

# Q&A WITH BRITTA DE LAAT

Interview by Lara McCabe

Upholstery is an aged trade and unfortunately one that has been diminishing due to modern consumerism. But there is something really exciting happening with new generations of young upholsterers, including in the Illawarra. Perhaps it's a reflection of our community engagement with environmental issues.

I chatted to Britta de Laat, whose Coledale-located upholstery, restoration and vintage furniture business called "dumped & ditched" goes by the motto "we all deserve a second chance".

## What do you love about furniture upholstery and restoration?

While so many of us are looking towards the next best thing, I enjoy carefully reviving the relics consumerism tells us to leave behind, transforming d

**CLOSE** ces of furniture into true gems. **PHOTO** founding dumped & ditched, I worked as a set decorator in the film industry.

Basically, I was giving characters an identity through transforming an empty space into one full of stories. Now, through dumped & ditched my vision, my sense of aesthetics and storytelling all come together. I enjoy the slower pace of restoration. Working with my hands, manipulating materials into shape gives me immense satisfaction.

## Do you think the skill of upholstery differs much from the past to today?

Yes and no. Certainly factory settings, with huge machines, fabric laser cutters and the like, have simplified and sped up work processes. As an upholsterer, one needs to know both modern and traditional skill-sets – a lot is still manual work.

What makes furniture restoration unique is the attention to detail that must go into honouring the original craft. Remaining true to the authenticity of the original while introducing a modern element is at the heart of my work. Craftsmanship, simply put, is the opposite of the industrialised conveyor belt. Craftsmanship is the quality that comes from creating with passion, care and attention to detail.

## What fuels your passion and energy in your business? Design or sustainability?

Our concept is simple: bring your piece of furniture or purchase one from us, together we will take you through textile options as well as preferred comfort preferences (think different levels of density like in

Photo: Britta de Laat by Dida Sundeet



mattresses.) Together with our customers we create unique vintage pieces of furniture, keepsakes for future generations.

Sustainability and conscious consumerism are definitely topics that fuel me and my work; as well as buy local, consume consciously and ethically. You could say sustainability is the message and design is the language I choose to express those ideas.

## You have some amazing photography on your website.

The photographs are a continuation of my work as an artist and art director. When I relocated to Coledale I found local photography artist Dida Sundeet, who shares my passion for vintage and sustainability. We photograph restored furniture pieces in derelict urban settings, local places that once held a greater significance in the community, but that have long had their need surpassed and now face decay. I want the observer to wonder why anybody would leave such a piece of furniture out on the curb.

## What else is happening with dumped&ditched?

Last year, I held an introductory workshop on up-cycling with Rumpus and we will run more hands-on workshops to teach DIY enthusiasts about wood-restoration, upholstery and sewing techniques.

We're also stockists for several textile companies and are in the process of revamping our shop to showcase those as well as some fabulous furniture care products.

There are openings for work placements for talented and committed people who would love to learn more about upholstery and wood restoration.

■ Follow dumped & ditched on Facebook & Instagram. Visit [www.dumpedandditched.com](http://www.dumpedandditched.com) to see furniture given a second chance to shine! **2515**