

Impossible Furniture

*Furniture people **Chris Rose** and **Fred Baier** ramble across art and design borders in this long and loose conversation*



Furniture designer Fred Baier, and head of the Wood, Metals, Ceramics and Plastics course at Brighton, Chris Rose have both recently written about design. The experience started a conversation about present and future which the some-time partners plan to illustrate in a forthcoming book.

Baier is one of the country's best known furniture designers. His work has been at the leading edge of contemporary making and design for the last two decades. He was also one of the first in to explore the possibilities of computer aided design, and his extended immersion with the medium has helped create the impossible furnitures Baier has built his international reputation on. Chris Rose worked with Baier for many years, from the early eighties, and both taught at the Parnham furniture school during the same decade. Since that time Chris has built up one of the leading departments which, unusually in the febrile state art and design sector retains a commitment to the hand, to skill and to the spirit of craft at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and in a time when these are increasingly under pressure within the Higher Education world, to produce cheap, low maintenance and low input courses. All this is antithetical to working with hands and working with materials.

This is the first of three parts of a conversation that sets the scene for the illustrated book on design practice that Fred Baier and Chris Rose are working on together in 2001. Fred has just published *Vision and Reality*, a booklet discussing craft practice for Northern Arts, whilst Chris will be publishing an essay as part of a book for 'creative design practice' which will be published by Butterworth Heineman later in the year. Here in edited form is part of a long and ranging talk which

took in the state of design-maker education, the influence of computer aided-design as well as Fred's theories on motorway bunching of cars and the need for a new word to be created in the English language to describe this phenomena.

Chris Rose: I wanted to talk about design being a key interdisciplinary skill, which brings people together from different disciplines and helps them communicate because designers can visualise concepts. People who are working in a visual arts medium can connect to specialist ideas or technical ideas or any other kind of ideas, somehow bringing them together and giving them some kind of shape or form. So if you can do a model, anybody can respond to a model, without having to have a special technical knowledge. We were talking earlier about what is the future of design education, that's one area and the other area is that there's a lot of moves amongst science and engineering courses, to make them more interesting; for teaching them differently. To encourage young people to get into it, and see whether it's a creative area of endeavour, rather than a dull fact-finding process.

Fred Baier: That's a bit of a spin around. Because in my youth it was too vague and risky to do anything arty, because there didn't seem to be a lot of point to it. Now there seems to be loads of things for it to be channelled into and there isn't too much point in doing science.

In pre-nineties art education the courses were just hanging out with whoever were the teachers. But it's not like that at all any more. Although the reputation that England has for art education comes from then, (the old art school phenomenon) rather than from now.