

MEET THE DESIGNER

# Tricia Harris

WORDS BY CONOR BIGGINS

In 2020 designer Tricia Harris swapped the hustle and bustle of Dublin city life for the draw of country living in Co. Kerry.

A diverse designer from the start of her journey, Tricia has worked on projects ranging from home furnishings to arctic yacht design. I caught up with Tricia on her practices to date and how she's continuing to grow in the West of Ireland.

## How did you get started in design?

My interest in design started when I was young. I was always making things at home in my Dad's workshop and loved the experience of creating with my hands. My school offered woodworking and I was lucky to have an enthusiastic teacher. This combined with very supportive parents, encouraged me to make the mad decision to study furniture design at Letterfrack. The passion for design in Letterfrack was phenomenal and helped shape my design practices. I then moved to Dublin where I lectured in design and rented a space at The Chocolate Factory, a Creative Arts Centre. In 2020, thanks to the lockdown,

I decided to move back to Kerry, and it's been one of the best decisions I've made. It's allowed me to refocus on my work and connect with so many of the other designers in the west of Ireland.

## What inspires your work?

From a young age I found the way shapes interact very interesting, and that's been the inspiration for many of my pieces. Lately, I've been exploring different materials and allowing that to inform my designs. For example the way chords, shaker tape, and other fabrics interact with wood has started to grab my attention. I've recently been inspired by a sort of Japanese craft and Irish Heritage fusion. I'm looking at past Irish designs, the character of them and what makes them such beloved pieces of a home and combining that with joinery and techniques used in Japanese craft. More broadly speaking, my eyes are always open to my surroundings. Often I'd plan a holiday around creative hubs, going to design shows, or meeting with other designers, even those outside of furniture. All this comes together to inspire my work.



## ■ INTERIORS

### What is your creative process?

It starts with listening to my clients to understand what they're looking for. After that it's on to pen and paper where I explore what's possible. I enjoy how creative I can be at this stage and tend to generate loads of different concepts some of which I will turn into 3D models. Then I contact a maker, who in turn will come back with a price. After that it's a continuous back and forth between the maker, myself, and the client. We all work together on the finer details finding ways to improve the final product and cost.

### What is your biggest design challenge?

Finding a balance between creativity and commercial viability is an art of its own. You want to put your own stamp on a new design, you want it to be something new and different, but at the end of the day it also must be affordable for the customer. I've overcome this by finding makers that are a good fit, and working together with them to find solutions that work for everyone, including the client. How do you incorporate sustainability in your work? Sustainability is baked into my design process. Where possible we use native Irish Oak and Ash, these not only look gorgeous but also last a lifetime. Plus they're durable, over time if these materials get bumped and scratched it can just be sanded and re-oiled. The longer a piece can be in use the better for the environment it gets. I avoid the use of screws and glues where possible in favor of clever joinery and I've recently started researching the use of natural



Studio Harris Workshop Visit with Daniel Gill

dyes. I believe people are starting to appreciate the benefits of considered design that will last and promote sustainable practices.

### What has been your favorite project?

I've really enjoyed working on the Dweller's collection with Daniel Gill, a very talented furniture maker in Athenry. The Dweller's collection is an exploration of shaker furniture design that takes its inspiration from Irish design gone before. It started with the design of a spindle back bench for a client in Galway and has since then been developed into a range of furniture that's garnered great exposure. The resulting designs are something that people will actually use day to day and not just for show. To me, the collection combines so many aspects of good design. Each product is considered for long term use, for example, thanks to some clever traditional Irish joinery the legs are easily replaceable should they get wet or damaged. Also many pieces can serve multiple functions such as a chair, side table or plant stand. It's been a very fun project.



Studio Harris Dwellers Spindleback Bench



Studio Harris Lazy Lounger



Milking Stool, part of Dweller's Collection

### What advice would you give other designers starting out?

Honestly, do the opposite of what I did. If I could go back I would focus on creating niche designs and expanding from there. When I started my practice it was driven by passion, I had so many ideas and wanted to express them all, this resulted in designs that were appreciated, but totally different from each other. I think it's important to research the business side of things, start small, build a brand and expand gradually from there. Furniture is a difficult business to make a living out of, it's important you find a mentor, create a business plan, and get in touch with the Local Enterprise Office. All this can help you start in a way that is financially sustainable and lets you put on your business hat when needed.

### What Irish designers do you admire?

Superfolk are doing lovely stuff, they've a very considered approach with a strong philosophy in what they're doing. I think they've found a really nice position between craft and design. Perch Design is another one, they create great products for offices focusing on human centered design and ergonomics. Also Modet in Cork are creating some beautiful pieces. Abroad then there's Laura Mays, and Orior furniture who are both elevating Irish design to a very modern standard.

Studio Harris Lagom Sideboard Oak 1800

### How would you like to see design grow in Ireland?

It would be great to see more appreciation for design as separate from craft. I think for this to happen there needs to be more options for design at scale in Ireland. In the past Ireland had production furniture facilities but this has more or less ceased now. It would be great to see design houses, like those in Scandinavia, opening up in Ireland. But for that to happen there needs to be production options available. This could have the knock on effect of allowing more designers in the west to collaborate on larger scale design projects.



Conor Biggins is a designer in the west of Ireland specializing in high-end interiors and furniture. To get in touch or for more information, please visit [conorbiggins.com](http://conorbiggins.com)