

The ENTREPRENEURS

FROM THE EDITORS AND BUREAUX OF MONOCLE MAGAZINE

• THE BUSINESS HANDBOOK FOR PEOPLE WITH BIG IDEAS

• issue 02 • 2020

THE TOOLS TO FIX, SECURE AND REFOCUS YOUR BUSINESS

How to chart a course through choppy waters, find opportunities, learn powerful lessons and be ready for a new world of entrepreneurship

Our stories of resolve and resistance from across the globe deliver an optimistic take on the future of the office, start-up finance and the need for cities with tight business communities

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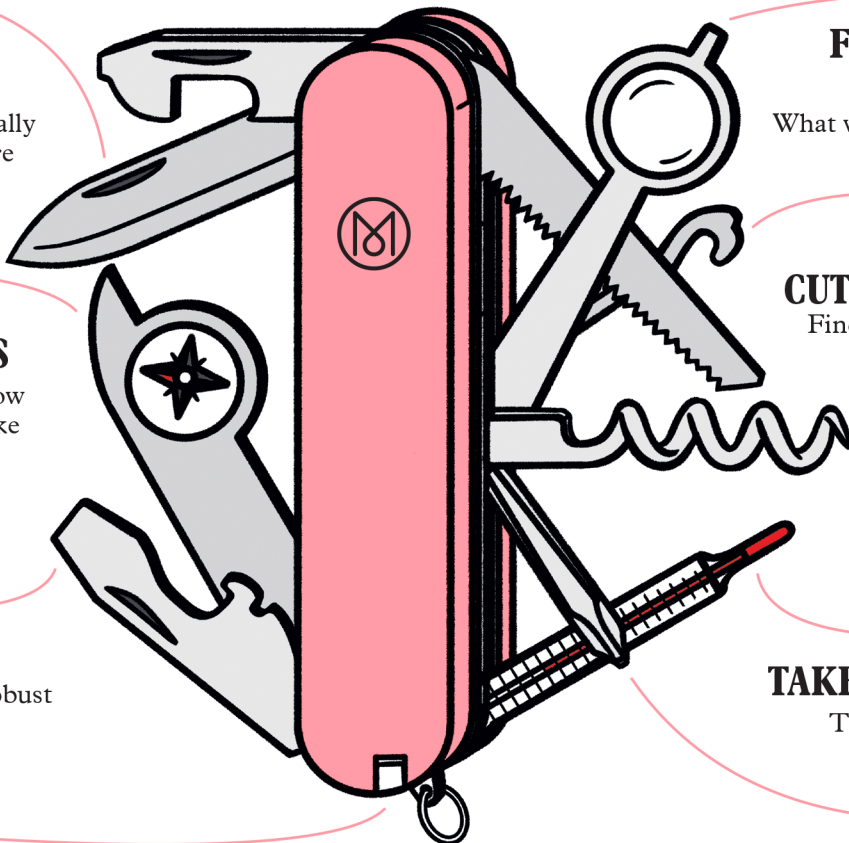
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URBAN DEVELOPERS

Hayley Curnow REPORTING FROM *Melbourne*: A crop of talented graphic-design firms are winning commissions across Melbourne's property and hospitality industries, providing their clients with elegant branding and the city with a strong visual identity. PHOTOGRAPHER *Tom Ross*

"Good work isn't possible without good commissions," says Melbourne graphic designer Patrick Scanlan, discussing the realities of his profession. Luckily for the co-founder of Studio Hi Ho, the firm he set up with Wesley Waddell in 2011, good design projects are present in the city, which within 10 years is set to become Australia's most populated. The work of Scanlan's three-man team – known for sharp typography and bright, clever illustration – has become lauded in design circles. Yet most of Studio Hi Ho's best creative art direction is commissioned by an unlikely source: property developers.

As foreign investment flooded the city in recent years, Melbourne's property market boomed and, according to Scanlan, smart developers realised that Melburnians were under-served. Boutique estate agent, and



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long-standing Studio Hi Ho client, Milieu Property was one of them. Milieu began to commission designs for sensitively built apartment blocks in up-and-coming neighbourhoods such as Brunswick. The projects would be beautiful (and make for wise investments) but as they went up behind construction hoardings their stories needed to be told to potential buyers. This is where Studio Hi Ho found its niche.

"Architects talk like they are talking to other architects," says Scanlan. "So we had to find a simple way to communicate [with potential buyers]." He rolls out an elegantly crafted property brochure for a Milieu project in Fitzroy. Here, on tactile stock, the character of the city's architectural vernacular is highlighted through bold photography and warm renders of the forthcoming property, with eloquent writing outlining its design. "It's pretty simple: people tend to love good design, which these projects were about, so we just had to strip all the jargon away," says Scanlan. "For us it's always about boiling things down to their most simple form and stripping the clutter away."

Aided by smart marketing, many a Milieu property has been sold off-plan. As this boutique style of development has grown in popularity, so too has the clever collateral that's commissioned around it. In the property industry, however, the style of communications has become painfully similar to that forged by Studio Hi Ho.

1. Studio Round staff caps for Pepe's Italian & Liquor
2. Studio Hi Ho's Congress clock
3. A 2015 Hi Ho brochure for a Milieu project
4. Projects of Imagination's Nick Cox
5. Birrarung Marr park
6. Studio Round branding for chocolatier Koko Black

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Unfortunately, copycatting is a familiar story in Melbourne, particularly in the hospitality trade. Before the pandemic slowed things down in 2020, new coffee shops and restaurants seemed to be opening constantly, all hoping to provide a small point of difference but often presenting themselves in unoriginal ways. As a result, the hospitality businesses that tend to survive in Melbourne have a common trait: they apply design-conscious, original art direction to bolster their appealing menus and service.

Graphic-design firm Studio Round, which operates from a light-filled venue in the agency-laden suburb of Carlton, knows this well and has built its business around the F&B industry. One of the company's most successful partnerships has been with chef Andrew McConnell, who is responsible for many of Melbourne's most-loved modern dining destinations. For McConnell's popular Asian-fusion restaurant Supernormal, which opened in 2014, Studio Round designed Tokyo-inspired takeaway boxes for lobster rolls, complete with cut-out cardboard lobster trimmings, and serviettes featuring illustrated Super Mario-style clouds. Scenography is key at such venues and, at McConnell's restaurants, good graphic design is in abundance.

It is also present inside informal wine bar Marion, the latest collaboration between Studio Round and McConnell. Designed as a sibling to McConnell's flagship Cutler & Co, Marion is imbued with a lived-in authenticity; Studio Round's tagline for this new venture is: "A bar that feels like it's always been there". The site's historic urban context inspired the condensed heavy signage that sets the tone for Marion's wider identity. "Brand to us is not a veneer," says Studio Round co-director Robert Nudds. "Instead it builds a project from the inside out." He notes that the wine bar's identity is cohesive and considered: the menu boards, tableware and uniforms all reflect its brand ethos. Nudds believes that Melbourne's



"Branding to us is not a veneer. Instead it builds a project from the inside out"

1. Perspective on the city
2. Patrick Scanlan (on left) and Wesley Waddell of Studio Hi Ho
3. Dennis Grauel's Brunswick Grotesque font
4. Studio Round's branding for Pepe's Italian
5. Marion by Studio Round



The city according to type

Typographers such as Dennis Grauel, who created the Frisky Freadman font for Studio Hi Ho's branding of architecture firm Freadman White, are taking the urban texture of Melbourne and transforming it into characters. Grauel's work is imbued with Melbourne-isms including a typeface that is an ode to Brunswick, a suburb known for its arty, bohemian culture. Reflecting this, Brunswick Grotesque is mixed with five different character widths that reflect the huge variety of signage across the district.



Calming influence

In March the UN set out a challenge for designers across the globe to "translate critical public-health messages into different languages, cultures, communities and platforms, reaching everyone, everywhere". It was much needed. In a time where calm and clear information should have been the order of the day, much of the Western media ran away with sensationalising the pandemic – and so did the art directors who they employed. Of course, there have been examples of graphic artists plying their craft more positively, such as the deliberately aloof shaping of type around the images in a *New York Times* piece on social distancing. The artistic representation of important information can mean the difference between life and death. We're confident that the UN notice will seed plenty of clever, creative and helpful results from designers. — NSG



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1. Hardware Société's 'No Eggs on Toast' cookbook, with design by Studio Round
2. The city's Forum Theatre
3. Studio Round co-founders Michaela Webb and Robert Nudds
4. Studio Round HQ by Design Office
5. Gertrude Street door to Marion



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"isolation has allowed [Studio Round] to take on a bigger role". Rather than being purely about graphic design, the firm's work could alter an item on a menu or impact service culture – in a positive way.

Another Melbourne firm that's enlivening some of the city's restaurants is Projects of Imagination (POI), whose work includes designing for Australian-Asian favourite Chin Chin. POI's business model fuses branding with interior design. Directors Nick Cox and Dion Hall believe that, as a result of Melbourne's remoteness, they've



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been able to develop a collaborative model that's outside the norm for a graphic-design studio. "Typical client-creative boundaries are ignored in favour of an approach based on curiosity and problem-solving," says Cox. For a recent project for Collingwood gelateria Piccolina, for example, POI took references from mid-century Italian design, drawing on iconic fonts and forms articulated in shades of green, white and red. This base provides a palette that can be adapted when new items are added to the menu, or when the owners change the interior design. "The visual cultures that we create evolve as our clients' menus evolve, as their customers evolve, as their businesses evolve," says Cox.

These ideas come full circle at Congress, a wine bar that Studio Hi Ho worked on with both Milieu and the interiors firm Design Office. Studio Hi Ho was tasked

with creating the bar's brand identity and scenography, and designing its menus, glasses and tableware. It was a dream brief for Scanlan, who says that the style is "Bob Hawke, 1980s boardroom", referring to Australia's eccentric former prime minister.

Design influences include old parliament clocks. Interestingly, the red and green lights that indicated an imminent vote in the House or Senate have been referenced here in a device showing when Congress is open and closed. The success of the bar has seen its owners recently open another outpost, with the design brief again awarded to Studio Hi Ho. Like its entrepreneurial contemporaries, the firm is embracing the theory that, in Melbourne, graphic design goes beyond the screen or printed page. As Scanlan says: "It's that idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts." — (M)

"The visual cultures that we create evolve as our clients' businesses evolve"