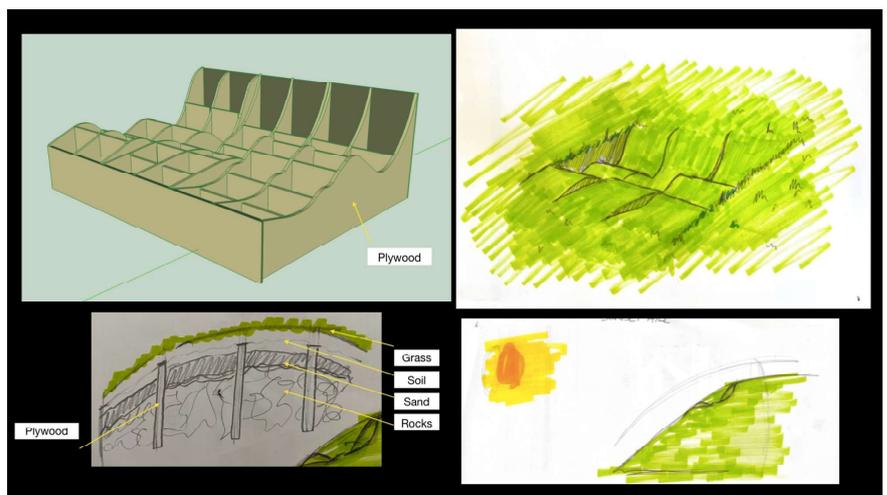
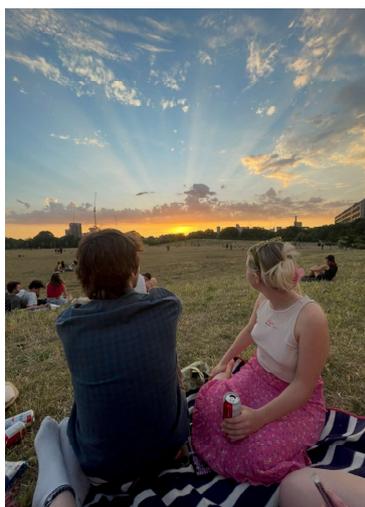
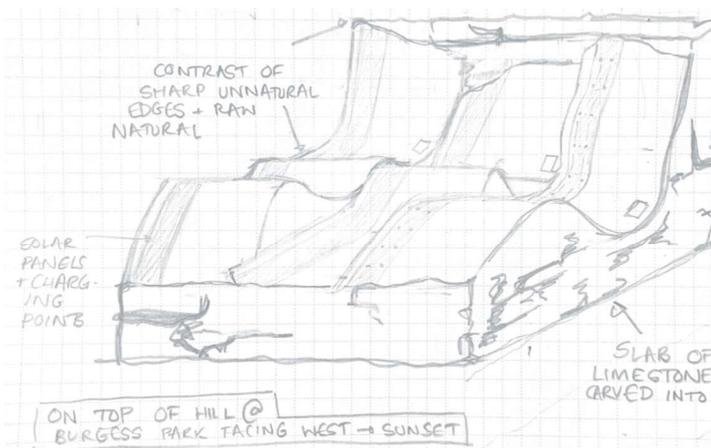


Upholders Travel Bursary

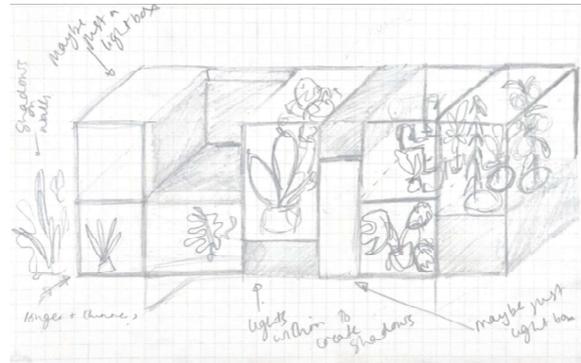
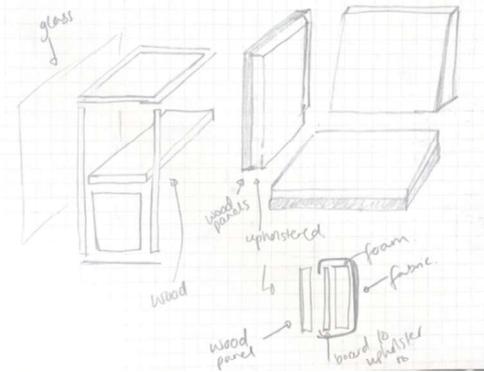
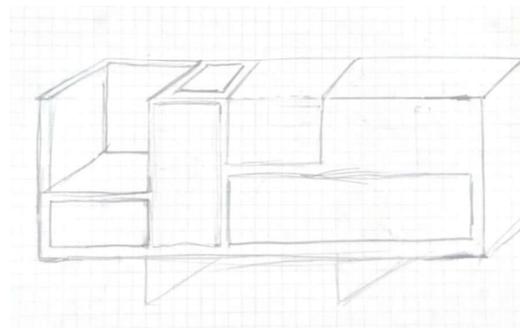
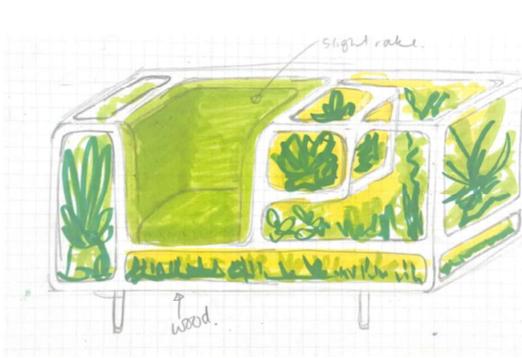
Last year I was the lucky recipient of the Worshipful Company of Upholders Travel Bursary. My travels began in June in Florence, Italy. There I attended the Florence Institute of Design's Furniture Design course. The course was centred around two design projects, each lasting two weeks, as well as as a series of lectures and factory visits.

We were tasked at designing a chaise lounge and a credenza. This process involved market research, finding our target audience, creating initial sketches, trialling ergonomics, drawing 2D and 3D computer models to then finally create a 1:10 prototype. This was a fascinating process, because as somebody who comes from the construction side of the furniture making process and works with many interior designers I began to truly understand the design stages. I have aspirations to create bespoke designs for clients in the future so being set this task with the guidance and critique of a professional was incredibly valuable.

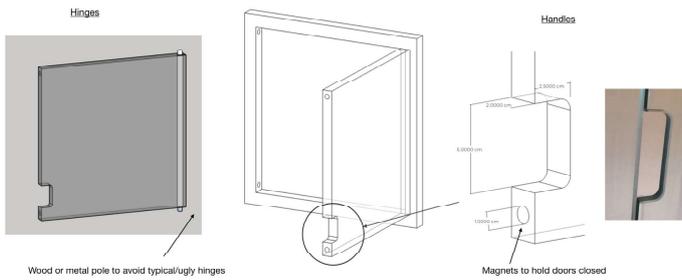
I named the chaise lounge project SLUMPY, based on the acronym Socially Liberal Urban Minded Professional, which usually mockingly refers to young people living in the city, much like my friends and I. The chaise was designed specifically for the hill in Burgess Park, which faces the sunset and is in my opinion the perfect place for slumpies to unwind for free in nature after a stressful day in the office. I created a structure that could be filled with rocks and clay with a topping of soil and grass. This process really highlighted the benefit of computer aided designs as well as hand sketches to gain a sense of the perfect proportion.



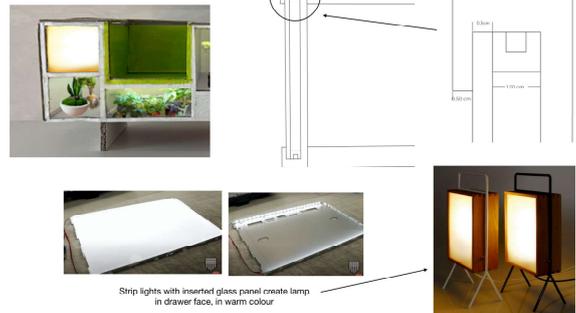
The credenza project was named EDEN, designed with the intention of bringing the outside in. A combination of a greenhouse and a sitting area, the credenza was designed to be filled with plants, that can cast shadows on the wall to create the feeling that the user is sitting within nature. After the critiques of the first project the second project drilled in the importance of thinking through the details.



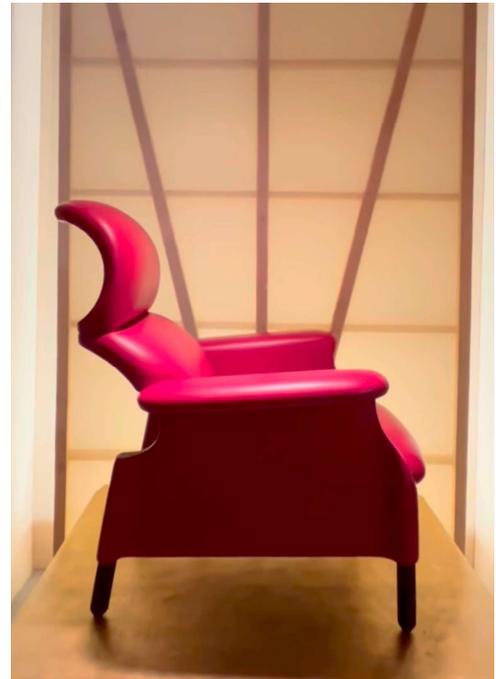
DRAWER DETAILS



BOX LIGHT DETAILS



Aside from the designing the course included visits to EDRA and Poltrona Frau, two prestigious Italian designers. Poltrona Frau was particularly insightful as we were allowed to visit their huge factory using a production line set up with over 50 upholsterers. Targets were hung on screens above the craftspeople to let each part of this massive mechanism of workers understand how much more was to be completed before the end of the week. Finishers (those who tightened the leather covers with heat guns and then assembled the pieces) were expected to complete 6 items per day. Most of Poltrona Frau's sofas and armchairs are covered in leather, stored on shelves 5 storeys high. When we first entered they were being checked by somebody on a scissor lift. Upon arrival at the factory each hide is stretched and scanned for imperfections, which are marked and then used for more hidden parts of the furniture. Each hide is given a QR code

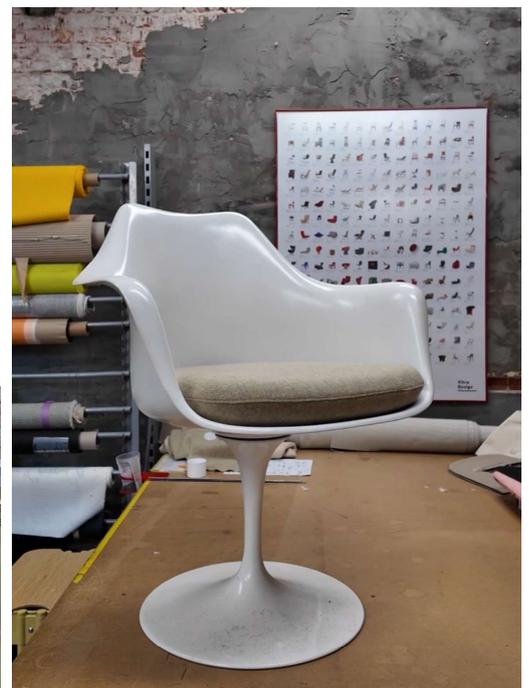


detailing its type and colour. It is then laid out on a large conveyor belt with projectors overhead and the cutter projects each pattern piece onto the hide. Once they are happy with placement, it is rolled under a laser cutter.

We were shown parts of the making of the Chester sofa (see above). Once the back had been stuffed with what Poltrona Frau called "vegetable horsehair" and covered in scrim, it was caged inside a metal jig with holes in exactly the correct position for the buttons. I was very impressed by the use of technology and to see my job produced on such a huge scale was incredibly illuminating.

The next stop on my trip was to Zele, Belgium, where I met Clint of Clint Stofferling. Clint was an impressive craftsman but also an incredibly talented businessman. His manner with clients was insightful. He had intensively researched around his subject by talking a lot with his suppliers, particularly of fabrics and foam, which meant that he could speak about them in an exceptionally sophisticated way. He was passionate about using the best of everything; the best tools, the best techniques, and the best materials. This was fantastic to learn from. The layout of his workshop was clever too, he recognised that every tool needed to be placed in the position where it would be used to reduce time searching for it. Clint's workload is primarily modernist pieces, particularly those from the mid century. This meant that he had a lot of tailoring and sewing experience, which is something I am less familiar with. Therefore he set me on to the task of remaking eight Tulip chair seat covers. This gave me an excellent grounding for patterning, templating, cutting, sewing zips and stretch fabric.

I also was able to attend an installation for headboards and mattresses that Clint was working on and we experimented with making our own foam in a waffle maker!





I then headed to Copenhagen where I met Brian of Liebeck's Traditionel Møbepolstring. Brian's workshop was in Fredericksburg, the most expensive area of Copenhagen, with "the wood guy" and "the curtain guy" next door. Brian acted as the point of contact for manor houses looking to restore their furniture. He would delegate parts of the work to his neighbours to provide a full service. This was a very different kind of business model to anything I'd ever experienced before.

Brian hated foam and the majority of his work was traditional. During my time there we focussed on the reupholstery of a seat using coir fibre and hemp. We also used tacks for most of the process except for the top fabric, something which I am less familiar with when working commercially for a company. He taught me Danish springing, which used knots I'd never seen before and the stuffing was a masterclass in feeling for unevenness. It reminded me of the importance of regulating. At the point of stitching I learnt how to do a French corner and Brian guided me through how I could improve on my technique.



My next stop was to visit Katja in Finland. Katja, of Verhoilijamestari, is a self proclaimed “upholstery nerd”. Inside her workshop were many books in many different languages on upholstery. She learnt English and is learning French to widen her understanding of upholstery which was incredibly inspiring to witness. During the week that I was with her she was teaching and I was able to attend her lessons. Mixing with her students was eye-opening, especially hearing about how they got into upholstery as the tuition in Finland is completely free.

Katja gave me a lesson in Finnish springing. She told me “in Finland we do everything twice” and by that she meant that many knots are tied to make absolutely sure it will be secure. It was by far the most complex springing I had ever done and definitely will be useful when tying in very tall springs.



In Finland it is much more expensive to use horsehair than in the UK, so upholsterers often use wood wool. I was able to try stuffing with this material, which actually was more of a packing action, creating a much denser edge. This is usually topped with black cotton flock, another unfamiliar process to me.



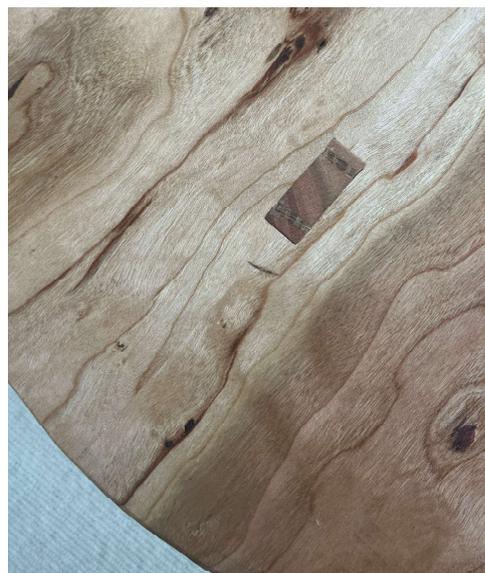
I then headed to China to attend the Shanghai International Furniture Fair. This was filled with machinery for mass production of furniture. Most of the items were for woodworking, however there was a dedicated section for upholstery too. There was technology for fabric cutting (like those in Poltrona Frau), foam cutting, pocket springs and even stapling a drop in seat. I later attended the Shanghai Museum and the difference between the historical pieces was astounding. China has such a rich history of craftsmanship and it was eye opening to compare this with its current industrialisation.



China has been such a source of inspiration for furniture design in the rest of the world, which felt obvious when seeing the historical pieces in person. Their joinery is known to be particularly spectacular, not requiring any glue and being fitted together based entirely on knowledge of how the wood will behave. Hans Wegner's China chair is another clear example of this and the knock on effect of his influence on European furniture is staggering.



My next destination was Japan, known for its unparalleled understanding of wood. Japanese joinery is especially detailed and intricate and this is obvious when exploring their castles and other historical buildings. Before attending my woodworking course I visited multiple wood or furniture museums. I was given an abundance of leaflets and paperwork detailing different types of wood with pictures of their biological structure viewed through a microscope and how that would affect their use. But my most significant education about wood came from my 2 week woodworking course with Jon Billing of Somakosha School, where I made a stool with dovetail joints and 3 different types of mortise and tenon completely by hand. Japanese tools are often of much higher quality and are much more highly cared for by craftsmen. The first two days of the course were purely about sharpening and setting the tools. We then began chiselling and sawing. Jon gave me a lot of books to read whilst I was there and it was also insightful to pick his brains about his experiences as a furniture maker of many years.



I learnt much about the history of furniture in Japan when I was with Yu Sakurai of Chaise Banque in Shiogama for 3 days. Chaise Banque was founded in 2014 and the company now has around 20 employees as well as an antiques shop. Yu has done a significant amount of travel for his work, visiting France, Poland and America, studying and teaching.

Western style seating as we would think of it was introduced to Japan after the forced ending of Japan's 220 year isolation period in 1854. Furniture was rare in the homes of everyday people because rooms were designed to be multifunctional. With this introduction came upholstery techniques, restorers and furniture makers used the materials that were available to them: rice straw. Whilst I was with Yu, he gave me a lesson to show me traditional Japanese techniques. The rice behaves differently to horsehair and so the techniques, although mostly the same, are slightly different to French techniques. The rice must be brushed through to remove any husks or small pieces before it is tightly wrapped with hessian into a roll. It can then be stitched to create a long lasting profile.



I'd like to thank the Worshipful Company of Upholders once again for their generous contribution to this trip. It has given me an opportunity to have a greater understanding about my own practise, a rare opportunity to think about how and why I am doing upholstery. Mixing with so many craftspeople has been incredibly insightful and I have learned a lot about upholstery and so much more. My intention with this trip was to expand my understanding of upholstery and read around my subject and I feel absolutely that I have

achieved this and it has left me with a raw determination to learn more. I realised how small the section of upholstery is that I regularly do and how important it is connect with craftspeople to learn. Before I left I had intended to return to my job full time once my trip was over. Working in other workshops around the world has proven so valuable in broadening my knowledge of upholstery I intend to continue this now that I am home by working freelance for a few different companies and also doing some private commissions to put into practice what I have learnt.

