

theage (melbourne) magazine

After a fashion...

Faustina "Fuzzy" Agolley and more Melbourne women on the art of individual style

The trouble with cool

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More shoes, now!

Six obsessive collectors

Suits you, sir

A middle-aged slob sharpens up his act

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THE
FASHION
ISSUE





I never wear very revealing dresses or things that are too short. I wear stuff that complements my body shape.

Chairs Jordan, 9548 8866



Style

at any age

Five creative Melbourne women talk about their style, their influences and their fashion mistakes. . . . Photography James Geer Interviews Susannah Walker, Felicity Lewis

**Faustina "Fuzzy"
Agolley, 26,
television presenter**

I've actually got a very small wardrobe. It's tiny. I'm always giving clothes to people. I'm not too attached to things. My family story explains my attitude to fashion. I was born to a Ghanaian father and a Chinese mum in London and my family was very poor.

Mum wanted to come to Australia so we could have a decent education and a roof over our heads. I was nearly two when we moved here. Growing up, I was very much a tomboy. I didn't really like the girly stuff.

Later on, when I was at Melbourne University and RMIT – I did a degree at each – I was still wearing quite relaxed clothing: jeans and flip-flops and hoodies and tank tops. That was really all I owned.

I modelled for about four or five years to pay my way through uni. This was after I was rejected by every major modelling agency in Melbourne.

And a lot of Sydney agents said, usually our black women are six foot and Sudanese. So I dealt with that for a long, long time . . . until the modelling agency Chic hired me and I got my first job the same week, a Bonds campaign with Miranda Kerr.

I never really wore any designers or labels until I joined the show Video Hits five or six years ago. When I started

my desk would just fill up with clothes – all these labels that wanted to dress me for the show and wear their clothes out. It was like Christmas every day on my desk. And in terms of the luxury of being able to buy clothes for myself, it wasn't really until then. Melissa Byrne, a stylist who works at Channel Ten, finds clothes for me for the show and the style of the stuff she chooses has definitely rubbed off on me.

What I wear on the show depends on the setting and who I'm interviewing – I'd wear something different for Michael Buble as opposed to a rapper. It's like playing dress-ups.

I'm pretty lazy when it comes to day-to-day dressing. My style is eclectic. I like to wear bright patterns in pinks, yellows, oranges that I've bought online or on my travels for work.

In summer, I like to wear skirts, shorts, baggy T-shirts. I like band T-shirts as well: I've got a Jay-Z one, a Beyonce one, a Jill Scott one. In winter, it's rugging up and layers and scarves.

I'm absolutely into the Melbourne black thing in winter. I try and liven it up a little bit with a scarf. I've got 25 to 30 scarves, so I've got different colours to brighten up the look.

I never wear very revealing dresses or things that are too short. I wear stuff that complements my body shape: I've got African features, I've got sizeable thighs and a booty, I've got hips. I'm not a rake-thin stick or a size eight.

20s

Faustina wears Ashish sequin dress, Cactus Jam International, 9654 1087, and her own shoes.

I was born in Saigon. We moved to France when I had just started to walk and it was only on my twenty-third birthday that I was reunited with my family in Vietnam. My grandparents and aunts came to pick me up from the airport and we recognised each other straight away.

I came to Melbourne because we had family here, and I studied languages at uni and then textile design at RMIT. Tapestry weaving has become one of my primary obsessions. I weave abstract images that dance around in my head. Earning a living out of handmade textiles is a colossal challenge. I'm finally going to bite the bullet and open a pop-up store in May.

Now I run textile tours to Vietnam. The tour takes travellers on a Mekong Delta cruise in a converted fisherman's boat, to tailors' workshops in Hoi An and to tribal villages in the Northern Highlands. The most enjoyable part for me is visiting my grandmother's house. My wedding dress cost \$30 – it was made by grandmother's tailor in Vietnam.

Growing up in France, I was obsessed with fashion. Paris was 800 kilometres from where I lived and when I was 16, I would go there on shopping trips during the sales and come back to school in Doc Martens, plaid trousers, vests, and people would ask me, "Where did you get these?" And I'd say, "Do you want to buy it?" I had an underground clothing business. But I got into trouble; the principal was like, "This is a school, not a marketplace."

There's one designer I love: Yeojin Bae. Her tailoring's impeccable, she makes anyone look good. The most expensive thing I own is a Tsumori Chisato trenchcoat. I bought it in Paris on the first day of a holiday there. I spent 70 per cent of my budget but I don't regret it one bit because I'll have it forever."

My wedding dress cost \$30. It was made by my grandmother's tailor in Vietnam.

Pauline Tran-Cecil, 33, textile designer

30s

Pauline wears a French vintage top, a homemade skirt, shoes by Stephen Venezia and necklace made with jeweller Anna Varendorff.

Helen Marcou, 47, co-founder of live music lobby group SLAM

40s

Helen wears a Nevada Duffy dress and Preston Zly shoes with birdskull pendant and ring and claw earring by Julia deVille.

My life changed when I discovered Patti Smith. I started getting into the darker side of things, reading Rimbaud and Blake, and being absolutely turned upside down.

I grew up in Hawthorn and then my parents moved to Glen Waverley, which was tragic for me because it was 1975. Just after the double dissolution, and I had these fantastic, progressive friends at Camberwell High. Glen Waverley was just so bleak, politically, I didn't fit in. I got into punk shortly after that.

It wasn't long after that I started sneaking out and going to the Crystal Ballroom (in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda). It was about that time I met Quincy (husband, rock musician Quincy McLean). New York punk really resonated with me. I embraced the fashion: Dad's old shirts with writing on them, ripped T-shirts, fishnet stockings, leopard-skin tights, purple hair. Back then, you didn't have the fabulous colours so you used old ladies' blue rinse.

From there, it moved straight on to '50s retro clothing: mohair jumpers, tartan pants, black tulle skirts, black hair, white face – slightly Gothic but with a punkier edge. It defined your subculture; you'd see each other on the train and you knew that you hung out at the Crystal Ballroom.

We started going out to (nightclub) Inflation on a Monday night and hanging out with young designers – Martin Grant was a little kid from Balwyn hand-making these beautiful black Gothic dresses for the go-go dancers. I started wearing stuff from all these people. Aesthetic was really important but it wasn't about money because none of us had any. We shared clothes. In the '80s, I wore cropped jackets, high-buttoned shirts, big earrings, which I still wear now, high-waisted skirts, black tights and black shoes.

My girlfriends were all into disco. I'd go and see Died Pretty or Quincy's band, Blue Ruin, and I'd go on my own in one of my little '80s short dresses, high heels, lovely make-up, lovely outfit, in a sea of flannelette shirts.

I dress to suit my figure. I'm not a model, I'm a real person. I've got big boobs, a big Greek bottom and I've had to learn how to hide flaws and over the years I've used style to do that. I love to wear a lot of black, given that I am in my 40s. I lived through the black era and we tend to fall back on it. I have to make an effort to wear other colours.

I wear short-run (designs) by local designers who I generally have a relationship with: Elin Ambe, Sara Thorn, Nevada Duffy, Angela Thirlwell, Claudia Mejia, Moya Delany, Cass Partington, Julia deVille. I like to buy from friends or vintage and there's nothing in between. That's why the Red Cross vintage shop on Brunswick Street is fantastic and I highly recommend the \$20 rack.

New York punk really resonated with me – ripped T-shirts, fishnet stockings, purple hair.

**Susan Cohn, 58,
jeweller**

50s

Susan wears a Levi's denim skirt that was "taken apart and transformed" by design duo Six, Rick Owen boots and a bracelet and earrings of her own design.

My look is "workshop chic". I am always searching out things that will have some presence but still project the working ethic. I need to be able to go from the workshop to a client meeting, back to the workshop, then to an exhibition opening. So it has to be hard-wearing clothes, workshop safety clothes that fit to the body and take that wear and tear of working on machinery, working at a bench. I usually wear work skirts and simple long-sleeved cotton T-shirts, and good strong boots. I live in boots summer and winter.

At uni in the early '70s, blue jeans and a black T-shirt was a sign of resistance, a refusal to follow the normal format. I wore my black T-shirt and my jeans with pride because it talked about being a woman at

that time. When I started out as a jeweller in the early '80s, I liked wearing solid colour, all yellow or all red. It was a way of trying to understand, when you wore a particular colour, how that changed the way you felt or how you projected yourself. But then, of course, I got very dirty ... so now I wear a lot of black. And black is a strong identity of Melbourne and I finally realised this was wonderful because apart from the practicality of it, the jewellery then becomes the highlight. It is the little bit of neon on the black.

I don't buy things because they're in fashion. I will spend good money on good-quality, well-made, inventive things that I know I am going to wear a lot and enjoy. I don't buy a lot; I sometimes wear things

I wore in the '80s with something new.

I have a strong working relationship with the fashion duo Six, Denise Sprynskyj and Peter Boyd. They do things in much the same way I do things, enjoying the wear of something, the markings on the clothing. I explore jewellery that does that, I think jewellery becomes more precious with the memory of the wearing. I now travel a lot - I'm currently curating an international exhibition of contemporary jewellery for the Design Museum in London - so I'll go to Six and say, "I need a travelling jacket, one with lots of pockets, one for the passport, and one for this and one for that", so I can just wear the jacket and don't have to worry about a bag. It's a wonderful interchange, a collaboration.



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I wore my black T-shirt and jeans with pride because it talked about being a woman and was a sign of resistance.

**Norma Lissek, 76,
fashion buyer**

60s+

Norma wears a necklace by one of her favourite designers, Sarah Pacini, a jacket by Sass and Bide, Jam Jeans and her much-loved suede pointy-toed lace-ups.

Fashion was always a big part of my life. I just can't imagine not doing something in the field.

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I was a fashion designer for many years but I've always moved with the times and not stayed stuck back there. I'm still looking a year ahead all the time. Many years ago, women in their 30s thought they were old but, thank God, it's now progressed and the 40s is still very young. Of course, there are certain clothes that are only for 20-year-olds but you can adapt as you get older and still look fantastic.

Fashion was always a big part of my life. My mother was always interested in my sister and me looking the best we could possibly look. She brought us up to be well-dressed and I loved it. I used to sketch clothes at school when I should have been doing other things. When I was 26, my father bought me a shop in Geelong and then I moved into designing. Later, we had three shops and I had my own label for 30 years - classic pants, divine shirts, great jackets and coats. I have a black pure wool winter coat that I designed and I still wear it and get compliments. Now I am buying for a little shop in Geelong and I love it. I just can't imagine life without doing something in the field. I feel blessed to work in it.

I don't like a lot of frills and flounces. My colours are black and beige and cream and maybe navy, because you get so much more mileage out of them. If you have the basics and you add a little something different each season, you can build a good wardrobe. I don't usually buy impulsively - when the new season comes in, I choose what will work with what's already in my wardrobe, along with maybe a couple of things that are a bit way out. If I have to have something, I'll have it, whether it's \$1000 or \$100. My wardrobe isn't as big as it used to be but my husband, Morry, cannot believe the row of black pants in my wardrobe: "Why do you need another pair when you've got all of those?" Well, you might have 25 pairs of black pants you've collected over the years but they're all for different occasions, aren't they? (m)