

Gary Bennett & David Paris

Gary (left) and David, both 53, are so different they shouldn't be buddies let alone brothers and business partners. The Mick and Keith of woodwork make beautiful magic together.

David

I was born in Kenya and lived there till I was two or three, when we moved to a property in Eneabba. After about a year my dad was killed in a traffic accident, which was pretty tragic. I grew up in Kalamunda and did an apprenticeship as a cabinetmaker. Then me and my girlfriend went around Australia in an old Holden. I was in a wrecking yard in Nambour and bumped into Gary and his girlfriend, who were looking for bits of stuff for their old car as well.

I went off around the world for three years and I ended up back on the Gold Coast but came home to see my mum. I stayed at Gary's house again — he was just starting Jahroc. I was watching what Gary was doing and I really liked it. That was 1988. Then I ended up marrying his sister.

We were mainly doing kitchens and a builder went broke on us. The accountant told us to shut the doors. What we normally do when we get into situations like that is chuck the surfboards in the car and go surfing. Gary took a notepad and I drove and he just started designing things we thought we could build really quickly ... a basic rustic range.

We wanted to buy our own factory but couldn't afford anything in Perth. Gary's mum and dad lived in York and he went to visit them. The old flour mill was for sale. Gary's really full on — once he makes his mind up he wants to do it.

Things were going OK but they weren't going as good as they should. We did a marketing plan and worked out what Gary's strengths were and what mine are. Gary's is marketing and design. My ability is more management, admin, accounts and running the workshop. I'm good with staff, Gary's not so good with staff. I'm more laid-back. He's highly strung and impatient — can't understand why people can't do it as quick as he can. But very talented. He is a very passionate person, where I'm more practical.

After nine years Gary moved to Margaret River and opened up the gallery there. So we were supplying two galleries: York and Margaret River. But we couldn't get staff and I ended up moving to Margaret River as well. Gary did a trip on the True North around the Kimberley, getting lots of inspiration, with the artist Larry Mitchell. They came back and we did a collaboration with him — Larry did about six paintings and we did 10 bits of furniture. We've done five of those and we've just released a book showcasing them.

I reckon in 28 years, we've only ever come to fisticuffs once. Being mates is one thing, marrying his sister Jo is another — she's the best person in my whole life. She and (Gary's wife) Lara work in the business as well. And Gary and I are very close — we trust each other implicitly.

At one stage we went out and we were cutting the wood green and when you cut that slab, the colour of the timber is just amazing. I remember this one log ... we built an amazing suite of furniture and it went to this guy in Sydney. And he just loved it. We only get to see it for a short time and then it goes out the door and we never see it again. But the good side of that is you know the people who buy it get to live with it day in day out, and it becomes a family heirloom, because that's what our furniture is — it's made to last forever. Knowing people are going to get something like that ... it's a great feeling.

Gary

Dad was a headmaster so we travelled around. We ended up in York — we lived in the little house in the middle of the school yard. Eventually he was promoted to superintendent and we moved to Perth. Jolimont Primary, City Beach High, it didn't

matter where I went, dad was a presence. At high school I was a ratbag and used to sneak off and go surfing. I remember one of my teachers said "How can two parents like yours produce a child like you". The only thing I excelled at was woodwork.

As soon as I could get off I did. I did an apprenticeship as a carpenter/joiner then took off to Indonesia. Came back and worked pitching roofs then went off to Queensland to build houses. I went to the Sunshine Coast and that's where I met Dave.

We became pretty good friends and then he went off around the world. We kept in touch — he's a letter writer. But I'd take long time to respond. So he used to write down in his little book when he got my response and make me wait that long for the next one. Very methodical, Dave.

I came home and fitted kitchens for a while but got bored with that. Then I started making stuff. About eight months later Dave came back from his travels, moved in with me. I remember going to Bali with my girlfriend at the time and the last thing I said was: "Keep your hands off my sister". Sure enough we get back and they meet us at the airport ...

I thought I'd take a partner on. I had Dave and another mate that I weighed up. The other guy was a really good chippie but too much the same as me. I needed someone that could do bookwork, who was more methodical. Even then I realised I needed an opposite. Dave joined me in 1988. Then he married my sister and that was it. When Dave came in it gave me time to experiment. I made this groovy-looking suite, put it in the York art awards and ended up winning an award. That gave us a kick along to pursue the other side of things.

I went up to York to introduce Lara to Mum and Dad and saw the old flour mill. We set up our first gallery there. But I missed the beach so I went to Margs. I felt guilty because Dave was slaving away in York so we bought the old Margaret River Galleries building and bang, overnight the doubled our business. We won a business award and had to go to Tasmania and Dave and Jo came and looked after our house and decided to move there too. They ended up buying the house next door. A lot of people think it's weird but it's great having my sister next door and Mum and Dad live around the corner now. We've got three kids and Dave and Jo have two.

I don't think we ever came to blows but it was close. I'll never forget the day. Being in a family, there's always times when there's a bit of tension but because he's married to my sister we can never let it unravel. We're opposites but having that family tie makes you work things out.

For a long time we did everything together but funny enough now he's living next door we don't really, we're always together. We're more like brothers now, like Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. I laugh and tell people we're married: my boy wife and my girl wife. It's been working for a long time and it works, \$45,990 but now, see jahroc.com.au.



PICTURE ROBERT DUNCAN

take FIVE

with oboist Diana Doherty

*I LOVE ... quiet nights at home, cooking for friends and loved ones, curling up on the sofa with a movie, my dog and my crochet.*

*I LOATHE ... the feeling of helplessness that overwhelms me when I read the world news in the newspaper.*

*I WILL ... always aim to keep learning.*

*I WON'T ... ever win anything but I really enjoy my tennis lessons.*

*I WISH ... that everyone in the world was fed, felt safe and had someone to love.*

Diana Doherty plays Mozart with the WA Symphony Orchestra on July 31 and August 1. For details, see tickets.waso.com.au.



Amanda Keenan