



Bright sparks

Turning a fantastic idea into a tangible product is all in a day's work for industrial designers Karina Sharpe and Neil Waldbaum

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When Karina Sharpe and partner Neil Waldbaum visit Bunnings, they get a thrill when they walk down the aisles.

But it is not because they are diehard DIY enthusiasts. Instead, the excitement comes from seeing products they have designed on the shelves, be it a watering can, cooler or stylised packaging.

The creative pair, both industrial designers, share a passion for innovation. Since moving to the Coast from Melbourne three years ago, they have helped many budding inventors turn an enterprising concept into a tangible product.

"There are no silly ideas, everything is worth trying out," Neil says, as he ponders the most bizarre concept he has come across. "For me the most exciting designs are for things there isn't even a name for because nothing like it exists yet."

By way of example Karina points to aglets – the tube of plastic at the

end of shoelaces to prevent them fraying – as a small but significant product.

"Who would have thought such a simple thing would have been such a great idea? Now billions of them are produced," she says.

The couple's Currimundi home doubles as a work studio for their business, Deep Orange Design, and is full of objects collected to inspire design ideas, as well as some of their past creations. "Ever since I was a kid I have always been fascinated by the way things work. I was always pulling my toys apart," Neil says. "These days we keep all sorts of things that have been well designed, like bottle tops and Tic Tac boxes. It is always interesting to see how people have resolved a design issue."

One of the most significant projects the couple have collaborated on is a design for a fan, one of which hangs unobtrusively from their living room ceiling. Neil explains the idea for Fanaway came from Melbourne civil engineer Joe Villella, who wanted the concept of a fan with foldaway blades evaluated.

Although the concept of retractable blades was not new, the shape of the blade and the mechanism in which to retract them was



Pieces designed by Karina include (clockwise from left) sterling silver rings, a laser cut jewellery tree, a textile design and nature-inspired accessories

innovative, meaning patents could be applied as well as design registrations on the styling.

"Joe presented the prototype on (ABC TV show) *New Inventors* and it won the people's choice award for the episode. Since then the fan has been picked up by Beacon Lighting and it is now sold around the world," says Neil, who is working with Joe on a new invention.

With Fanaway taking four years from prototype to production, Neil says persistence is the key for aspiring inventors.

"Depending on the complexity of the invention, products do take a lot of time to come to fruition and it can be a costly process as inventors need to apply for patents and enlist a patent attorney," he says.

"Yet if you strike upon a good idea it's really worthwhile. Generally, good design ideas come about by way of solving a problem.

"If something is bugging you, it's probably bugging someone else too."

Neil and Karina have jointly designed myriad products, from casino tables, Party Feet (gel shoe pads), boating mechanisms, stainless steel tools and resin homewares to jewellery and textiles, which are Karina's current focus.

Inspired by nature and whimsical characters in children's books, Karina describes her pieces, which include screen-printed tea towels, T-shirts and jewellery, as "wearable goodness and wondrous objects to live amongst".

With a technical background that sets her apart from many designers who sketch their ideas on paper, Karina devises her jewellery using CAD (computer-aided design) and creates mock-ups, before a Melbourne manufacturer produces them in sterling silver.

"My dream project would be to do a range of dinnerware with my illustrations and create more textiles," she says of the Karina Jean label, which will be at the Mamma's Market in Buderim on December 18.

Neil, who also loves a technical challenge, has several of his own inventions in the pipeline. Yet he remains tight lipped about the details, as is par for the course with fledgling innovations. "One of them is related to surfing," he offers tantalisingly, "and the other is related to energy saving." Stay tuned for more.



Above: the Fanaway fan with retractable blades

Below: A cooler set, watering can and packaging designed by the couple

