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Melbourne  
Collaborative creativity

Australia's second city is built around good taste and entrepreneurial drive and that goes for its fashion community, too. A vibrant mix of designers and manufacturers is harnessing a collaborative spirit and defying a wider industry downturn.

"We've got something special here in Melbourne," says Courtney Holm, a menswear designer and founder of Menske, a popular quarterly event bringing together the city's best artisans and designers. "We are passionate about our industry and there is a fearless spirit of innovating here that sees Melbourne designers taking a more daring and conceptual approach to fashion. We also have the openness and opportunity to learn from other designers, which doesn't tend to happen in other Australian cities."

Holm adds that local designers are striving to keep a once-buoyant manufacturing industry alive, while a "Made in Melbourne" tag remains a powerful selling point for top-tier labels.

Nobody Denim is one such company, a family-owned operation producing premium jeans from a busy factory in Melbourne's north. "My business used to stone-wash 18,000 pairs of jeans a week for fashion businesses in Melbourne," says Jim Condilis, whose denim laundering company was the inspiration for Nobody Denim. The label was launched by his two sons Nick and John in 1999 with the help of his facilities; the heritage and quality of Australian manufacturing is one of its key assets.



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Nobody Denim's business model falls into line with a broader ideal among Melbourne's creative community to build brands that are about genuine brand stories. So says Graeme Lewsey, CEO of Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival. It's the nation's largest consumer fashion festival and connects citizens with the country's most talented designers.

"There is a strong passion from customers here for local luxury," says Lewsey. "A desire for beautiful, unique pieces that might only be possible to find in one local designer's studio is something that can't be denied as a great movement in Melbourne. There is also a real sense of Australia's creative industries being celebrated overseas and there is a strong energy around contemporary Australian design and the idea of local luxury is an intrinsic part of this."

While small labels across the globe have felt the pinch as an evolving industry has squeezed consumer-spending habits in disparate directions, Melbourne brands take

City opportunities

In Australia's second city, proper seasons and cooler temperatures provide an opportunity to go beyond flip-flops and T-shirts with proper selling seasons for fashion retailers. A "Made in Melbourne" resurgence not only paves the way for a new skills base in the city but should also lead to a distinctive set of new brands.

Q&A

Amanda  
Briskin-Rettig  
A-Esque Founder

In the space of one decade Melbourne's Amanda Briskin-Rettig turned AU\$5,000 (€3,500) in savings into an AU\$50m (€35m) fashion empire with Mimco, an accessories label she sold in 2006. Latest venture A-Esque creates high-end leather goods for men and women.

Why manufacture in Melbourne?

I'm very cognisant of the business side; I didn't start making here for benevolent reasons. As a creative I want to be on top of, around and within the making process. When I manufactured in China [with Mimco] the distance resulted in a type of design process that I didn't want to do again.

Why is Melbourne a strong base for a fashion business?

We have a design culture through interiors, furniture, fashion and living. Within this small industry, individual silos aren't particularly powerful; there is a lot of amalgamation. You must master best practice and stay really sharp. [a-esque.com](http://a-esque.com)



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- 01 Nobody Denim's flagship store in Fitzroy
- 02 Brunswick Street
- 03 Denim distressing at Nobody Denim
- 04 Shop front at Nobody Denim
- 05 Oscar Hunt
- 06 Tailoring at Oscar Hunt
- 07 Oscar Hunt director Chris Edwards
- 08 Courtney Holm of Menske
- 09 Dust concept store
- 10 Office of Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival
- 11 Jeans at Service Denim
- 12 Shoppers viewing luxury trainers at Sneakerboy
- 13 Strateas Carlucci's Peter Strateas (left) and Mario-Luca Carlucci
- 14 Service Denim exterior



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a brazen attitude to the business. Richard Bell, co-founder of Threebyone, says his denim company was built purely around passion. He adds that Melbourne labels both young and old tend to approach business with an optimistic vigour. "Whether it's in coffee, hospitality or fashion, people buy into things for the right reasons – and that is around passion, knowledge and consideration."

This passion echoes across Melbourne's independent retail assembly, which is both surprisingly sophisticated and edgy. The tasteful tailoring of Oscar Hunt on the city's famous Hardware Lane has allowed it to significantly scale up business in four years, and the conceptually daring fashion spaces of Dust and Sneakerboy have both earned cult followings.

Affordable studio space in the inner city's further reaches also allows emerging designers to set up shop at relatively low costs. Strateas Carlucci is an award-winning label regarded as one of Australia's best prospects in the global luxury-fashion sector. Based in a former hosiery factory in East Brunswick, co-founder Mario-Luca Carlucci says the essence of Melbourne remains integral to the brand despite 75 per cent of its sales being overseas. "There is so much happening around us in the art, music and food scenes that the creative energy becomes the best sounding board for our label," he says. — NSG



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## Designers to watch

- 1 **From Britten P/L**  
The eponymous label of brothers Alexander and Tim Britten-Finschi offers carefully finished menswear with tailored architectural shapes. Each garment from the brand is designed and manufactured in Melbourne.  
*frombritten.com.au*
- 2 **Dust**  
From the cavernous innards of a CBD basement, Dust offers a multisensory fashion-retail experience selling conceptual garments and scents. The space was designed in conjunction with celebrated architecture firm Sibling.  
*dustredux.com*
- 3 **Threebyone**  
Threebyone channels Australian and Scandinavian heritage into three denim lines: Neuw, Rolla's and Abrand. The labels reach buyers globally and are stocked at Service Denim retail outlets in Australia and New Zealand.  
*servicedenim.com*
- 4 **Oscar Hunt**  
One of numerous quality tailoring services in Melbourne, Oscar Hunt is housed in a light and warm space in a heritage building in Melbourne's city centre. Offering a playful but refined customer experience, Oscar Hunt's growing team have quickly earned a loyal following.  
*oscarhunt.com.au*