

Galleries For All

The first in.cube8r@ gallery was set up in the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy in July, 2007, fulfilling a long-term dream of its founder to have an ethical, commission-free retail outlet for handcrafted items. Isy Galey wanted to create something that empowers artists and presents their work to the public during regular shop hours. An ex-nanny, kindergarten teacher, almost art teacher and glass blower, she held onto this dream for nearly 12 years. "To be honest, it was fear that held me back," she admits. Finding herself in the Centrelink queue after a nanny contract ended, she saw a flyer for NEIS (New Enterprise Incentive Scheme) and decided to take the plunge. She signed up, did a seven-week training course, developed a 50-page business plan and received a start-up grant. Unbelievably, just seven weeks after opening, in.cube8r was full and a waiting list had started.

Isy originally envisaged having glass display cubes to exhibit students' and up-and-coming artists' work, so the term "incubator" and motto, "a small, warm box where beautiful things grow", were a good fit. Being all about cubes, she tweaked the spelling with the auspicious number 8, which symbolises eternal flow. Four key aims shaped the final concept and the main one was to create a space



Isy Galey

where artists didn't have to pay any commission on their sold pieces and where they could set their own prices. Second, she wanted to give artists power over the presentation and location of their display. Additionally, it was to be an interactive space, with each artist responsible for arranging and stocking their area, changing things around, trying new ideas and being active participants in the gallery. Finally, it had to be non-elitist. "I wanted anyone who made anything to have the freedom to display their wares in a public space," she

says. "There has to be at least 50 per cent handmade input and we keep it varied, so there are no two people working in the same way," she relates. Everything is handmade, one-off, unique and proudly Australian, with work in every medium from glass to textiles, clay to prints, metal to home-made skin care. "We are open to anything, but some things just don't sell so they fall away. We have a contemporary edge, but this can also be felting, quilts and cross stitch, it just depends on the angle of the maker," she continues. "Lots of our participants can make a living out of handmade," she claims and she observes that hands-on people with drive who try new ideas and keep it fresh are the most successful.

The gallery contains 90 separate display spaces that artists rent from as little as \$20 per week for a three-month period, depending



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on their location in the store or shop window. In addition to 40cm glass cubes, there are wall spaces, clothing racks, boards and shelves. "We've created a formula and it works. It pays us a wage, meets all the costs," she reveals. "Of our current participants, 60 to 65 per cent have been with us from the very beginning. This shows me that my model is working. We have purpose-built software that the artists can log into, their sales come up at their end as soon as the item is sold, and it's up to them to maintain and manage," she continues.

After opening with just nine participants, the idea took off and soon Isy was fielding requests for other in.cube8r stores interstate and beyond. She decided the only way to grow the concept was through franchising. Vicki Sinclair's in.cube8r opened in Fortitude Valley near Brisbane in April, 2010, and Susanne Foale's followed in the Sydney suburb of Mosman in November

the same year. Isy was negotiating with another franchisee as we went to print.

Isy lives in the Dandenong Ranges with her partner, Michael, and says she would never have had the courage to start without his support. "I'm super proud of this. This is an ethical business and through franchising, I share the love and know-how of over a decade of in.cube8ing the dream," she declares. "Customers love the concept — they come back for every birthday, anniversary and wedding because they know that their gift can't be found elsewhere and that 100 per cent of what they buy gets paid to the creator," she states. "There is something about representing handmade that can only be described as magical," she adds.

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