



MAN OF THE WORLD
Piero Gesualdi in his
new Fitzroy emporium,
Mandopiero.

Renaissance man

Melbourne's multitalented Piero Gesualdi returns with a venture that's the very definition of eclectic, writes **Michael Harden**.

The last time Piero Gesualdi dipped his toes into the Melbourne hospitality pool it was with the game-changing Rosati. The cavernous restaurant-café he opened on Flinders Lane in 1986 with Ronnie Di Stasio not only redefined the concept of Melbourne's Italian dining, by locating the gleamingly modern restaurant in then-insalubrious Flinders Lane, it was also instrumental in the renaissance of the city's laneways.

Over the past 40 years Gesualdi has worked in architecture, interior design, homewares and fashion. His shops, Masons, in Sydney and Melbourne, were among the first to introduce Australians to the likes of Gaultier, Armani and Comme des Garçons. Now he's back in the hospitality business after a long hiatus, transforming a warehouse-sized former tile showroom on Fitzroy's Brunswick Street into an emporium-design wonderland-gallery-apericena bar-café called Mondopiero, or "world of Piero".

"I like to think of this as my home, my bar that I'm inviting people into, and so I like to play what I'm going to stock by ear," he says. "I don't know how it will pan out. I have to see the way that people use it."

Gesualdi is a great believer in allowing businesses to change and grow with time; he sees it as part of the process. It's something he observed during his time as a restaurateur. When he finally sold Rosati in 2007, it came as a great relief; the restaurant had become a constraint, "a thing I no longer wanted to do", he says. "Suddenly, when it was gone, I had time to think."

"It came like an avalanche. It was beautiful. I went back to school to learn how to design on computers. I redesigned my house. I went on overseas trips to look at things I wanted to look at. It was total self-indulgence at its absolute best," he says, "and I realised after a while that it was all leading me to what I wanted to do here at Mondo."

Since closing Rosati, Gesualdi has also been working on several architectural and design collaborations and was recently inducted into the Design Institute of Australia's Hall of Fame.

With its covetable range of kitchenware, furniture, light fittings, bespoke shelving, taxidermy (some courtesy of artist Julia deVile), body products, sound systems, bicycles, eyewear, footwear and antiques, plus a food and drink side to the equation – a bar at the front and a café at the back – it's little wonder that Mondopiero comes across as more a burst of imagination than a clinically calculated and planned business. Which is why trying to describe exactly what it is can get complicated.

The best explanation is probably that there's a little something for design freaks of every stripe, be it stingingly hip timber, ceramic and metal cookware from the Italian company KnIndustrie, cooking knives from Coltellerie Berti, Japanese glassware from Cibi or pewter-edged ceramic tableware from Cosi Tabellini. And despite the gallery-esque feel of the place, it's definitely a shop with everything – from the enormous stuffed giraffe head and neck, a bejewelled (stuffed) fluffy white dog and all the black metal fixtures and fittings, which can be made to order.

Gesualdi also plans for Mondopiero to hold workshops in everything from making panettone to ikebana and soldering metal. "I want there to be constant change here," he says. "Nothing will be in situ. Everything will be moving, whether it's the display cabinets or the stock. We have new things coming in every month and other things will disappear."

Then there's the bar, which involves a banquette and bar shelving built into a giant framed mirror that appears to lean against the wall, all designed by Gesualdi. He believes it'll be the first in Melbourne to offer



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apericena. An ever-changing rollof of dishes will include anchovy fritters, Venetian-style liver with onions, baccalà mantecato and crumbed veal brains with black olives.

A portmanteau of "aperitivo" and "cena", or dinner, apericena is a nuanced version of aperitivo where the food leans more towards a light dinner than predinner snacks and in Italy is typically gratis. Gesualdi hopes to follow the tradition here, but will wait and see whether locals will be able to enjoy free food in the spirit in which it's offered. "The bar will be integral to the whole complex," he says. "So we have to make sure we get it right." Mondopiero, 28 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, Vic, (03) 9417 7047, mondopiero.com.au