



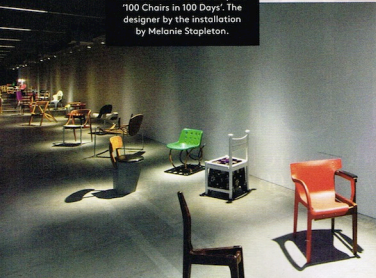
SEATING CULTURE

Food, wine, conversation and ideas were flowing freely at an evening to celebrate *Martino Gamper's* 100 re-imagined chairs.

Photographs WILL NEILL Words KAREN MCCARTNEY



Clockwise from top Guests on the terrace at RMIT Design Hub. Sharing plate of steamed Daintree barramundi, cabbage and pickled daikon by chef Sean McConnell of Monster restaurant. Martino Gamper's '100 Chairs in 100 Days'. The designer by the installation by Melanie Stapleton.



You know a dinner is unusual when you are asked to bring a drinking glass with a story attached. The first of a series hosted by Hotel Hotel, the dinner was a collaboration of RMIT's Design Hub with designer Martino Gamper, created for the sharing of food, wine, conversation and ideas.

London-based Martino was in Melbourne to open his exhibition '100 Chairs in 100 Days' at the invitation of Design Hub. "We admire Martino's approach, the way he transforms disused objects into new chairs, giving them new meaning, and his understanding of how objects can tell cultural stories," says Hotel Hotel special projects director Dan Honey. Cultural stories resonate with Hotel Hotel. The concept behind its Monster dining room draws on the notion of Australian suburban family rooms of immigrants from the 1940s to 80s as a generator of ideas. So Martino's focus on research and process and his ability to re-imagine with poetry and wit were strong connecting themes.

Martino's project has travelled the world, growing gradually as a new chair is added at each destination. For this project he collected disused chairs from alleyways and friends' homes and reassembled them – one per day – but not, as he points out, necessarily consecutively.

The dinner played with notions of the familiar, and familial, alongside the curious and slightly disconcerting: conventions were either enhanced or skewed. There were no placecards so there was an element of serendipity as to who you sat beside. The meal, cooked by Monster kitchen and bar executive chef Sean McConnell, was designed

to share and serve yourself as you would at home. Even the menu was arrived at by exchange as Sean interpreted Martino's references to taste. We experienced bitter, raw and pickled foods with flavours including lemon, anise, cumin, fennel, chilli, coriander and ginger. Every dish, served with generosity and care, was a rewarding sensory experience.

While not a formal occasion, friends of Hotel Hotel Jad Choucair and Nur Shkembi read Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's 'Passport' in English and Arabic. The poem explores themes of nationality and identity, how they are built and dismantled – a parallel with the chairs themselves. The unfamiliar made us sit up and listen, concentrating in an attempt to extend our understanding.

The eucalyptus and banksia installation by Melanie Stapleton from Cecilia Fox that welcomed guests on the terrace denoted the misplaced, while floral arrangements were wrapped in brown paper and given to guests on departure in a way that was modest and heartfelt.

I did have a story to tell about my small precious dusty pink Venetian glass tumbler which I gladly gave to the design lecturer who sat beside me. We had covered a lot of ground during the course of the evening and so a gesture that reminds us of the value of sharing was entirely appropriate – and I have to say I did leave feeling rather virtuous.



Clockwise from top right
Aerial view of the re-imagined
chairs. Table settings were
informal and creative. Hotel
Hotel founder Nectar Efkarpidis,
in discussion. Imaginative
solutions show in the re-formed
chairs. Starter of gin-cured
kingfish, cucumber and dill.
Monster chef Sean McConnell.

