

My Journey into Product and Furniture Design

BY LILY THAM | PRODUCT AND FURNITURE DESIGN STUDENT AT KINGSTON UNVIERSITY

Designer and maker Lily Tham studied Product and Furniture Design at Kingston University. Her work explores experimentation, materials and the hidden potential in waste streams. Here she shares how her journey into design began with Design and Technology at school where she finds inspiration, and her advice for students considering a creative career.



I studied Product and Furniture Design at Kingston University, including a professional placement year. My work is rooted in experimentation, material exploration and observing how people interact with the world around them.

Discovering Design

My journey into design started at school when I chose Design and Technology (Textiles) as one of my GCSE options. It quickly became my favourite subject. It was creative, practical and constantly challenging. I loved the process of turning ideas into something physical and felt that the subject really clicked with the way I think.

Because of this, choosing Product Design at A-Level felt like a natural next step. My A-Level years were unfortunately affected by the COVID pandemic, but that did not stop me from completing a final project that I was really proud of. Even during such a disrupted time, I was always eager to get back into the workshop and start designing and making again.

When it came to choosing a university course, I knew I wanted to continue along a creative path. Product Design felt like the right fit for me, but the challenge was deciding where to study. I researched different courses carefully, looking closely at the details of each programme. Workshop facilities were a big factor for me because I love working hands-on with materials.

Interestingly, I had never heard of Product and Furniture Design specifically until I started exploring different design courses. One of my teachers suggested Kingston University and, after researching it further, I realised how highly regarded the course was. From that point, it quickly became my top choice.



Looking back, my natural passion for designing and making physical objects led me to the right place. Sometimes things really do just fall into place.

Finding Inspiration in Everyday Life

A lot of my inspiration comes from observing everyday experiences and the way people interact with objects and spaces. By watching how people behave naturally, I start to notice small problems or unmet needs that could potentially be solved through design.

Another strong theme in my work is a focus on materials and waste streams. I am fascinated by the potential of materials that might normally be considered waste. To me, these materials still have so much value and opportunity within them.

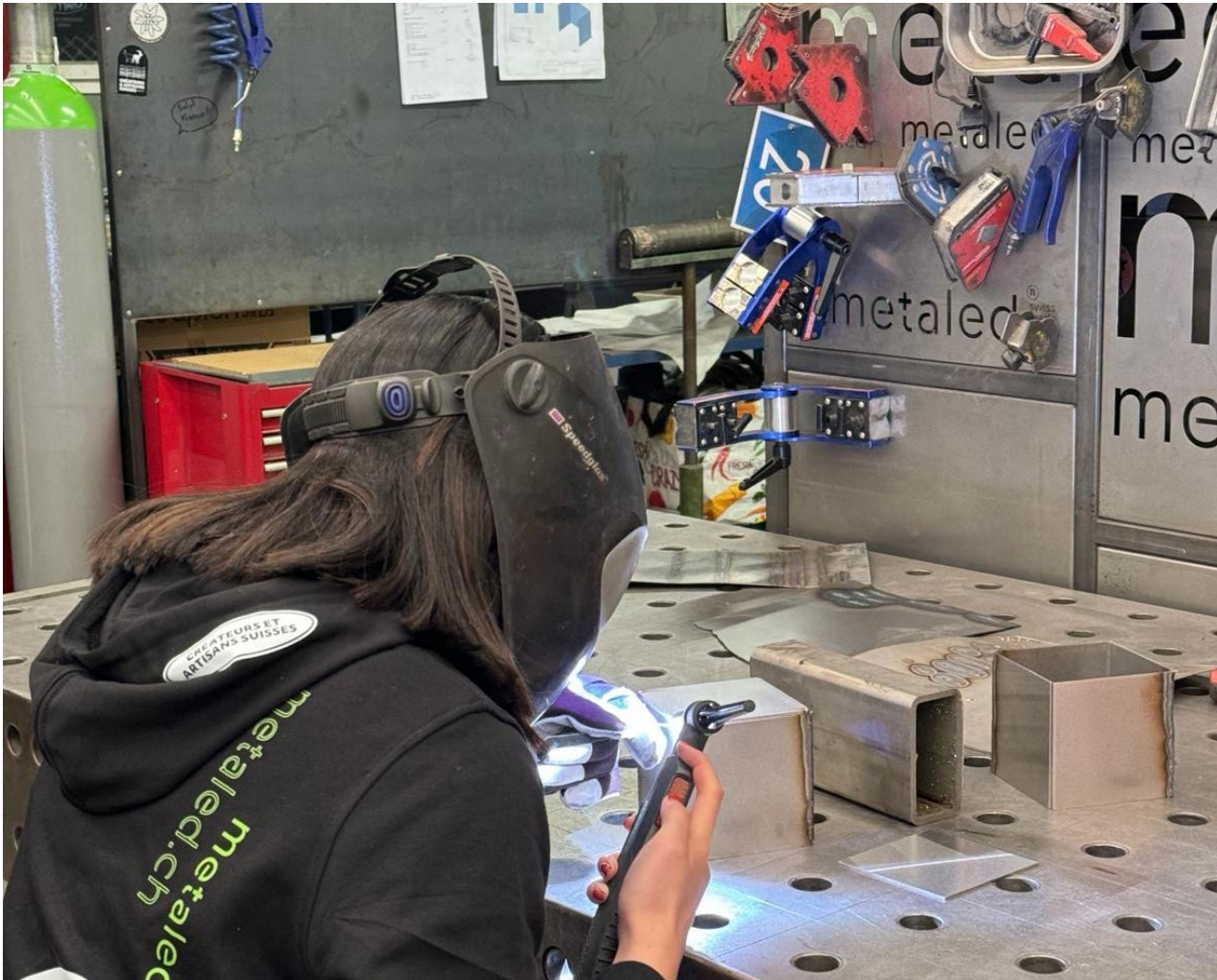
Experimentation plays a huge role in this process. I enjoy testing, manipulating and exploring materials to see what might happen. Often the most exciting ideas come from unexpected discoveries made during experimentation.

My Design Process

My work always begins with real-life observation. I pay attention to how people interact with their surroundings and how objects make them feel. For me, it is important that design has a narrative and emotional connection, encouraging people to pause, question and engage with the piece.

I am naturally curious about materials and processes, and this curiosity drives a lot of my work. Hands-on experimentation often leads to surprising results, pushing designs in directions I might not have originally expected.

Every new material or technique brings the possibility of discovering something new, and those discoveries are often what make a design feel unique.



Advice for Young Designers

If I am completely honest, I did not always know exactly where I would end up career-wise, and at 23 years old I still do not have everything figured out – and that is completely okay.

My biggest piece of advice for anyone interested in the creative industries is to try everything. You never know what you might enjoy until you experiment with different areas. For example, drawing is not necessarily my strongest skill, but I have discovered a real passion for product design, furniture design and photography.

Stay curious, keep experimenting and don't be afraid to explore unfamiliar ideas or materials.

Another important piece of advice is to document your work carefully. A strong portfolio is essential in the design industry, so it is worth making sure you photograph your projects properly as you create them.



Take high-quality photos of finished pieces, but also capture process images along the way. These might include sketches, prototypes, material experiments or workshop processes. Studio shots are great, but it is also helpful to photograph work in context, showing how a design might exist in the real world.

Recording the process will make it much easier to build a portfolio later and helps tell the full story behind your work. Often the most exciting design outcomes come from the places you least expect.



Lily Tham Instagram
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