

# Benchmark

He's off the rails, but that's a good thing!  
Meet Mal Corboy – the Perth train driver who  
became a New Zealand design guru WORDS Rick Murphy

White Corian benchtops and island offset the bright pink in Mal's award-winning design.



LEFT With its stainless steel and American oak tops, this kitchen took out the award for Kitchen Design of the Year 2009 Australia.



**M**al Corboy is an internationally renowned kitchen designer based in New Zealand, with a swag of awards to his name and a list of happy clients that stretches to Los Angeles. His designs are instantly recognisable, defined by individual use of colour and lighting, with an emphasis on clean, extended lines and peerless attention to form and function.

Not bad for a Perth boy who began his career as a train driver. So, how did he get from the workshops at the old East Perth depot to the houses of the rich and famous in Europe and America?

"I was an apprentice cabinetmaker with Public Works, then got my train driver's ticket. I married and moved to New Zealand, where I discovered they had one train and two train drivers," he laughs. Squeezed out of the giant New Zealand rail industry, Mal took a position as a cabinetmaker, only to be made redundant in the stock market crash of the late 1980s. Jobless and a long way from home, he made the life-changing decision to open his own cabinetry business.

He has never looked back, his company establishing a reputation for quality before Mal branched into the world of design. "Once you had built and sold a kitchen, you had to design the layout. I suppose you could say my design career began from necessity, then it became a passion."

With qualifications as a certified kitchen designer in both Australia and New Zealand, he set up his own studio in Auckland on a start-up budget of nothing at all. Studying industry professionals, Mal had noticed a gap between form and function. "It seemed that many designers didn't really care about the practical concerns of their clients, whereas, as a cabinetmaker, I automatically knew what could and could not be done. When I started designing, and gained confidence, I began to think more from the perspective of form."

The aesthetic principles of design have always been tempered by Mal's knowledge of construction and the practical limits of work. After all, a beautiful kitchen is nothing if it doesn't work. Mal always consults with clients on their aspirations, and never starts a project without personally inspecting the site.

"I was fortunate to have a number of clients who said 'go for it'... design should make a statement. Love it or hate it; that's great. It's better than no response at all"



LEFT This kitchen was created with the intention of contrasting glass with various types of wood.  
BELOW Concealed lights give the blue kitchen a futuristic, gravity-defying look.



### HOVER CRAFT

A tight U-shape offered few, if any, options in this Auckland kitchen, so Mal moved a wall or two and redefined the floor surface

**THE BRIEF** The male owner wanted a European-style kitchen that would become a point of reference and difference within the apartment, while maintaining a masculine aesthetic.

**THE EXECUTION** Mal introduced solid marble surfaces and floor-to-ceiling stainless steel cabinetry, which conceals cupboard and storage spaces and gives the whole design a dramatic, yet sleek, finish. The effect created by concealed blue lighting running along the base of solid bench areas lends the design a futuristic, hovering, aspect that became an instant talking point among design bloggers. It says a lot about Corboy's talent that a simple string of concealed lights has taken a solid kitchen design and delivered it into the realm of conceptual art... except forever on display and forever functional.

# CUSTOM MADE AND DESIGNED CABINETRY



QUALITY • CONTEMPORARY • CLASSICAL • UNIQUE



**Butler Interiors**  
fine cabinetry design and manufacture

P: 08 9271 4009 F: 08 9271 4452 E: sales@butlerinteriors.com.au W: www.butlerinteriors.com.au

A: 64 Clavering Road, Bayswater, WA (By appointment only)