



“Watching Al build that first bed, I saw a future unfold for us that combined our skills” IMOGEN

DESIGN PROFILE

al + imo

Husband-and-wife duo Al and Imogen Roberts are on a mission to educate and empower makers and buyers with their sustainable approach to design

In 2016, Al and Imogen Roberts were on a mission to find a new bed. Unfortunately, everything they liked was out of their price range. Al, a carpenter by trade, decided he would have a go at designing and building a bed himself – a small decision that has had a big impact on their lives. “We made our first bed frame in our inner-city Melbourne share house carport with basic carpentry tools and no plan,” says Imogen. “I remember Al turned to me at the end of the day and said, ‘That’s the best day’s work I’ve ever done.’ It was in that moment we knew this is what we needed to be doing.”

“I’d studied fashion at university, and by the end of my degree I struggled with the idea of fast fashion. Watching Al build that first bed, I saw a future unfold for us that combined our skills.”

The Al + Imo furniture-making and design business was established shortly after. By 2017, Al had left his job to focus on the brand full-time, while Imogen stepped into the role of photographing, styling and marketing the products.

However, you won’t find Al + Imo products in any old shop. This husband-and-wife duo are dedicated to sustainable living and all their pieces are made to order. “We’re believers in only making what’s needed, which is why we don’t have showrooms or carry stock,” says Imogen. “Our timber is sourced from local timber yards – a lot of it is recycled and has been milled from demo sites around Victoria. Our main sustainability goal is encouraging people to buy once and buy well.”

While the brand is known for its practical, minimal and robust designs that celebrate the beauty of natural timber, it has grown to include a podcast called Talkshop: The Workshop Talkshow by Al + Imo, and the online educational resource Furniture Friends. “We started getting a lot of questions from people interested in starting a making business, and we thought

a podcast would be a great way to have that conversation,” says Imogen. “We talk about how we keep a positive and healthy mindset, how we started and how we’re growing our business while building our dream life along the way.”

The Furniture Friends course was developed for similar reasons and is a 12-week business and marketing program guided by the couple. “It’s our mission to see more custom furniture in people’s homes across the world and less crap in landfill,” explains Imogen. “Rather than expanding and producing more furniture ourselves, we know we can have more impact globally if we use our skills to help other independent makers successfully run their businesses.”

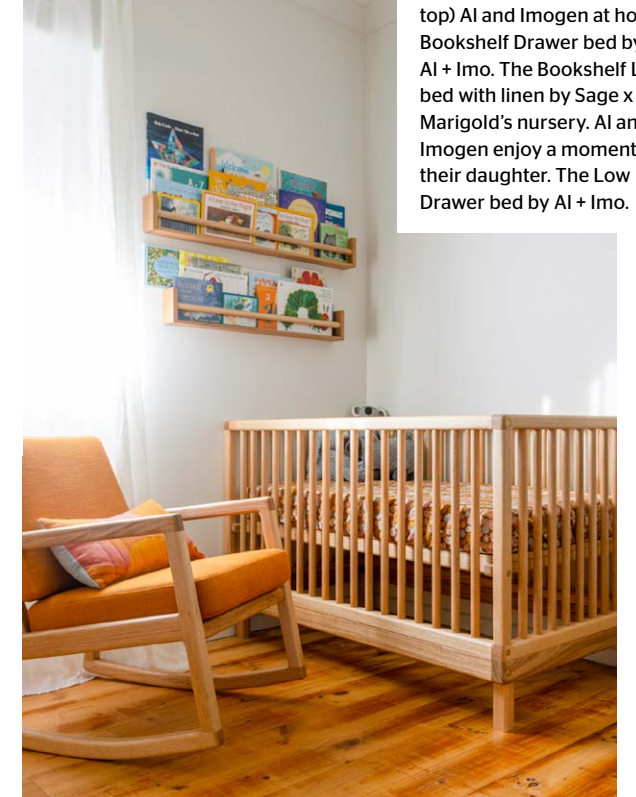
Another challenge right now is balancing family life with a growing business. “We welcomed our daughter Marigold in May last year, and juggling family life has been our biggest challenge so far,” says Imogen. “We’re both very ambitious people who love working, so I’d say figuring out our roles as parents and business owners has been challenging – but it’s been the best challenge yet!”

There is no desire to expand Al + Imo just yet, but the pair have set their sights on making sustainable furniture more accessible to everyone with a new online DIY series. “During lockdown 2020 in Melbourne, we started filming DIY projects and creating plans to stay connected to our community,” says Imogen. “It’s an exciting addition to our business, and we’ve now planned lots of projects for 2022 while building our new home.”

“We enjoy connecting with other makers and have a passion for sharing our knowledge, so I see us expanding Furniture Friends and the education side of Al + Imo.” **10** Shop the range online at [alandimohandmade.com.au](http://alandimohandmade.com.au) or follow Al + Imo’s journey on Instagram @al\_and\_imo



CLOCKWISE (from opposite, top) Al and Imogen at home. Bookshelf Drawer bed by Al + Imo. The Bookshelf Ledge bed with linen by Sage x Clare. Marigold’s nursery. Al and Imogen enjoy a moment with their daughter. The Low Drawer bed by Al + Imo.



ARTWORKS BY ANDREA NUNGARRAY/MARTIN (TOP) AND FROM VINTAGE POSTERS ONLY (FOIRE INDUSTRIELLE POSTER OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT)