

THE AUSTRALIAN Financial Review Magazine



Oroton CEO Sally Macdonald and creative director Ana Maria Escobar. Photographed by Louie Douvis.

THE HUME REPORT

*Marion Hume's
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fashion industry*



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The transforming angel

Mark Landini emphasises social spaces when reinvigorating brands.



Design briefs have included interiors for Jones the Grocer (main picture), Jurlique (below) sass & bide (below right).

It was a whim 18 years ago that took Mark Landini to Australia, walking away from his London job as head of the renowned design group Conran. A week after he arrived, it became apparent his new business partner in Australia was selling snake oil. But the British designer manoeuvred this misfortune into his next opportunity.

“We were sort of stranded, sort of Robinson Crusoe,” Landini admits ruefully.



“I wanted to get drunk so I went down to Liquorland and bought a bottle of wine. After which I said to my wife: ‘You know, that was a shit experience.’”

“So that evening I wrote to the managing director of Liquorland and said, ‘Your bottle shops are crap. You need to develop a new brand.’ And I got the gig to develop Vintage Cellars; he rang the next day and gave me a week to do it.”

It was a sleepless week reworking the Coles-owned chain: Landini created the branding, the shop fittings, the ticketing strategy, the wine club, even the uniforms. The first store opened in Mosman, on Sydney’s north shore, two months later and remains unchanged today.

“For years, people didn’t know it was owned by Coles. Even to this day, people think it’s independent and that was very intentional on our part.” This was the beginning of many high-profile projects, including reworking the first sass & bide shop on Sydney’s Oxford Street, the ATO office in Canberra, and the Jurlique brand.

But the raffish designer is inexorably drawn back to his métier: food. Before he left London, Landini redesigned Harvey Nichols’ food court and he’s now doing the same for Selfridges. “Harrods would have been nothing without its food hall,” he says. “It was the anchor to its market. Similarly, Harvey Nichols’ new food hall really reinvigorated that brand. And now Selfridges has realised it is key to its future. They have big plans there.”

“Very few retailers have places that can provide a social context to their customers. The thing about food is that it actually pulls everyone together and creates a place where we can meet and talk and live and fall in love and fall out of love and all of that kind of stuff. That doesn’t happen in the shoe department. Never.”

John Manos, the owner of Jones the Grocer, has also relied on Landini’s love of communal, social food spaces to create the look and feel for his burgeoning chain of cafés-cum-groceries.

Landini says his enduring purpose has been to create lasting design that unlocks commercial value for his clients. “I often looked at architect and designer David Chipperfield – a hero of mine – and thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to just do what you do?’ To be a stylist, if you like,” says the honours graduate in interior architecture. “But I work commercially. We make people money and [as] a stylist you wouldn’t be able to do that ... I always try and do simple things because I think simple things last.” ■



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