




Style and the city



Is there such a thing as a “Melbourne look”?
Natalie Craig asked some of our top fashionistas
for an outfit that typifies our city’s style.



Ms Melbourne is woken by her clock radio and sighs as she hears the weather forecast: cloudy and cool with a chance of *anything*.
As usual, getting dressed will be a delicate process, like assembling a mille feuille pastry, but with finespun layers of “interesting” black.
She foregoes cheap trends and puts together an outfit that is quirky yet understated. She is individual, and therefore typical. She has the “Melbourne look”.
But are these cliches true? Are we so wedded to black layers, so incapable of bold statements? Where’s the joy, the light, the freakin’ colour?
On the cusp of the L’Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival, we ask five local designers and a prominent fashion illustrator to draw a “Melbourne look” in order to see if the stereotypes are true.
Like wily politicians, our designers neither confirm nor deny the claims. They drew layered looks as well as strong, individual garments. And they gave us colour — although sometimes, it must be admitted, we really had to talk them into it.

Fashion festival director Grant Pearce has said this year’s event will be “more sophisticated than ever”, with catwalk shows organised around trends.

The Melbourne designers we spoke to claim to avoid trends, although gentle currents, such as pleating, are apparent in their sketches. But on the whole, they say anti-fashion is in fashion and personalised style is crucial.

As the variety in the six sketches suggests, the Melbourne look is a slippery concept, best described as *a little bit different*. Elegant, with a touch of crazy. And did we mention black?





LISA GORMAN,
Gorman
“Refreshing”

Lisa Gorman says garments in her label look positively “crazy” against the muted tones of mainstream Melbourne.

“We are a little bit crazier on the print and colour front compared to what you normally see on the street,” she says, laughing.

Her model wears a fluffy animal-print angora jacket, multicoloured skirt in a striped design that never repeats itself, and matching shoes, and totes a black duffle bag with a South American-inspired cross stitch.

She’s colourful and she’s not wearing layers, but the combination of different textures and tones, and the ubiquitous black opaque tights, still make her *so* Melbourne.

Gorman says eclectic ensembles, born from the quest for individuality, are also distinct to our city’s style. “On-trend, single-brand shopping is not what we’re into ... People here are quite comfortable putting it together themselves. They’ll mix up designer brands, high-street brands and vintage.”

Gorman says she also references old garment cuts, textures and palates in her clothing line. “I like to fossick, to look at what has been and adapt it to a modern, current lifestyle.”

It’s an attitude Ms Melbourne shares. Gorman’s interpretation is that she is “refreshing, relaxed, and surprising”.



ALEX AND GEORGIE CLEARY,
Alpha60
“Edgy”

If loving black is wrong, Alex and Georgie Cleary don’t want to be right. The brother and sister’s funky Fitzroy-based men’s and women’s label, Alpha60, is relatively colourless, as is their personal dress.

“The beauty of black is it’s super-versatile; it can go from day to night,” says Alex.

Georgie says Melbourne men and women make monochromes “edgy and elegant”, rather than insipid, with some even creating a “persona” out of black’s nothingness.

While the siblings agree layering is essential to the “look”, their sketch highlights a single item — the knife-pleated scarf they have sold for the past five years.

Ironically, the sculptural scarf, designed to be different, has become a classic. “People do identify with [the scarf] instantly as ‘Melbourne’, as ‘Alpha60’,” says Alex.

He says our interest in the arts reverberates in our dress, which becomes “a way to state, even in an understated way, your affiliations, your personality, your ideas”.

And, perhaps, your provenance. “The last time we went to Sydney we walked into a shop and the guys didn’t even ask if we were from Melbourne. They just said: ‘Oh. What part of Fitzroy are you from?’ ”





HELEN O'CONNOR,
Thurley
"Intellectual"

Ms Melbourne "suggests, she doesn't display", says Thurley founder Helen O'Connor.

She pictures her dressed in a blue sunray-pleated dress, cut to highlight the bust and drape delicately over the rest. Sharply cut black lace "shooties" (open-toed shoes crossed with booties) and black glovelets help to "pull back the feminine", O'Connor says.

She says the dress could easily be adapted for Melbourne's changeable weather by adding a tailored black jacket or black opaques. It is a classic, considered, refined look — in stark contrast to the Sydney look.

"Sydney girls are far more courageous with their fashion choices," she says. "They dress to match the beautiful, vivid colour and light up there ... People are also much more body-conscious and willing to embrace trends, like the mini.

"Melbourne girls are a little bit more intellectual about the way they put together an outfit; it's about personal style. They're almost loath to follow trends, and I think that's where I'm at in fashion."

But black remains a personal addiction. "My wardrobe is predominantly black," she says. "And people in the office do comment. I am trying to tackle my obsession with black by doing bright red, blue and purple prints that incorporate black or greys into them, so it's not so much of a contrast and weaves itself in." Baby steps.



MEGAN HESS
"Strong"

Melbourne fashion illustrator Megan Hess envisages a woman dressed in a classic pencil skirt and patent heels, with a top-heavy frou frou wrap in bright magenta.

"The silhouette I've drawn is very avant garde, but also relaxed," she says. "The Melbourne look is polished but a little dishevelled ... The big, messy hair keeps it from looking too stuffy or posh."

She says the outfit shows how colour, when it's worn, is always strong.

"We do a lot of black, but when we do colour, we do strong shapes and hues, often paired with black ... which is quite London."

As well as Melbourne clients, Hess draws regularly for Bloomingdales in New York, illustrates the novels of Candace Bushnell (of *Sex and the City* fame), and travels regularly to New York, London and LA.

She says we are the diametric opposite of the Californian hub. "We would never wear a hot pink bandage dress. Never," she says.

But New York's attitude to fashion resonates. "I think it's just confidence ... Both cities have a whole spectrum of people, from those who don't care about fashion to those who really do, and who push the limits. And as we get older, people here still dress up. We don't give up on fashion. And our men are the best-dressed in Australia."

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ARTHUR GALAN
"Chic"

"The Melbourne look is understated and chic; more correct than current," says Arthur Galan, who designs for men and women. "You want to be appropriate for what you're doing and who you are."

His "Mr Melbourne" looks like he might, say, take a stroll down a dim laneway on the way to a hole-in-the-wall espresso joint. He's suave but slightly tough-looking, and a master of texture and layering, in a wool jacket with leather panels, wool vest and slim jeans tucked in to lace-up boots. Colour is unimportant here.

"What can we do, black just sells!" says Galan, adding by way of consolation that this season he is also doing "beautiful grey tones and gorgeous blues and fleshy pinks".

When we speak, Galan is en route from Milan to a wool mill in Florence to indulge his professional passion for European textiles. It's a passion he's been delighted to find that Melbourne men share.

"When I'm in the store and the men are sort of scrutinising the fabrics and loving the quality, it makes it so much more exciting ... you go that extra bit further to make it special."

Mr Melbourne likes quality, and is also distinct from other Aussie blokes because he makes an effort. His mien is simple, with a twist.

"He's confident enough to put it all together," says Galan. "The Aussie male, and particularly the Melbourne male, has come such a long way since we started (in 1998) ... He still keeps it reasonably simple, but with a little bit of quirkiness."





MELBOURNE FASHION FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Rachel Wells picks out the best of the fest.

FASHION FULL STOP

Monday, March 14, 5.30pm

Part runway show, part rock concert celebrating iconic Australian fashion from the 1960s to today.

Tickets, from \$39, The Plenary, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, South Wharf, Imff.com.au

L'OREAL PARIS RUNWAY 1
Tuesday, March 15, 6.30pm

Designs by Carla Zampatti, Leona Edmiston, Nina Maya, Rachel Gilbert, Romance Was Born, sass & bide.

Tickets from \$49, Peninsula, Central Pier, Docklands, Imff.com.au

THE CLOTHING EXCHANGE

Tuesday, March 15, 6.30pm

A clothes swap for stylish fashionistas.

No Vacancy Gallery, 34-40 Jane Bell Lane, city, \$25. clothingexchange.com.au Tuesday, March 15, 9pm

L'OREAL PARIS RUNWAY 2
Tuesday, March 15, 6.30pm

Features the Designer Award 2011 finalists, including Arnsdorf, Bassike, Dress Up, ELLERY, From Britten, Laurence Pasquier, Lui Hon and Song for the Mute.

Tickets from \$49, Peninsula, Central Pier, Docklands, Imff.com.au

MANSTYLE: DANDIES
Wednesday, March 16, 12.30pm

A floor talk that coincides with the NGV's men's fashion exhibition by curator Katie Somerville.

Free, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Federation Square, ngv.vic.gov.au

L'OREAL PARIS RUNWAY 5
Friday, March 18, 6.30pm

Features Aurelio Costarella, Collette Dinnigan, Dion Lee, Jayson Brunndon, Scanlan & Theodore, Toni Maticevski and Willow.

Tickets from \$49, Peninsula, Central Pier, Docklands, Imff.com.au


L'OREAL PARIS RUNWAY 6
Friday, March 18, 9pm

Features Alice McCall, Alpha60, Dhini, Gorman, Karen Walker, Kate Sylvester, Limedrop, Nevenka.

Tickets from \$49, Peninsula, Central Pier, Docklands, Imff.com.au

FASHION MODELS ON FILM
Until March 17

Includes documentaries *Picture Me: A Model's Diary*, *Catwalk*, *Dressed for Summer 2011* and *Model*.

ACMI Cinemas, Federation Square, from \$14. Bookings, 8663 2583. 



NICHOLAS VAN
MESSNER, Life with Bird
“Darkly poetic”



All-weather wear was never so stylish. Life with Bird, which last year launched its first shop at Melbourne’s GPO, envisages Ms Melbourne draped in a wispy shirt, cropped vest, slouchy jacket and pleated skirt, and with bold accessories.

“She’s got pieces that can easily be peeled off, and she is quite heavily accessorised,” says Nicholas Van Messner, Life with Bird owner, along with Bridget “Bird” McCall. “Those strong focal points are just as important as the garment ... She’s got a wedge ankle boot, which is spot-on at the moment, that ties back well to the man’s hat and the bag.”

He describes the Melbourne look as “darkly poetic”. Contradictions and ambiguity are common, and we are partial to an air of androgyny. “Unlike in Sydney, we don’t do a pure feminine sexy look ... we tend to toughen it up a bit,” says Van Messner. Our men also feel less pressure to be blokey, and wear a “slightly feminine look”.

He says while we’re good at adopting trends, the beauty of our city’s culture is that people feel free to be creative with their dress.

“The last thing I saw in Melbourne that really stuck out was a woman in a double-breasted vintage coat. She had literally ripped the sleeves out, and was wearing it with a belt on the outside to pull it together. Such a great little tweak ... just inspirational!”



THE GOOD LIFE FOOD & WINE

FIVE OF A KIND

LOST CULINARY ARTS From the craft of butchery to the art of jelly, the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival brings skills and ingredients from a bygone era into the 21st century. Prepare to make good.



FORGOTTEN FRUITS HIGH TEA

FITZROY bar Southpaw will combine the new with the old in this high tea event. Chefs will create old-fashioned comestibles such as gooseberry tartlets, white chocolate and silenberry mousse, rosehip chutney, medlar marmalade and elderberry and rhubarb jam, to be washed down with house-made tea infusions, lavender champagne and jugs of Pimms. The menu also highlights gourmet butchery with a charcuterie plate, and there'll be sandwiches, cakes and pastries, too. Keep an eye out for the Tim Tam: spiced medlar biscuits with dark chocolate marquis. **March 11-13, 2-6pm, \$25 high tea selection with pot of tea; \$35 with jug of Pimms, minimum 2 people, Southpaw, 189 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, 9004 2590, southpawbar.com.au**



BOMPAS & PARR

WOMEN in the kitchen may be the focus of this year's Langham Masterclass series, but London's jellymongers are very special guests indeed. Sam Bompas and Harry Parr, who have been credited with bringing jelly back into fashion, are hot property on the English food scene, having created a walk-in cloud of breathable gin and tonic and flooded a building with four tonnes of cognac punch that visitors boated across before drinking. The duo will co-host a Theatre of Ideas session on combining jelly with art and architecture with San Sebastian's three-Michelin-starred Elena Arzak. **March 12 and 13, 9.30am-12.30pm, \$160, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, melbournefoodandwine.com.au**



PASSATA EXPERIENCE

IT IS tradition in Italy that at summer's end, whatever fruit is left from the tomato harvest is turned into passata (home made tomato sauce). Each region has a different method – Melbourne's Marisa Travain is making hers in the northern-Italian style, bottling the sauce uncooked. In this hands-on workshop, learn to cut the tomatoes, drain the water from the fruit, puree and bottle the sauce, then boil the bottles for preservation. Lunch will be provided and at the end of the day, sit down to a glass of wine and bowl of pasta napoli. **March 13, 10am-4pm, \$180 all inclusive with sauce to take home, Va Bene Pizzeria e Pasta Cucina, Shed 9, Central Pier, Docklands, 8623 9690, vabenepizzeria.com**



BEAST ON A BLOCK

BUTCHERY is an art most of us leave to the experts, but in this eye-opening event, learn your cuts of meat and how to cook with them. The Point's executive chef Scott Pickett has in past events laid a lamb carcass on his bench, skilfully slicing and dicing each section, explaining to onlookers what he's doing and why, and sharing tips on how best to prepare them at home. This year, pig gets the Pickett treatment, from pork chops to trotters. Watch the tutorial, ask questions, then feast in the Point's dining room from a menu that presents the best of this beast. **March 9, 5.30-10.30pm, \$135 including presentation, dinner and wines, The Point, Aquatic Drive, Albert Park, 9682 5566, thepointalbertpark.com.au**



HOT SMOKED SALMON WORKSHOP

CAMPARI House is turning its attention to teaching people how to hot smoke (as opposed to cold smoke) salmon fillets at home, effectively cooking the fish. Head chef Simon Turner will also demonstrate how to make bread rolls and mayonnaise from scratch so that along with a rocket salad and glass of wine, you've made your own Sunday lunch to be enjoyed on the Campari rooftop.

Tomorrow and March 13, noon-2.30pm, Campari House, 23-25 Hardware Lane, city, \$75, 9600 1574, camparihouse.com.au



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L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival (LMFF), 2011
 Ambassador: Melissa George.
 Photography by Daniela Federici.

Now in its 15th year, L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival (LMFF) continues to celebrate, inspire and connect the designers, consumers and retailers who keep Australia's innovative fashion scene alive.
 By Helen Alexander

Fashion-forward Melbourne

WITH ITS HIP BOUTIQUES, acclaimed design institutions and buzzing arts scene Melbourne has long been at the cutting-edge of fashion. And from 14–20 March, Australia's capital of couture will play host to thousands of spectators, designers and models as they descend on the city to

take part in one of the largest and most respected consumer fashion events in the world, showcasing Autumn/Winter collections available in-store, straight from the runway.

Kicking off a jam-packed schedule of events, Fashion Full Stop at The Plenary

combines label-studded runway show with live rock concert, focusing on designers – from Jenny Bannister to sass & bide – and styles that have shaped the country's fashion identity from the 1960s to today. While at Peninsula, Central Pier, the LMFF National Graduate Showcase



Left: L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival (LMFF) launch.



Above: Samantha Harris; newly appointed David Jones young fashion ambassador.



Left: Megan Gale, Alex Perry and Melissa George.

revels in fresh, upcoming talent, with collections from 12 of the country's most impressive fashion graduates – the design visionaries of the future – enjoying their runway debut. And on Tuesday 15 March, winners of the prestigious LMFF Designer Award 2011 for emerging talent in fashion design, which helped launch the careers of Romance Was Born and Dion Lee, will be announced.

Thought designer collection previews were only open to the upper echelons of the fashion world? Think again. As festival Creative Director and industry authority Grant Pearce notes: "LMFF is a unique festival... it gives the consumer access to the glamour and excitement of fashion." Meaning you can grab runway-side seats at world-class shows across the city. And then there's the LMFF Red

Carpet Runway – a public presentation of Alex Perry's Spring/Summer 2011 collection, which takes place in the suitably stunning Royal Exhibition Building. Having checked out 'Master Of The Ball Gown' Perry's dramatic couture and statement pieces, spectators end their A-list evening with a post-show cocktail party. Making Australia's constantly evolving fashion scene even more accessible, Federation Square's open-air runways will host a number of themed and label-led 'Sidewalk' shows.

Industry-focused forums and seminars promise to inform and connect designers and retailers, while fashion lovers can indulge their passion with a month-long cultural programme coinciding with the festival. With over 70 events, exhibitions and lectures taking place in Melbourne

city and regional areas, check out ManStyle at The Ian Potter Centre, which traces the evolution of men's fashion from the 18th century to the present day with works by designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier and Vivienne Westwood, while fashion takes to the big screen with ACMI's boutique season of films examining the modelling industry.

Feeling inspired? Discover your inner supermodel at a beauty workshop packed with L'Oréal goodies, then head to the festival bar at Central Pier's Woolshed Pub and soak up the atmosphere.

Sharing home-grown creative talent with the world, this year's LMFF promises a stellar line-up of events. For further information and to buy tickets, visit www.lmff.com.au and prepare to see Melbourne sparkle.