MEET AUSTRALIAN designer Brodie Neill, whose work is “the perfect combination of technology and craftsmanship; the handmade and the digital”.

Last year, a rising star of the design world, much of whose work is dedicated to raising awareness of the scourge of ocean plastics, travelled to Germany to immerse himself in the philosophy of Mercedes-Benz.

In Stuttgart, Australian furniture designer Brodie Neill, whose work is showcased at the NGV Triennial exhibition, explored the Mercedes-Benz Museum, toured a factory and discussed the future of mobility with directors from Mercedes-Benz. It’s an experience that Neill, who is known for his innovative approach to reconstituting materials, found invaluable.

“There is a great synergy between my work and the technology of Mercedes-Benz,” he says. “It’s an experience that Neill, the director of Mercedes-Benz, had when he was first introduced to the brand.

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“For me, the combination of materials and mobility is what makes the work so exciting. It’s like being able to create something that will outlive you,” he says. This is the way I was taught in Tasmania when I learnt furniture design - we were taught to design and create things that will outlive you, plus 25 years. Longevity was very important.

That’s always been with me. As a designer, when you’re putting pen to paper or clicking the mouse, you’re always thinking about what material to use – on a larger scheme, as mankind, unfortunately we are using the world’s resources at an alarming rate.”

This awareness led to Neill’s fascination with the modern environmental scourge: plastics.

“I thought it very fitting for the world’s largest island and custodian of the oceans to take a leading role on the topic of ocean plastic. I wanted to utilise design to tackle this global issue and bring it to an international forum in the form of a round table, based on the idea of a round table discussion.”

“The starkly beautiful piece tells a dark story of globalisation, industrialisation and consumption. "Gyro, table is a contemporary rendition of a 19th century specimen table, which, traditionally, were tables made in the workshops and ateliers of Europe from precious stone, woods, ivories – precious materials gathered from far-away places," explains Neill. "Gyro, table was a contemporary rendition that also has a sinister underbelly in that the material it is made from did come from all over the world but, unfortunately, is plastics that are moved all around the world by the gyroscopic motion of the oceans."

The Remix chaise

The piece is not Neill’s first foray into reconstituting materials of typically considered waste. In 2008 he created the Remix chaise, which is made of 44 layers of sheet material sourced from workshops and building sites around the UK. Neill reconstituted the material and sliced through it with a state-of-the-art process of computer numerical control (CNC) carving. "I applied, like a lot of my work, the perfect combination of technology and craftsmanship, handmade and the digital," he says. "The Remix chaise was Neill’s first major foray into creating art from the world of waste."

“The Remix was then finished with super smooth French polish, so if you ran your hand over it, it is one sinuous surface,” he says. In doing so, Neill demonstrated that a material that is typically viewed as rubbish, could be reimagined into both an aesthetically beautiful and functional piece. “Rather than seeing it as waste, it’s something that we wanted to see as a potential building block of something new,” he says.

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