




VOGUE

IN STORE & DECOR

The entry to Mondopiero in Fitzroy is furnished with the mega 'Lumel' floor lamp and the Eames-bomage '1956' recliner and footstool, both from Dutch designers MML.



E NTRY INTO THE PRIVATE WORLD of architect-turned-cultural-entrepreneur Piero Gesualdi is through a steel wall that magically parts with the press of a doorbell. It's a bit Bond — James Bond — but the fortification suits Fitzroy, a Melbourne suburb on the city's edge that is as gritty and hardcore as it is genteel and highbrow. "No doors... just openings," booms a voice from the dark inner depths of the old military drill hall that is now Gesualdi's home. "This was one of five very important regimental headquarters built on the brink of World War II."

Gesualdi appears to tell that the proportions of the brick building were beautiful but the existing windows were not. "It took me six years in heritage to get any alterations approved," he says, holding hands to a visibly pained face. "The original stair was over there, but this new one doesn't quite block his pee-pee." Say what? He nods to the floor-to-ceiling photomontage of Michelangelo's statue of *David* that, back-dropping the stair, makes an in-your-face feature of 16th-century manhood. "That statue represents Florence, my soul city," he says, leading like Dante through the inferno from the dark woods of the downstairs mess hall to the modernist upper-living 'mountain-top' that basks in natural light and the best views of Melbourne. "I needed a vertical image to go twelve and a half metres high and there it was," he gestures. "It's ridiculous." Yeah, right!

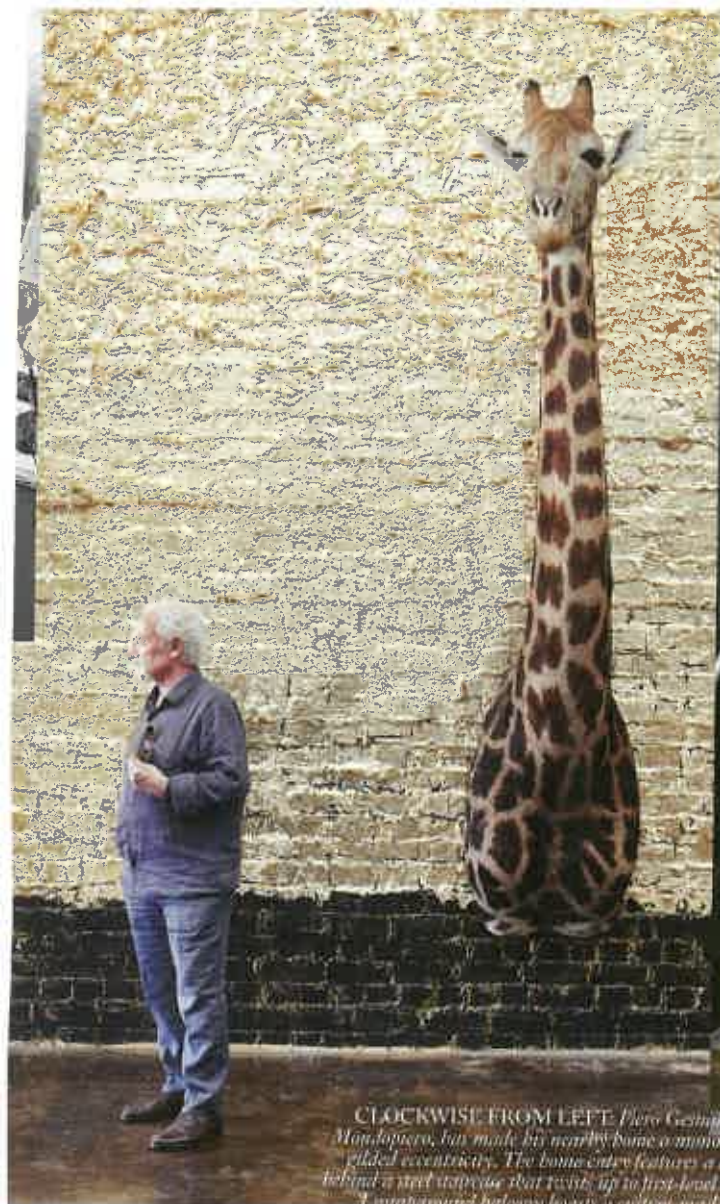
Gesualdi has made a 40-year career of directing Melbourne's focus onto *la bella figura*. And that he has, from Masons — the high-fashion boutiques that brought both Jean Paul Gaultier and Claude Montana to Australia in the 1980s — to the radical Rosati, a 500-seat trattoria that regenerated Melbourne's laneways with its faded trompe-l'oeil frescoes and regional Italian fare. His conviviality has always come wrapped in extraordinary cover. "Call me 'detail on steroids,'" he says as he claps his hands in that Italian way that says, "What's next?" "Come on, I will tell you stories as we go." He heads down and out the front door, for a two-minute commute to his new commercial venture at the city end. >>



MONDO MAGNIFICO

A tour through the ulterior realms of Piero Gesualdi, the visionary who brought high-end Italy to downtown Melbourne.

By Annemarie Kiely Photography by Sean Fennessy



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Peter Gesmiller, seen flanked by a taxidermy giraffe at Mandopuro, has made his nearby home a monochromatic counterpart to his near-ubiquitous gilded eccentricity. The home entry features a double-height photo of Michelangelo's David, behind a steel staircase that twists up to first-level living and dining rooms. OPPOSITE PAGE: A wraparound balcony offers a custom-made small pool and city views beyond the trees.





« of Brunswick Street. It's an entertaining walk and talk that terminates in front of a former tile shop, one window of which now fills with a stuffed wildebeest grazing next to a garden wall. "Where do you think you are?" Gesualdi asks as he opens double glass doors onto Mondopiero, the mini-emporium that self-describes as the purveyor of all things important to his private world.

Well, the Ikebana florist in the foyer would suggest Tokyo, but the prosecco bar opposite says Piazzò San Marco, Venice, and then there is the taxidermed giraffe poking through a gilt wall that gives the surrealist's impression of an African savannah. It's an insane product collection and context that, according to Gesualdi and his collaborator, Paolo Gnechi Ruscone, is premised on peculiarity and the passionate narrative. "This is a highly curated space in which every product has a good reason to exist," says Ruscone, applying the rules established in Chuck Palahniuk's cult novel *Fight Club* to Mondopiero's retail philosophy. "The first rule: don't talk about it. Those who know, know."

Or so the steady stream of designers passing through its doors would suggest. These 'fight clubbers' are using fast footwork to bag the prize pewter and ceramic pieces by Cosi Tabellini (a third-generation Italian company) and the bed linens by Busatti (the eighth-generation textile weavers in Tuscany). They will not share their secret of discovering tableware by Knindustrie, art vases by Gaetano Pesce, perfumes by Aquafior, glass by Guaxs or the ultimate city bikes by Brazilian-born New Yorker Lorenzo Martone, because this is a world of design stealth wealth worth keeping for the cognoscenti. However, can such self-indulgent retail survive the ravages of the modern marketplace? "It will go on as long as it has to," says Gnechi Ruscone, citing *Fight Club*'s seventh rule. "We are battling a material culture that designs for the rubbish; where is the magic, where is the meaning?" It has moved to Mondopiero. VI. 28 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy; (03) 9417 7047; mondopiero.com.au.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A clock that once hung in Milano Centrale train station fixes time and tone to Italy. Gesualdi's shop is filled with all the things special in his world — or Mondopiero.

IN PROFILE



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Handmade knives by Italian company Coltellerie Berti and hand-blown glass by German brand Guaxs are indicative of the unique pieces with a provenance sought out by Gesualdi and his staff. A deckchair subversion of Gerrit Rietveld's 'Red and Blue Chair' by MAL mixes it with tableware by Così Tabellini and mini-megaphone speakers by EnSis, in a repurposed warehouse reminiscent of central Milan.



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