

Fabulous 70s:
a celebration of Melbourne fashion

9 October–20 December 2026
Glen Eira City Council Gallery

City of GLEN EIRA
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No title (Fashion illustration. Two models with wooden sculpture) (1970s)
Gelatin silver photograph 50 x 39 cm
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Above image: Jenny Bannister & girls, Melbourne Cup 1978 © Rennie Ellis Archive

Acknowledgements:

Prue Acton

Jenny Bannister

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Debra Dascal, Mr Simon Fashion Archive

Jon Haskin and The Haskin family

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Brian Samuel, Samuel Family Archive

Private Collections

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Curator's essay

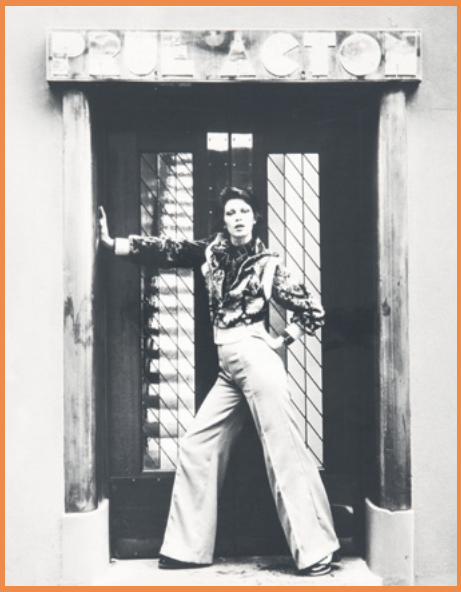
Step back into 1970s Melbourne and explore the decade's bold, eclectic and innovative fashion. A fashion revolution shaped the Australian fashion landscape in the 1970s, during a period of social and cultural changes. The fashion of the 70s embodied these changes, with many Australian designers embracing this spirit of experimentation and creativity.

This exhibition features iconic designs by leading fashion designers and labels including Prue Acton, Jenny Bannister, Sally Browne, Clarence Chai, Mr Simon, Miss Hartnell, Leon Haskin, Elvie Hill, Norma Tullo, Merivale, Van Roth and others who were significant in the fashion world. The selection of garments, photographs, fashion designs, sketches, press clippings and archival material on loan from public and private collections, provide an insight into the stories, creative vision, and achievements of the designers working during this decade.

The important stories and legacies of a selection of local fashion designers and their families are celebrated in the exhibition with examples of their visionary fashion.

Visitors can explore and be inspired by the vibrant styles of the 70s from youthful ready-to-wear designs and evening wear, through to bohemian and disco styles, and the experimental punk fashion which emerged later in the decade. This exhibition offers an insight into the significant contribution the designers have made to Australian fashion history and their enduring impact on the fashion landscape across Australia and the globe. Their iconic designs and styles continue to influence and resonate across generations.

Diane Soumilas
Curator, Fabulous 70s: a celebration of Melbourne fashion
Glen Eira City Council Gallery



Prue Acton, Fashion House, Melbourne (1963-1991), Prue Acton, Fashion Designer

Prue Acton OBE is an Australian fashion icon. An internationally renowned and influential Australian fashion designer, she is often referred to as "Australia's golden girl of fashion" who made a significant contribution to the fashion industry for more than three decades.

When describing building her business, Acton said, "After the first of many outback experiences, in the Flinders Ranges in 1972, I began developing new palettes. Working with our mills, knitters and dye houses in Flinders Lane in "Marvellous Melbourne", and growing sales and expectation from our buyers and our Prue Acton boutiques – in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Tokyo, Canada and Myer Melbourne – we had the volume of sales and the expectation of the unexpected." "My original/foundational block, the basis of our unique Shape - fashioned in fine wools and fine cottons - suited our young market - so they could wear these versatile designs to work and to dance in Melbourne's incredible discos. And in similar climates - USA and Japan."

Image: Photograph of model standing in front of Prue Acton store, Davisons Place, Latrobe Street, Melbourne, c. 1973, photographer unknown, image courtesy of RMIT Design Archives. Gift of Prue Acton 1994



Sally Browne, Fashion House, Melbourne (1970-2000), Sally Browne, Fashion Designer

Sally Browne is an Australian fashion icon and a renowned inspirational speaker. She launched her fashion label in the early 1970s and developed her business to become one of Australia's leading fashion brands, designing and selling high fashion through over 400 boutiques throughout Australia. Her designs of the 1970s reflect the decade's spirit of experimentation and creative freedom in Melbourne fashion, shaped by the social and cultural changes of the time. "My designs in the 1970s were intricate, individual and wonderfully eclectic. There was an extraordinary variety: velvet jackets embellished with embroidery and feather or fur sleeves; patchwork velvet flares; flowing crepe dresses adorned with ribbons and ultra-frilly hemlines; sheer chiffon flouncy tops; and jeans embroidered with all kinds of decorative motifs. Then there were the heavenly coffee-toned cotton voile dresses and outfits—delicate, diaphanous creations trimmed with hand-dyed lace and tiny pintucks. You could call it bohemian hippie meets romantic feminine glamour." Sally Browne

Image: Courtesy of Sally Browne



Mr Simon, Fashion House, Melbourne (1940s-late1980s), Simon Shinberg, Fashion Designer

Simon Shinberg was a leading fashion designer who began his career in the 1940s on Chapel Street in Melbourne and launched his popular youth fashion label Mr Simon in the 1960s. His daughter Debra Dascal née Shinberg said the 1970s was "a decade of eclectic extremes for her father. His collections ranged from bright bold colours to soft pastels, miniskirts, very short hot pants to jumpsuits, and long flowing dresses including a bridal range sold exclusively through David Jones. In the exhibition, you can also view some of the different fabrics Shinberg used over the decade including Velour, Crepe Lurex, Chiffon, Arnel Jersey, Calico, Wool and Banlon." "The disco scene was a huge influence which saw Simon produce full disco ranges which won many awards and produced many fashion parades at David Jones Australia wide."

Image: Simon Shinberg with models showing his Mr Simon fashion range at the Singapore Hilton, 1972. Photo courtesy of Debra Dascal



Miss Hartnell, Fashion House, Melbourne (c.1966 - c. 1973), Brian Samuel, Fashion Designer

By the early 1970s, the Miss Hartnell fashion brand was well established in Melbourne. As Brian Samuel, the Director of Miss Hartnell fashion house explains, "Fabric selection was straightforward because we knew what the market expected. We copied the fabrics used in the Hartnell collections, but sourced local alternatives rather than importing them. Hartnell used pure silk shantung and chiffon; Miss Hartnell used Japanese Rayon Shantung and polyester chiffon. Prints came from Sekers Fabrics, a leading trade supplier and tenant in the same building, while the Hartnell collection used Swiss and French prints. The styles were younger, ranging from bridesmaid dresses and evening culottes to long skirts, coordinated blouses, and a variety of evening wear aimed at school formals and university balls."

Image: Miss Hartnell Fashion house. c. 1971, Courtesy of the Samuel Family Archive



Jenny Bannister, Fashion Label, Melbourne (1976 – 2009), Jenny Bannister, Fashion Designer

Jenny Bannister is a celebrated Australian fashion designer who launched her own label, Jenny Bannister Fashion in Melbourne in 1976, during the radical Punk fashion movement. Her Punk fashion has been collected by major Museums, Public Galleries, RMIT Design Archives and private collections. "In 1975 I was working in upcycled denim, jungle greens and tat (vintage fabrics) for boutiques in Chapel St. Around that time Clarence Chai asked me to make him a striped canvas jumpsuit I had made for my sister Wendy. He rang a week later and wanted another one. Then he suggested a label "Jenny Bannister for Chai". By 1979, I had my own Jenny Bannister label and had branched out into selling to other boutiques. Reflecting my long interest in upcycling, these garments are made from leather offcuts and denim bolted together with pyramid studs and minimal sewing."

Image: : Jenny Bannister *Punk outfit* 1978 leather, studs. Collection of Jenny Bannister



Clarence Chai, Fashion Label (1974-2010), Clarence Chai, Fashion Designer

Clarence Chai (1946-2022) was a leading Australian fashion designer, renowned for his innovative youth fashion label and use of vintage fabrics in Melbourne and Sydney in the 1970s and 1980s. His label "Chai" and retail stores in Crossley Street and Collins Street were influential in Melbourne's fashion landscape. His contributions to fashion design and Melbourne's queer design culture are significant and his legacy is preserved through his archive at RMIT Design Archives. "Clarence Chai opened his small "alternative" fashion business in Crossley Street in central Melbourne. In doing so he was activating processes and ideas, later influential in the way Melbourne transformed itself. These ideas included re-populating the city with both residents and niche creative businesses; revaluing and re-using existing city buildings; reanimating neglected parts of the central city and honouring the specificities of Melbourne's built environment, including its small streets and lanes." Dr Sally Gray 2023

Image: Photograph of Clarence Chai (left) with Sandy New and Victor Wong, c. 1976, photographer unknown
Image courtesy of RMIT Design Archives. Gift of Clarence Chai 2022



Norma Tullo, Fashion House, Melbourne (1956-1977), Norma Tullo, Fashion Designer

Norma Tullo (1935–2019), MBE, was a significant figure in Australian fashion and one of the leading designers of the 1960s and 1970s. Tullo established her label in 1956, and by the early 1960s her business was flourishing. In 1965, she won a record seven *Australian Wool Board Awards*, along with the *Australian Lyrebird Award* and the *David Jones Fashion Award*. In 1977 she closed her label, and later in 1988 joined the team at Fletcher Jones. Tullo promoted the use of natural fibres, particularly wool and was known for her elegant designs. She introduced Peppinella, a new woollen fabric into her range in 1973, starting "… a new collaboration with the Peppin brothers, creating a range using wool grown from their renowned merino flocks." Ann Carew, RMIT Design Archives.

Image: Norma Tullo Salon, Toorak Road, c. 1970 © Rennie Ellis Archive

Leon Haskin, Fashion House, Melbourne, Leon Haskin, Fashion Designer

Leon Haskin, (1933-2011) was a well-known Australian fashion designer who established his women's evening wear label and manufacturing business at 15 Flinders Lane, Melbourne in 1962. He introduced iconic fashion styles that continue to be influential and collectable today. His father Henry Haskin (1900-1980) was a pioneer in the women's clothing industry starting his business in Flinders Lane in 1919.

Jon Haskin recalls, "growing up in the 60s and 70s, I have fond recollections of the family business (Joseph Haskin & Co) located in Flinders Lane and later moving to Epstein House on Flinders Street. The sounds of the sewing machines, voices of the designer, Mrs Brian, and my dear matriarchal grandmother Jesse, booming across the floor keeping the staff in line and on track, all left an indelible impression on me. And then there were the characters, in particular, Leon Haskin who without doubt left his mark on the industry. His legacy was his modern, fun and innovative designs which can still be found on-line and amongst the cherished collections of the vintage movement."

Elvie Hill Fashion House, Melbourne (1956-1991), Elvie Hill, Fashion Designer

Melbourne fashion legend Elvie Hill (1917-2018) was known for a range of feminine and sophisticated designs and her own couture label "Elvie Hill" located at 55 Flinders Lane. Her boutique, located on the "Paris-end" of Collins Street was famous, and she dressed some of Australia's most celebrated women over four decades. Her contribution to the Australian fashion world is significant and lives on today.

Van Roth, Fashion House, Melbourne (1940s - 1980s)

Van Roth was a well-known Australian fashion house, established in Flinders Lane in the 1940s and closed in the 1980s. Van Roth's high-quality stylish gowns were awarded the Australian Gown of the Year Award in 1967 and the fashion house sold garments all over Australia including towns in the outback.



Glen Eira City Council Gallery

Glen Eira Town Hall
Corner Glen Eira and Hawthorn Roads, Caulfield
03 9524 3333

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