



# MADE IN MANHATTAN

Mark Wilkinson, Europe's finest furniture designer, makes it to New York City.

**By Felicity Sargent**

**T**o be hailed as "The Mozart of Kitchen Design" is not an easy feat, nor is being called "The finest designer of our time." Both titles are of equal merit, and one man—interior design phenomenon and bona fide genius Mark Wilkinson—has been lauded as both.

Now a favorite of European royalty, Wilkinson's rise to the top was not an easy one. Faced with severe dyslexia as a child, he was disgraced with constant belittlement by his educators saying, "Wilkinson, you will never amount to anything, your education has been a total waste of taxpayer's money." The irony is anything but subtle, and certainly resonates with acclaimed Wilkinson, as he is now a Mensa member with an intellect above genius level, not to mention a global interior design icon.

Wilkinson's first business venture began in 1977 when he founded a kitchen



making business, in partnership with two long time friends. Seeking out more creative liberty, in 1981 he started a business under his own name, with his wife Cynthia. Thus, Mark Wilkinson Furniture, a business at the cutting edge of classical custom furniture making, was born. Soon after the world began to formally recognize Mark Wilkinson as a creative designer. Amongst the personal characteristics that make Wilkinson such an extraordinary kitchen furniture designer is that, as well as his understanding of how furniture is made—a skill made particularly intimate during his days renovating antiques—he also understands, first hand, how a kitchen needs to operate. He is a first class family cook, with many of the UK top chefs amongst his friends, and a cookery column in the UK food magazine, Flavours. This unique range of skills has been the foundation that has resulted in showrooms throughout the UK, as well as in Moscow, Dubai, and now, Manhattan.

Wilkinson operates a three-pronged business plan, creating order, yet range: design, manufacturing, and retail. Collectively, MWF has 14 showrooms of its own, and is a sector-market leader in the U.K. Wilkinson's business savoir-faire has resulted in numerous accolades for MWF, as well as for Wilkinson himself. In fact, he is the U.K. kitchen and bath industry's most honored person.

A grandson of cabinet-makers, Wilkinson has artistry in his blood. His attention to detail is the tell-all sign of his combined interest in both art and business. He personally fashions the body of all of his furniture, as well as all of his ranges, handles, hinges, and tins. This level of detail can be traced back to his artistic roots and the traditions of his father and grandfather. Having been dubbed as "the finest designer of our time," it seems obvious that his artistic cultured vision will transcend the ages and consequent trends.

"In these times, it is quite immoral to design any products that will go out of fashion," he says. "That lays upon us designers the responsibility to create furniture that has the quality to last, and also has the appeal to satisfy the aesthetic needs of several generations."

Education, and the betterment because of it, is something of particular sensitivity to Wilkinson due to his own academic struggles. Wilkinson's award winning Apprenticeship Scheme has made a substantial impact on the lives



of many. Twenty-five percent of his factory's workforce came through this program, giving both parties satisfaction, industry, and the fulfillment. For a boy who struggled so much, he has certainly overcome his adversities, and delves into more academic activity than most people would ever pursue. "Dyslexia brings more gifts than glitches," he says. "If you have it, flaunt it. When you stumble, hold out a hand. Help will come. When you achieve, stand proud and then lend a hand with humility."

Wilkinson's charity work far surpasses any of his many artistic and business merits. To see one man's good touch so many others is inspirational, and proves that he does indeed practice his preaching; he is directly involved with more than 25 charities. Wilkinson has gone as far as taking those with disabilities into his home, mentoring them, and sending them back into the world with a craft or trade that grants them the elusive self sufficiency. He has also extended his charity work to research and discovered that karate helps children with dyslexia with sequential challenges.

New York welcomes this international man of business, art, and charity to share his many attributes with the city. Especially excited to have Wilkinson stateside is Mary Brouder Murphy, a high-end home designer with more than twenty years of experience. She, too, is of European descent, and became involved in the design industry in Ireland. In her Manhattan showroom, patrons will have the option of using Murphy's design consulting, layouts, project management, and general contracting to help incorporate the beautiful pieces of Wilkinson's kitchen and bathroom furniture lines into their own homes. ☛