

From surfing to shaping



A keen skateboarder, surfer and snowboarder, Chris Eames spent 10 years, – and 20 winters – bouncing between the South Island and North America, chasing perfect bluebird days and waist-deep powder runs. But at 28 it became time to think seriously about his future. Positive memories of woodworking at college led him to enrol in a furniture and cabinet making course at UNITEC, which was his springboard into the industry.

“The saw literally hasn’t missed a beat in four years and we push it pretty hard. We’ll cut down cabinetry components for a few days and then rip down a packet of solid oak. It’s stood up to everything we’ve thrown at it and it’s only the single-phase version of the K500S.”

A couple of years later and Chris added the Format-4 dual 51 combination planer & thicknesser – also made by Felder and supplied by Jacks. “I wanted a machine I could have confidence new, inexperienced staff could easily use, get a good finish from and is safe.” The dual 51 comes with Felder’s renowned ‘Silent-Power’ cutterblock, which uses insert knives in a spiral formation with a unique geometry that creates a ‘shear’ cutting action.

A few years and various joinery and cabinet shops later he turned his focus to furniture design, soon landing a design and production role with one of New Zealand’s premier furniture designers. “I really enjoy designing furniture and balancing the creativity of design with the practicality of production,” says Chris.

“I was using an old buzzer and thicknesser with traditional straight knives. I was constantly battling with the idiosyncrasies of those machines and chip-outs. Felder’s Silent-Power cutterblock eliminated the chip-outs,” explains Chris. It’s also taken a step out of the production line. “After buzzing and thicknessing, we’d have to run our chair legs and rails through the drum sander. Now we can completely skip that process. Even better, we’ve also not turned the knives on the dual 51 yet and we’re putting one to one and a half cube of timber through the machine a month.”

With six years of experience in furniture design and production and the guarantee of work from his previous employer it was time for Chris to go out on his own. He established Open Furniture in 2018. Specialising in high-end solid timber furniture, Open Furniture will also take on kitchens and cabinetry work. Chris has a small, stable team consisting of a qualified joiner, and a polisher. His team’s skill set complement each other. “Although the furniture industry in New Zealand is pretty small, there’s a demand for well designed, good quality NZ made furniture,” Chris says.

Chris recently added a Felder F700Z spindle moulder and FB-510 bandsaw. He has plans to take on an apprentice, and eventually start his own brand of high-end solid timber furniture. With a growing business and new baby on the way, it might be a while before Chris is racing down the side of a mountain on a regular basis. But you get the feeling he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Chris started Open Furniture on a modest budget of just \$25K. His first significant purchase was a Felder K500S panel saw. “I knew I’d need a good quality saw that would fit my limited budget. After researching the options, including a lot of time spent online, I decided on the Felder K500S.” It turned out to be a good decision.



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