



PRECINCT TOUR: GERTRUDE STREET

No other straight 750-metre stretch of street offers the kind of insight into Melbourne's artisan and fashion culture. A handful of fashion designers have opened their flagship stores on Gertrude Street to be able to present their work in its 'native' environment, while they continue to design from their studios above. Other stores, while other designers have started unusual enterprises that are harder to categorise as they are frequently part gallery, part studio, part retail space. Experience them for yourself.

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For a long time, the top end of Melbourne's Collins Street, with its international luxury brand stores, has been known as the 'Paris End' of the city. By that standard, Gertrude Street is definitely the 'Melbourne End'.

In the nineteenth century, Gertrude Street was full of small businesses that supplied wares to enthusiastic prospectors on their way out of the city to try their luck at the gold fields. Soon after, the area turned into a slum but it has soon after and has remained a social hotspot ever since.

When Gertrude Contemporary, one of the city's most forward-thinking art incubators, settled in this former working class area 25 years ago, it set in motion a series of changes that have since seen the street's Victorian shopfronts become the homes and public faces of the city's mature local fashion labels and designers from other fields.

Many of the designers and artisans working from here still maintain that the only thing saving the street from falling victim to gentrification and chain stores is the continuing presence of social services: the nearby commission flats, boarding houses and methadone clinics that keep developers at bay.

Meet a cross-section of Melbourne design talent and learn what drives them on this guided walking tour — it doesn't get more 'Melbourne' than this!

Kate Rhodes & Viviane Stappmanns
Co-Curators, The Audio Design Museum

THE JOURNEY

DISTANCE: 1km

TIME: 1 hour, 10 minutes

This is an easy journey. Start at Gertrude Contemporary (Stop 1). It's only a hop, skip and jump to Obüs (Stop 2) and from here do a quick sojourn so Smith Street to visit Queen (Stop 3) and The Social Studio (Stop 4). Returning to Gertrude Street via Crumpler (Stop 5), venture west on the right hand side to get to Spacecraft (Stop 6).

Lamington Drive (Stop 7) and Third Drawer Down (Stop 8) are just a few metres off Gertrude Street on George Street to the right, then to the Signet Bureau (Stop 9) and Vixen (Stop 10) and you'll have to cross the street just once to visit Since Grey (Stop 11).

Cross over Brunswick Street to get to Little Salon (Stop 12), Cottage Industry (Stop 13) and the Mattt Studio and Store (Stop 14).



1. THE LOCATION: GERTRUDE CONTEMPORARY

Set out for your walk from one of Melbourne's most respected contemporary art spaces. Established 25 years ago through the initiative of a group of artists, the building includes a number of gallery spaces, as well as studios for a select group of 17 local and international artists. The artistic aura of Gertrude Contemporary is often credited with transforming the street from being the 'dark end of town' to a haven for artisan and designer stores and galleries.

200 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
gertrude.org.au



2. THE LOCATION: OBÜS

Just a few doors down from Gertrude Contemporary, this small store was the first for Obüs, a womenswear label established by graphic design graduate Kylie Zerbst. Now in its 11th year, Obüs is one of the longest running and most successful independent labels among the new generation of local fashion designers.

226 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
obus.com.au



2A. MEET THE DESIGNER: KYLIE ZERBST

Hear Kylie discuss the trials and tribulations of starting her own fashion label. She also reflects on key moments in the last decade of running Obüs and describes the evolution of her design aesthetic, which first explored sculptural forms and monochromatic tones to become increasingly more playful.



3. THE LOCATION: QUEEN

The next stop, on the corner of Gertrude and Smith Streets, is the Queen store, acting both as the flagship location for its in-house fashion label and a platform for emerging fashion designers and accessory makers.

77 Smith Street, Fitzroy
queenclothing.com.au



3A. MEET THE DESIGNER: CHRISTINE BOYLE

Queen, the label, inhabits an unusual patch of Melbourne fashion terrain. Its designer, Christine Boyle, is a fine arts graduate who fell in love with painting and printing textiles. She still focuses on creating and customising textiles and is less preoccupied with producing collections in correspondence with the fashion calendar. In this respect, her work is representative of a number of smaller labels across town.



4. THE LOCATION: THE SOCIAL STUDIO

The Social Studio defies definition. It is at once fashion label, retail store, cafe, education facility and community project. The small space clad in recycled plywood opened in 2009 and currently sees around 20 young members from newly arrived communities – some of them refugees – obtain qualifications in the textile trade thanks to a partnership with RMIT Tafe.

128 Smith Street, Fitzroy
thesocialstudio.org



4A. MEET THE FOUNDER: GRACE McQUILTEN

Grace McQuilten started to develop the idea for her social enterprise when working with members from newly arrived communities who had great trouble finding work. Here, she talks about her motivations to call into life this unusual project and explains how it works today.



4B. MEET A STUDENT: ABUK BOL

Abuk, a mother of three in her early thirties, was one of the first students to enrol in the program. Although she had earned a living making clothes in her native Sudan, she was lacking a formal qualification before arriving in Australia. The Social Studio gives her the opportunity to obtain a certificate in clothing production.



5. THE LOCATION: CRUMPLER

Fifteen years is a long time, but it's a short time to achieve global success – especially that of Crumpler's dimensions. Friends Dave Roper and Will Miller started their bag label in the mid-nineties and named it after one of their part-time employees (and now partner). Though the production of the colourful bags and accessories was moved offshore a long time ago, the Crumpler custom shop on the corner of Smith and Gertrude Streets is the company's own private piece of nostalgia and a reminder of its roots in Fitzroy.

87 Smith Street, Fitzroy
crumpler.com.au



5A. MEET ONE OF THE FOUNDERS: DAVE ROPER

Hear Dave talk about the events that triggered an avalanche of Crumpler bags to spread around the globe. It all began when the bicycle messengers in Dave's and Will's employ needed a sturdy receptacle for their cargo...



6. THE LOCATION: SPACECRAFT

Spacecraft is a very happy marriage between art, design and the artisan practice of screen printing, producing predominantly homewares and linen, and the occasional piece of clothing. The store front on Gertrude Street is the extension of a large, busy printing studio in North Melbourne, where this interview was conducted.

225 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
spacecraft.com.au



6A. MEET THE DIRECTOR: STEWART RUSSELL

Artist and designer Stewart Russell speaks about the themed explorations he conducts to arrive at the prints he uses for to transfer to textiles and furniture. He explains the process of screen printing and gives an example of one of his personal forays that spawned one of Spacecraft's most popular and enduring prints.

7. THE LOCATION: LAMINGTON DRIVE

Lamington Drive is the public part of a conglomerate named the Compound Interest of Applied Arts, which consists of an illustration agency, a graphic designer and a web design studio. Named after a popular Australian fundraising activity, the gallery – entirely made from cardboard – shows rotating solo exhibitions by commercial artists, namely those represented by the Jacky Winter Group.

89 George Street, Fitzroy
lamingtondrive.com.au

7A. MEET THE DIRECTOR: JEREMY WORTSMAN

Jeremy is the resourceful director of the Jacky Winter Group and thus Lamington Drive. In this capacity, he brokers commissions to illustration artists by advertising agencies and other corporate clients. With Lamington Drive, he gives his protégés the opportunity to show their work without any client constraints. Here, he talks about his work at the Compound Interest for Applied Arts.

8. THE LOCATION: THIRD DRAWER DOWN

There's nothing quite like Third Drawer Down, with its tiny shop front aptly named Museum of Art Souvenirs. This small business marries art and design in the most original ways, with limited edition outcomes that are part artwork, part manufactured design object.

93 George Street, Fitzroy
thirddrawerdown.com

8A. MEET THE DIRECTOR: ABI CROMPTON

Abi is as smart and quirky as her business. With a degree in fine art and a strong background working in design retail stores, it was no surprise that she connected her two backgrounds in 2003 by commissioning artists and illustrators to create limited edition artworks printed on tea towels. Since then, the small business has grown in leaps and bounds. Hear it all from Abi herself (and pick up a short lesson in contemporary art history along the way.

9. THE LOCATION: THE SIGNET BUREAU

It's not just the stunning interior that sets the Signet Bureau apart. The store is the result of a rare alliance between a number of fashion-related businesses to realise their dream of running a flagship store.

165 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
thesignetbureau.com.au

9A. HEAR ABOUT THE STORE: MIRIAM BORCHERDT

Miriam is one of the founding members of the Signet Bureau (hear more about her label Munk in a separate chapter, 8C). Here, she talks about its inception and the philosophy behind the store.

9B. MEET THE DESIGNERS: JOHANNA PRESTON & PETER ZLY

The second driver behind the Signet Bureau, Preston Zly is probably Australia's most renowned avant-garde shoe label. The duo has been creating two ranges of 12–15 different designs per year since the late 1990s. Their career has seen the pair collaborate with fashion designers such as Akira or MaterialbyProduct. From their nearby studio, the two explain what it's like to work in such a specialised trade.

9C. MEET THE DESIGNERS: MIRIAM BORCHERDT

German-born, Italian-raised and US-educated Miriam Borchardt has worked for John Galliano and Romeo Gigli. Arriving in Australia, she says she felt she had no choice but to start her own label. With Munk now nearly a decade old, the designer explains her work and reflects on the particularities of working as an Australian-based fashion designer.

munk.com.au

10. THE LOCATION: VIXEN

A proud 17 years old, Vixen is one of Melbourne's longest-standing independent labels. Nevertheless, all of the work at the Gertrude Street store is printed and produced in Melbourne.

163 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
vixenaustralia.com.au

10A. MEET THE DESIGNER: GEORGIA CHAPMAN

Over the course of her career, designer Georgia Chapman has produced textiles for many antipodean designers like Collette Dinnigan, Scanlan & Theodore and Zambesi. However, in more recent years, the trained textile designer has shifted her focus to solely work on her own range, which includes a range of garments. She discusses her development from her shop top studio.

11. THE LOCATION: SINCE GREY

This former art gallery combines both a retail store as well as a studio, where all Since Grey garments are designed. The store is a more recent addition to the Gertrude Street fashion fold.

122 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
sincegrey.com.au

11A. MEET THE DESIGNER: NADIELE KOLB

A trained landscape architect, Nadiele Kolb started her young label with a friend when they couldn't find clothes to fit her. Speaking from the backyard of her studio, Nadiele—who now runs the label on her own and produces two collections a year—says Since Grey's success is in part based on an early support network of retailers who champion local fashion.



12. THE LOCATION: LITTLE SALON

This little store has become a stalwart on Gertrude Street, selling mainly the accessories made and manufactured by its owner, Geneine Honey, as well as being an outlet of other artists and designers who do small-run production work.

71 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
littlesalon.com.au



12A. MEET THE DESIGNER: GENEINE HONEY

Like many fellow fine arts students, Geneine Honey needed money to live while studying, but was keen on doing something creative. So she made some jewellery and sold it at a market. Geneine's designs were so successful that she took some big orders home. In the coming years, technologies developed in her favour and within a decade, her preferred manufacturing method — laser cutting — shifted from being a high-priced technique to becoming a photocopier-sized machine she keeps in her studio. She talks us through the transition.



13. THE LOCATION: COTTAGE INDUSTRY

A look into the window of Cottage Industry might have you thinking that someone's grandma is on a wild trip (and judging by the sheer number of products available, the rest of her nursing home friends are, too). But there is nothing twee or granny-esque about this store. The tapestries, the doilies and the tea towels are all part of a grander recycling scheme.

67 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy



13A. MEET THE DESIGNER: PENELOPE DURSTON

Since graduating from textile design in the late 1980s, Penelope Durston has worked in many fashion and textile departments in the Australian design industry. Almost ten years ago, an accident saw her channel her energy into an unusual approach to re-purposing. She talks about it from her studio, amongst hundreds of 1960s teatowels.

misspenpen.blogspot.com



14. THE LOCATION: MATTT BAGS

It's somewhat ironic that Gertrude Street is bookended by two bag stores, each with a sewing machine in the window. While the Crumpler store on the other end is a nod to the label's early beginnings, the Matt Studio and Store is very much a salute to the future, for the label has only settled here in 2009. And unlike Crumpler's base, the Mattt store is not the tip of an iceberg that stretches into offshore factories. At Mattt, all bags are made on site.

13 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
mattt.com.au



14A. MEET THE DESIGNER: MATT THOMPSON

A mechanical engineer as well as an industrial design graduate, Matt Thompson has earned his stripes as a bag designer weathering heat, cold and offbeat conversations at this town's artisan markets for almost ten years. When it came to moving into his own store, he was not only equipped with the right skills, but with a decade of research and development acquired at the coalface. Hear him talk about his customer-driven approach to design that incorporates a new take on sustainability.

