade's most notable rubbish-to-riches success stories. Its product – multicoloured plastic sheets made from recycled waste – caught the Nineties obsession with environmental issues.

Atfield, a practising furniture designer who also teaches at Goldsmith's College, has used the material in her own designs, while at the same time the material has captured the imagination of other designers who have used it on a range of interiors and products. It can be seen in the children's basement of the Science Museum, Bristol's Out of This World eco supermarkets, and most recently in lighting on show at Christopher Wray.

The material uses processes of heat and pressure to compress flakes of recycled plastic into sheets up to 25mm thick. To achieve different effects, rubbish has to be sorted by hand into colour types. What has attracted many designers to the material, apart from the jazzy colours, is that the sheets are very easy to work and require no finishing or edging.

Over the past four years, Atfield has been developing the material, constantly searching for recyclers and processors with the capabilities of creating different physical properties and a wider range of colours.

One of Atfield's personal favourites, the HIPS Range, was introduced two years ago at 100% Design – a collection made from high-impact polystyrene products such as coat hangers (tortoiseshell), yoghurt pots (terrazzo effect) and vending machine coffee cups (a creamy brown with flecks of black) which offer more muted tones than the original brightly-coloured sheets. "What I like about HIPS is that it's not so explicit," she says. "With the Bottle Range, it was more obvious where the material came from. With this range, it's more mysterious."

Sadly, legal wrangles with her former business partner Colin Williamson mean that Atfield, who will be taking over control of the company, will not be launching as many new products this year as she'd hoped, but a new silvery-grey sheet developed from recycled crisp packets sounds promising.

She will also be showing a table and chair originally designed for Newbury Arts Centre – the former is "a tressel table but with the folding mechanism reworked so that it is stable", and the latter is "a reworking of a director's chair". ■



Made of Waste/Jane Atfield