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LANDINI ASSOCIATES

MARK LANDINI BELIEVED HE COULD DO ANYTHING IF HE PUT HIS MIND TO IT – SEEMS LIKE HE WAS RIGHT.

words
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Mark Landini calls it the barbecue test – and when his design agency meets with a potential client for the very first time, he advises them to take it. "I say they should get together and ask themselves, 'Could we have a barbecue with those people?' I explained it to a guy in London; he said, 'Oh yeah, we've just done this massive piece of market research, at great cost, to try to find out why people employ particular design agencies, and the single most important reason is if they like them.' Well, we worked that out at no cost."

The anecdote is classic Landini. It's elegant, it's simple and it cuts to the chase – three things that drive the approach of his Sydney business, Landini Associates. But it's more than a corporate philosophy. "I had ADD," explains the British-born fifty-year-old, "I couldn't spell as a child and no-one could work out why. I don't suffer from it now but the after-effect is that I've always found things complicated. I've always naturally tried to simplify. Something in me desperately needs to do that. I need order."

Since launching himself in Australia in 1993, Landini (in Sydney eateries alone) has designed the Botanic and Centennial Park restaurants, Mint Cafe and a restaurant and two bars (Cruise and Posh) in the Overseas Passenger Terminal at Circular Quay. Corporate clients include Jurlique (Landini is responsible for their brand strategy, packaging and global retail look), Harrods 102 (the London department store's new convenience shop), Coles Myer, Queensland Rail and McGuigan Wines.

One thing he has never cracked is how to describe his company. "I don't have an elevator pitch," he says. "The best I've ever got is that we are

designers. When people ask: 'What do you design?' I say, 'What do you want designed?'"

He cites the work he did with the Australian Tax Office, "Everything that you get [from them] we did," he says, explaining how Landini Associates redesigned the tax office's entire approach, from website and tax packs to how they deal with customers. Yet Landini claims he only got into design by accident, and proffers a CV that includes stints as a "hod carrier [brickie's labourer], dish washer, musician, restaurateur and tennis coach."

At seventeen, he had no idea what to do. On a school friend's suggestion, he went to art college in London – just as punk rock exploded. He saw Sex Pistols gigs, formed a band ("like everybody did") and briefly met the British designer Tom Dixon, who was also in a band at the time. The pair didn't like each other much but would eventually become firm friends. Unlike Tom's band Funkapolitan, Landini's group The Polo Club were "far too cool to get signed by a record label." Says Landini, "I got rung up one day by the head at A&R at Polygram. He said, 'I want to sign you' – I don't think I even told anyone."

Landini's design course involved a work placement in Rome where he honed his Italian (his father is from Florence). In the early 1980s, he joined London design consultancy Fitch & Co as a junior and by the age of twenty-nine he was its global retail creative director. After several attempts, Sir Terence Conran hired Landini as creative director of Conran Design Group.

Then in 1992, Landini visited Sydney for a weekend. He fell in love with the city and persuaded his wife that they

should move there from London with their two young children (they now have four). After a business arrangement fell through, the unemployed designer wrote to Liquorland, telling them that their bottle shops were rubbish and that they needed to invent a new brand that could better represent their knowledge of wine. Borrowing a computer from his next-door neighbour, Landini designed logos, interiors, uniforms and a wine club. "I literally invented Vintage Cellars in a week," he says. "It was a massive success. No-one then, fifteen years ago, was doing what I could do: creating brands holistically."

It became central to his business. "I'd worked in Rome, where they have the idea that architects can design everything. And punk rock instilled that belief in me – that there wasn't anything you couldn't do if you put your mind to it," says Landini. "So it seemed natural and we had a great ride for years. Then the Olympics screwed it all up because everyone discovered Sydney and an avalanche of design companies moved out to Australia."

Increased competition forced a rethink. While based in Sydney, even though he had worked for companies such as Harvey Nichols, London visits were "more of an opportunity to go and buy shoes." After the Olympics, he ramped it up, started pitching for larger UK projects, and "stopped being the invisible designer." For Landini, the key to success is creating design like Awaba Cafe in Mosman – "very calm, very simple and understated. It's not concerned with being fashionable or winning design awards, or outdoing what was done the day before." And, of course, the barbecue test. He doesn't just use it with clients, he says, smiling. "Life is too short."

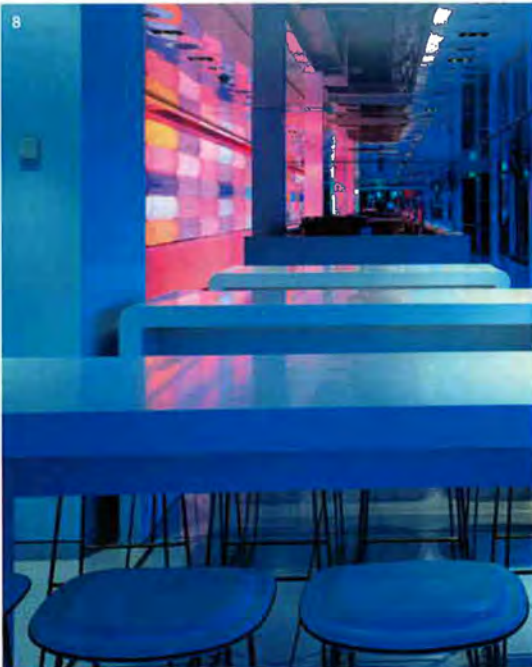
1+2 / THE HARROLD'S FLAGSHIP STORE IS AN ENVIRONMENT FOR SCHOOLING MEN IN THE FINE ART OF DRESSING WELL.

3+4 / DESIGNING LOGOS, INTERIORS, UNIFORMS AND A WINE CLUB, MARK LANDINI CREATED VINTAGE CELLARS IN A WEEK.



5-9 / LANDINI AND ASSOCIATES
 CREATED THE ENTIRE LOOK
 AND FEEL OF CRUISE BAR AND
 RESTAURANT, WHICH IS LOCATED
 IN THE OVERSEAS PASSENGER
 TERMINAL AT CIRCULAR QUAY.

5



10-14 / LANDINI ASSOCIATES
IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
JURLIQUE BRAND STRATEGY,
PACKAGING AND GLOBAL
RETAIL LOOK.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
IMAGES 1 + 2: TREVOR MEIN
IMAGES 3, 4 + 6-9:
ROSS HONEYSET
IMAGE 11: DAVID MORRELL
IMAGE 13: ADRIAN LANDER

10

Jurlique

