

Enduring values include good design

Mike Westrup felt barbecues were undermarketed in Australia – well, good-looking ones that is.



Among the chosen

The Japanese watch gets emotional.

What affliction encourages a person to accumulate timepieces? Whatever it is, you know you've contracted the bug when you return from shopping around for, say, a replacement washing machine with, instead, yet another watch. Was it the design that proved fatally alluring, the brand, or the movement? For most, it's a design so infectious that resistance simply dissolves. Brands such as Rolex and Omega have always understood our vulnerability to a particular look, which is why they seldom stray too far from designs they've learnt we have a genetic weakness for. If you think some of their current models could have been pencilled 40 or 50 years ago, it's because they probably were.

Even current must-haves such as Panerai and Hublot stick to formulas that religiously reflect their identifiable 'DNA'. It's a Swiss tradition, for while the Japanese have been grudgingly acknowledged as masters of mechanisms, especially battery-driven ones, when it comes to exterior design and appearances they've been regarded as about as refined as, say, Whirlpool.

But change is in the air: Seiko, Japan's sumo-sized electronics and watch concern, appears to have embraced 'design for design's sake', giving a cabal of young designers their heads, even changing its corporate line to 'Design your time'. This follows the recent unveiling of Seiko's Spring Drive movement which, while doing almost everything better than previous movements (more accuracy, more power reserve, smoother operation, etc), has hardly boasted breakthrough looks to match.

Now the Spring Drive is appearing in watches that reflect the edginess you'd expect from streetwise young Tokyo-istas. At this year's Basel watch fair, Seiko showed a monster chronograph called the iZul (pictured) which came dangerously close to eclipsing everything in the vicinity. Seiko Australia managing director, Shunji Tanaka, comments: "The importance of (pure) timekeeping will be reduced – we are investing and developing 'emotional technology' to appeal to individual consumers ... we want to be a brand to be chosen."

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a new departure. Rather like the man who bought the Remington company because he liked the razor, Westrup acquired the Everdure brand barbecues and gas heaters in 2001 because he liked the name. In the process, he became a manufacturer.

"We thought the name Everdure in housewares had an appealing ring to it. There's something enduring, sustainable about that name and we designed a solid product with clean and simple lines to go with the brand name."

As for the market, Westrup felt barbecue design was lagging behind a consumer trend towards style and functionality.

"Essentially, barbecue design and technology hadn't developed much as people were becoming more sophisticated in the kitchen. We wanted them to be able to smoke food as well as roast it. We took into account healthy lifestyle concerns and looked at fat drainage. We put lights into the barbecue so you could see what you were doing. We reckon we came up with something that probably functions better than your stove in the kitchen."

Wandering around New York's Museum of Modern Art a few years back, the chief executive of Shiro Australia came upon a Georg Jensen sugar bowl and creamer from the 1960s and immediately had the inspiration for his next product line.

Mike Westrup picked up a replica edition from the MoMA shop on the way out and, back in Australia, handed it to his product manager saying: "I want to turn this into a barbecue."

Westrup is a great admirer of the development of homewares in the '50s and '60s – particularly out of Denmark – and he heads the Australian division of a business with an honourable tradition of marketing and distributing leading-edge consumer durables.

An international distributor with exotic 1906 beginnings in Harbin, North China as a fur trader, the Hong Kong-based Shiro is the family-owned company that acquired the former Mobex

– distributor of Moulinex and Krups appliances in Australia – almost three decades ago. Brands handled by the company these days include GE, Casio and Gaggia. "Our charter," Westrup says, "is to distribute product that can be positioned in the first three places in any particular market."

While the Everdure e-series barbecue range continues the company's association with quality product, it does represent



The Baron is back



Andy Warhol's groundbreaking *Interview* magazine has been given an overhaul – even a tweaking of its famous masthead – albeit with an old hand, Fabien Baron, now one of its two editorial directors.

The celebrated art director was associated with the magazine in the 1980s. Of the revamp he says: "Innovation is really about starting from scratch to restore classic values."