

Driving with PIERO GESUALDI

FASHION AND DESIGN PIONEER PIERO GESUALDI REVS UP HIS SLINKY 1961 JAGUAR MARK II TO TAKE IT FOR A PURR AROUND HIS PICK OF MELBOURNE RETAILERS.

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Photography TIM O'CONNOR



This page Elise and Piero with the Jaguar Mark II. Opposite page, clockwise from top left District views from Piero and Michele's apartment. A hand-tufted rug by Piero complements the 1960s teak dining table and Yuzuru Yamakawa chairs. Italian 1950s chair from Peninsula Antiques e Moderno.



Gliding down the street in a black 1961 Jaguar convertible with leading man Piero Gesualdi behind the wheel is like being in a film directed by Italian great Federico Fellini. In true Fellini-esque style, Piero adds an air of sophistication and surrealism, flamboyance and fantasy to all he does and designs. With his shock of thick white hair, designer sunglasses and signature monochromatic attire, Piero and his classic car receive a rapturous response from bystanders on Fitzroy's Gertrude Street. It's a far cry from the little boy of Italian migrant parents who, decades earlier, hid in the suburb's back alleys in fear of being teased for wearing tailored knickerbockers. When it comes to style, Piero has the last laugh. The architecture student, designer and fashion pioneer founded Masons stores in Melbourne and Sydney in the mid-70s, introducing avant-garde designers such as Jean-Paul Gaultier, Comme des Garçons and Thierry Mugler to awe-inspired Australians.

Piero's longevità extends to cuisine with the establishing of Melbourne dining institutions Rosati and Pieroni. Today, Piero's adventurous ideas are channelled into Mondopiero, his design and homewares destination.

Behind his expansive vision is the woman who makes it a reality, his partner in life and business Michele Azzopardi. It's a perfect pairing: her patience tempers his playfulness. "He really is the eternal Peter Pan!" Michele teases. "It's true," Piero laughs, eyes twinkling. "I still don't know what I want to do when I grow up!" If Mondopiero is the product of an eternally youthful visionary, let's hope Piero never does! La dolce vita, indeed.



GERTRUDE STREET APARTMENTS

We meet Piero and partner Michele at their apartment, designed by Jackson Clements Burrows Architects, located on arguably the coolest junction in Fitzroy. Their home is on the uppermost level, which is set back and embedded within the building thus avoiding the traditional wedding-cake effect evident in many inner-city buildings.

The modest, modern, functional apartment was a downsizing exercise for the couple who previously lived in the grandiose army drill hall down the road. "I was reluctant to move into apartment living," confesses Piero. "But I was persuaded by this," he says gesturing to the sweeping north, south and east-facing terraces. While his deckchair from Wanderjagt is a tempting spot to perch, Piero prefers to take his morning macchiato at the 1960s round teak dining table with chairs designed by Yuzuru Yamakawa.

Piero's own designs, including the kitchen stools and the tufted black-and-white wool rug, pepper the apartment. The pair's bedroom has a distinctive 50s vibe with a sumptuous Italian chair from Peninsula Antiques e Moderno re-covered in green velvet upholstery, and a 1951 Pierre Guariche 'G21' reading lamp with a black shade. It is the basement, however, that holds Piero's pride and joy – his 1961 Jaguar Mark II convertible.



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HALE MERCANTILE CO.

The Jaguar purrs to life and, with feline nimbleness, transports us to our next location, linen merchants Hale Mercantile Co. The expansive, 500-square-metre trade showroom is an oasis of muted light in bustling Abbotsford. Beds made up in the crumpled, crinkled linen highlight the product's perfect imperfections. This, says founder Sharon Patsiotis, is linen's timeless appeal – elegance meets effortlessness.

The showroom provides a visceral experience where retailers, designers and architects can bring their clients, pull out fabrics from the extensive palette and dress a bed. Over by an old freestanding bath, Piero and Sharon stroke some Flocca linen bath towels in colours Armeé and Fog, and they later sit at a table set with Flocca linen in Rosa and Bere complete with double stitching and hand-tufted edges. All the yarns are individually dyed and spun from premium-grade flax sourced from Europe.

Sharon, who started the business a mere seven years ago, admits she had no background in interiors. "I was a number-cruncher in business and finance but I wanted to do something different," she says. What compelled her to start in this competitive industry? "I've loved beds all my life. I had two growing boys, however, and was always sending sheets off to be washed, starched and ironed. I thought there must be something that looks beautiful but is easier to maintain," says Sharon. "Fifty per cent of our sales are to the US. We've also done the linen for shows and movies such as *Nine Perfect Strangers*, *Love Me* and *Ticket to Paradise* with George Clooney and Julia Roberts," says Sharon. balemercantilecolinen.com

This page, clockwise from top left Piero navigates the Jaguar down the back lanes. Its classic chrome wheel spokes. Sharon and Piero inspect Flocca linen bath towels at Hale Mercantile Co. A Flocca linen table setting in Rose and Bere, also by Hale Mercantile Co.



GERTRUDE GROCER

At the wheel of the sleek and powerful Jaguar, Piero jags a park right outside his favourite food supplier, Gertrude Grocer. This shop, with its imported continental delicacies and organic artisan products, is a slice of Europe in the heart of Fitzroy. Shoppers are greeted by a stand of fresh market flowers. Inside is a cornucopia of fresh local produce and imported delights including Auricchio Parmigiano Reggiano grated parmesan, Acorsa black olives, Balzanelli mild pancetta, Rizzoli anchovies, Toscano pasta sauce and Filoncini Rustici prato.

It's the comprehensive pasta collection, however, that makes Piero a regular. "De Cecco is the best brand. Have you ever tried spaghetti alle vongole? It's a wonderful midnight snack," says Piero. Owner Joe Vicino endeavours to create a small artisan environment with a Mediterranean feel. "I love stocking unusual stuff. Nothing that's over commercialised," says Joe.

Piero pipes up. "The only thing you're missing is a *salumeria* (a specialised Italian deli). But you're forgiven as I do love the music you play here." Piero, laden with fresh flowers, leaves to the sweet beat of *Buonissimo* by Medité. gertrudegrocer.com.au



MONDOPIERO

As the name implies, Mondopiero is Piero's world: an exquisite collection of objects he loves. The store, with its cool, serene magnificence, inspires a sense of reverence. Shoppers are uplifted by the heavenly scent of Santa Maria Novella fragrances from the world's oldest apothecary founded by Dominican friars in 1221. One practically levitates through an inverted forest of black bamboo to an atrium bookcase crafted out of steel. The stock is equally intriguing: utilitarian lighting from Paris brand Sammode Studio, unique glass vases from family-based German company Guaxs, and marbled trays from Kaymet, a company that has received a Queen's Royal Warrant.

Every object tells a story. At the back of the store is a wall of velvet slippers – or furlane – by Piedàterre in rich, regal hues. "Originally these were peasant shoes made out of rags and bags with old bike tyres for soles," he explains. "They were popular among gondoliers in Venice because the soft rubber soles helped preserve their precious paintwork."

From humble beginnings these comfortable yet stylish slippers are now in demand and coveted by fashionistas worldwide. A metaphor for the life of this bold, brave, brilliant man. mondopiero.com.au



This page, from top Piero introduces Elise to some of the Italian delicacies to be found at his favourite food store, Gertrude Grocer in Melbourne's Fitzroy. The Jaguar cuts a sleek profile against the urban backdrop. Piero expertly backs out the Jaguar. Elise swaps stilettos for a pair of Piedàterre Italian velvet slippers.



1961 JAGUAR MARK II

DESIGN

Despite his obsession with Euro chic, Piero wasn't tempted to drive an Italian car. The Jaguar was always his first choice. The British carmaker's sleek, timeless appeal was fitting.

MARQUE

Jaguar was originally called the Swallow Sidecar Company but in 1935 the owners wanted a name that reflected the power and prowess of their new 2.5-litre saloon and the cat moniker was born.

FUNCTIONALITY

Piero's classic car started life as a red, four-door Mark II saloon with a 2.4-litre, six-cylinder engine coupled to an automatic transmission. Ever the musing, restless innovator, Piero was determined to re-imagine and remodel his vehicle.

With the help of coachbuilder David Pecorini, the Jaguar was transformed into a black, two-door convertible with a 3.8-litre engine and four-speed manual transmission. As always, Piero's vision has delivered striking results.

