

COLLECTIVE OBJECTIVE

Are you sitting comfortably? Whether it's on a Victorian Iron Back, a Fifties-style Egg chair or an unusual French parlour job, then read on to hear how 19 budding upholsterers have got together to form business start-up and support group, The London Chair Collective.

From working on the hit film *Calendar Girls* to organising a pop-up shop on Carnaby Street, Debbie Lowndes knows the power of teamwork.

So when she'd completed a course in upholstery at London Metropolitan University last year, Debbie knew that the best chance of success - for herself and fellow students - lay in working together. The objective was to combine resources, offer support and reduce overheads for start-up upholsterers.

And so was born The London Chair Collective. Says Debbie: "I set it up as a way to share information with fellow students - past and present - and promote ourselves and our work as a group by taking part in shows.

"There were all these people making these beautiful chairs but without a shop or means of showcasing what we do. By forming a collective we have been able to share costs at exhibitions and reduce

overheads with shared workshop space."

To date the collective has done Dulwich Craft Fair, the Alexandra Palace Antiques Fair and has even run a pop-up shop at Carnaby Street - all with the aim of showcasing its chairs to the public.

Based in London's East End, LCC has a fun and friendly website www.thelondonchaircollective.com, and a blog <http://blog.thelondonchaircollective.com/>. "It's a speedy way to show potential clients jobs that we have done and generally what mischief we've been up to," says Debbie.

From a variety of backgrounds (engineering to mental health work) LCC members between them cover a range of styles and techniques.

Some undertake more commercial work, like Jude Dennis and Sally Bell, while others - like Debbie - specialise in Victorian Iron Backs and upholster on a

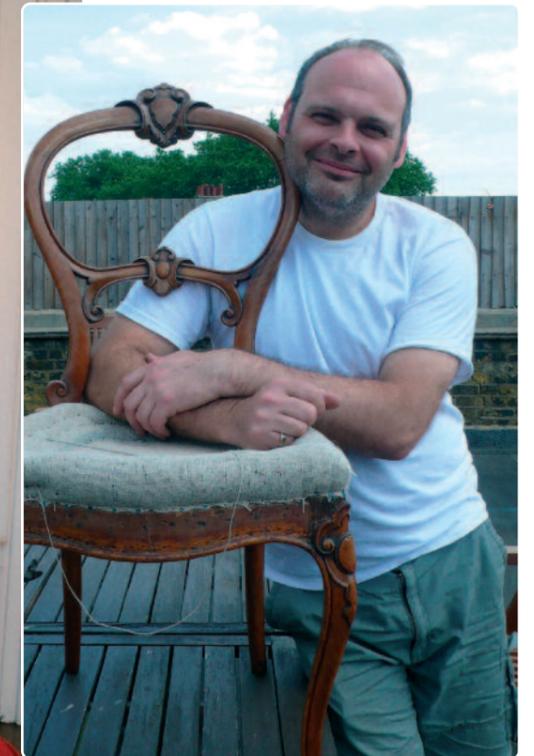


Debbie Lowndes

part time basis. Then there are those like Pia St-John whose amazing ideas and creations place her firmly in the avante garde category.

Iain Pitchford - who took first prize in the recent London Met student awards - is currently the collective's only token male. And Wendy Wilkinson - now 70 - decided to learn upholstery so she could take it up when she retired from her engineering business. She still hasn't quite got round to retiring but is enjoying the upholstery work anyway!

"I have to say that it's a line of work that seems to attract a really lovely sort of person," says Debbie. "Iain, for example, is a mental health worker and has the patience of a saint which is a terrific



Iain Pitchford

goal to produce bespoke upholstery of the highest quality but also to promote the craft and its traditions."



Wendy Wilkinson

advantage when you work in upholstery."

Some of the collective also share workshop space at The School of Stuff in Dalston when the venue isn't running courses during the week.

Some continue to practice under the guidance of Malcolm Hopkins, Alex Law and Matthew Gates - tutors at London Met. And the collective is currently working on further LCC shows for later this year.

Said Debbie: "Many of us have taken up upholstery after, or alongside, successful careers in a wide range of businesses and industries. We are all linked by a common



3D Hare Chair from Pia St-John



Dulwich