

MORE THAN A DREAM

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TURNED A HOBBY
INTO A BUSINESS

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MELBOURNE BEHIND TO
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COVER

Lucy Gist and Casey Howland reveal the inspiration behind jewellery business Junie + Belle. Photo: Ginger + Mint



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EDITOR'S NOTE

We're embracing all things creative in this edition of *gt*. In our cover story this week, we chat to Ocean Grove mums Lucy Gist and Casey Howland, who met while studying occupational therapy and found themselves at a loose end after being on maternity leave with their newborns. So, after years of sketching, planning, talking and dreaming, this year they launched jewellery label Junie + Belle, an avenue to harness their creative sides and an interest outside the daily grind of work and parenting (page 6). Also this week, Cam Ward catches up with Soula and Theo Mantalvanos who left behind their life in Collingwood to open Queenscliff Gallery, a place to showcase incredible Australian talent while also satisfying their love of art (page 8). For those of you looking to celebrate this warmer weather with a night out with friends, we find out what's on the incredible cocktail menu at The 18th Amendment Bar, while stylist Emelia Morris has got the perfect outfit sorted for a Sunday picnic lunch. Enjoy!

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CURATING A NEW LIFE

SOULA AND THEO MANTALVANOS WERE FORCED TO RE-EVALUATE THEIR FUTURE AFTER A HORROR INJURY. AFTER SETTING UP SHOP IN QUEENSCLIFF, THEY COULDN'T BE HAPPIER, WRITES CAM WARD



Soula and Theo Mantalvanos are directors of the Queenscliff Gallery. They moved to the seaside town after leaving behind their lives in Collingwood to build a new dream by opening their own gallery. Photo: Ginger + Mint

THIS is not how life was supposed to be for Soula and Theo Mantalvanos, idyllic though living and working in Hesse St, Queenscliff may be.

Now directors of Queenscliff Gallery, the couple are quite straight forward when they say they would not have come to Queenscliff if life had not gotten in the way. Nothing against the borough, but they were content with their lives and the graphic design business they were running out of their converted Collingwood warehouse, as well as Soula's own career as an exhibiting artist.

"It was enough money to live the lifestyle that we wanted," Theo recalls. "When we worked we worked, when we holidayed we holidayed."

But in 2007 their lives were up-ended when a fit ball Soula was sitting on burst and dropped her on to the concrete floor. She was left with chronic pain and it would be 4½ years before she would be diagnosed

"WE PLUCKED OURSELVES OUT OF LIFE AND WENT TO TASSIE TO FIGURE IT OUT."

with severe pudendal neuralgia. Soula now says she was "really lost for quite a few years".

Her accident meant she could no longer sit and work. She couldn't even draw, something she had been doing since she was a child. After the accident Soula and Theo persisted for almost a decade trying to make the business work but by the end of it they had come to see their company as more of a ball and chain they were dragging.

Then one day a client came in bearing two bottles of Tasmanian wine as a thankyou for some design work. She also had an Airbnb shack in Swansea she was in the process of selling and asked them if they would help spruce it up first.

And there on a seven-mile beach on the northwest shore of Great Oyster Bay overlooking Freycinet National Park near Swansea in the heart of Tasmania's east coast, Theo and Soula decided who they were, and what they could do and couldn't do.

"We could have stayed in Collingwood and been very comfortable but I wanted to work and I just couldn't find a way to work with what we had. It's really hard and it's still hard," Soula says. "We plucked ourselves out of life and went to Tassie to figure it out."

They sold up in Melbourne in a sea-change they hoped would help Soula manage her pain. The couple already had gallery connections and so they took the big decision to move from a service industry to retail and open a gallery of their own.

Despite no affiliation with Queenscliff, they eventually settled on the town's historical former



Soula is back creating her own art after an injury left her contemplating her future, before moving to Queenscliff to open an art gallery. Photos: Ginger + Mint

Wesleyan Church, which was built in 1868. They bought in August 2015, settled that October, renovated and opened Queenscliff Gallery two months later.

The gallery's mission is to enhance the regional arts culture and the careers of Queenscliff Gallery-represented artists, its vision is to be recognised as a destination regional Australian art gallery.

"You go to a museum and they'll give you all the information that you want and they won't sell you anything, then you go to a commercial gallery and they won't speak to you and they expect you to buy something. We wanted to be somewhere in between," Soula explains.

Theo largely works front of house, talking to visitors about techniques and methodologies, while Soula does the curation and social media for the gallery. And she is

again creating art herself in sketches, prints and paintings in acrylics and oils.

From living above an ice cream shop when they first moved to the borough, home for Theo and Soula is a snug oasis out the back of the gallery that you would never think was attached when you look at it from the road. What was a kitchenette is now Soula's studio filled with her drawings, etchings and paintings.

Instead of focusing on local art ("You've got neighbourhood houses and communities to do that," Soula says) they opted instead to set their sights further afield. They want to broaden people's experiences, and so show artists mainly from Victoria, but also from around Australia. Their deliberate focus is on aspirational pieces, but just as important is their relationship with the artist.

"We won't show someone we don't like," Theo says. "It sounds a bit clichéd, 'I don't like you I won't show you', but no I won't. If I can't deal with you and communicate with you commercially, how can I possibly promote your work and say to the people who come in 'That's not only a good piece of work, the artist is magnificent'? That's how we work, we build relationships."

In the fine print on the bottom of the gallery website is a list of artists that the gallery represents, not the least of whom is Sir Arthur Streeton - surprising given that the iconic Australian landscape painter died 80 years ago this September.

Streeton attracted a record-breaking \$3m for *The Grand Canal* and his works perennially makes the lists of the highest prices paid for Australian paintings every

year. Queenscliff Gallery's offerings are more modest - prints from copper and zinc etching plates made by Streeton, which were brought to the pair several years ago after a meeting with Streeton's grandson.

Prices for pieces at Queenscliff Gallery range from \$600 to \$30,000 but Theo says price shouldn't be the primary consideration when buying art. His tips are to firstly fall in love with the work ("don't understand why"), then comes the price ("don't hurt yourself") and finally find out who painted it ("a very distant third").

"If you can fall in love with something, it can cost \$50. It doesn't matter," he says.

Queenscliff Gallery at 81 Hesse St, Queenscliff, is open 10am-4pm Wednesday-Monday. Follow @queenscliffgallery on Instagram.

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