# Holme:

1. A place where the story begins.
2. Where time passes more slowly.
3. A place where I'm always inspired.
4. A place to land at the end of the day

the end of the day.

5. The place where I'm truly myself.

6. That sense of peace that you are in the right place.

7. Where friends come together.

8. A place

Definitions of Holme: 1.

# Introducing the neighbours – exemplary creative practitioners from Collingwood and its surrounds define their work and their connection to home.

It's no secret that Collingwood has long been considered one of Australia's creative and culinary hotbeds.
In recent years, the former industrial neighbourhood's once raw art and music culture has laid the foundations for the diverse intersection of sophisticated dining experiences, high-end retail, cutting edge contemporary art galleries and various design studios and creative platforms that thrives today.

In the pages to follow, we chat with six creative leaders from Collingwood and its surrounds – creative director Lou Weis, chef Josh Murphy, florist Katie Marx, butcher Troy Wheeler, and gallerists Dianne Tanzer and Nicola Stein – about their drive, their careers and their relationship to home.



# 6. That sense of peace, that you are in the right place.

**Katie *Marx* —**

For florist Katie Marx, home doesn't come with a grand, all-defining plan. Sometimes the most unexpected places, qualities and experiences resonate the loudest. Having recently taken up residence at Butterland – a former butter factory built in 1910 on the main street of Newstead, a small town just outside of Castlemaine – after a decade of building her bourgeoning floristry business in and around Collingwood, she has come to understand home as an accumulation of objects, histories, materials and people. With her partner – renowned furniture maker and designer Greg Hatton – and their two young children, Marx has found a place of solace, activity and great legacy.

# Katie *Marx* —

There's a shift in Katie Marx's tone when our conversation broaches the topic of home. Her lively, animated mode of speech assumes a reflective, unhurried cadence. "When I get home, I just stop the car, sit there for a minute in the dark and just breathe a big sigh of relief," she says, pausing for a moment. She speaks of coming home to her two kids, her partner and "all the things she loves"; she speaks of that indefinable sense of familiarity and of the history of objects that this family of "collectors" have foraged and built together.

"There's just this real sense of place," she says of the family home. It's a site of an almost indefinable belonging.

Marx, who is in her mid-thirties, has spent most of her adult life attempting to conjure such a sensibility for others. The philosophy underpinning her eponymous business Katie Marx Flowers – which has grown to become one of the most creative and sought after of its kind – is one based on helping translate the specificity of experiences and places.

# “That’s something that I really pride myself on, that I can grow some things and forage a lot of stuff that other people might not have access to.”

Her expressive floral arrangements draw upon native species, foraged branches and leaves, and seeded vegetables pulled from her garden, alongside more conventionally sourced blooms, to not merely provide embellishment, but a kind of visual and sensory articulation of her clients’ and collaborators’ aesthetics and needs.

“I think sometimes people don’t realise how much of a big part flowers play, especially during a life-changing event like someone’s wedding, which is just so hugely important in the scope of someone’s life,” says Marx. “It could be something as familiar as a fragrance; someone might have beautiful gardenias in their bouquet and then every year, when gardenias are in season, they’ll notice the smell and remember that day and the bouquet and everything that happened.”

Not unlike a song, our engagement with fragrance is sensory and emotional, rather than intellectual. “I get a little choked up sometimes thinking about it, like, ‘Oh my God, I’m making this beautiful thing for someone’ and I always try so hard to make it the absolute best I can,” she continues.

Marx’s work has been something of a staple throughout Collingwood, Fitzroy and the wider inner-city area for some years now, with celebrated chefs and restaurateurs such as Andrew McConnell, Shannon Bennett of Vue de Monde, and venues such as Circa making up the base of what is a prestigious clientele.

McConnell and his stable of restaurants and venues – anywhere from Cutler & Co. and The Builders Arms to Cumulus Inc. and others – have been at the core of Marx’s business for the best part of a decade and it is her job to create the flower arrangements for each and every one of his restaurants.

“I’ve had him as a client for almost 10 years now and he just lets me do whatever I want and completely trusts me and gives me real feedback,” she says. “He loves that I let some of my vegetables go to seed and save them in my veggie patch, then pull them out by the roots and just plonk them in a vase on this restaurant counter,” laughs Marx.

## “Having created this home with Greg and my family just makes it all the more special.”

“I’m not the kind of person who just goes to the markets and buys what every other florist buys,” she says. One of the qualities that has garnered Marx such acclaim is her unfettered creativity and commitment to unconventional materials. Her work reads like environmental sculpture as much as it does floral arrangement. She is driven by the underlying idea that even the most simple and commonplace of objects can be fashioned to become gestures of great beauty if only arranged with appropriate level of consideration and care.

Having grown up on a small farm outside the remote rural village of Te Awamutu on New Zealand’s North Island, Marx’s journey to find her place in the world has taken many turns. After three years travelling Australia and “living in every city except Melbourne”, she eventually visited and knew she’d found her place. “It was just like ‘Oh my God, why aren’t I living here? This is me, this is where I’m meant to be!’” she laughs, going on to to describe the vibrant creative atmosphere of Smith and Brunswick Streets. “Two weeks later I was living in Melbourne.”

A job with iconic Brunswick Street florist Flowers Vasette set her off on her professional path and she has been following life’s cues ever since. She and partner Greg’s reimagining of Butterland, their now home outside of Melbourne, speaks directly to her acumen for creating something special from what might otherwise be considered mundane.

It’s a site rooted in the history of its locale. “The concrete is made from the river gravel, which is 50 metres from us, and some of the bricks are handmade, and the chimney – which is 27 metres high – was built with a string line and is just an amazing feat of engineering when you think of how they would have built it,” says Marx.

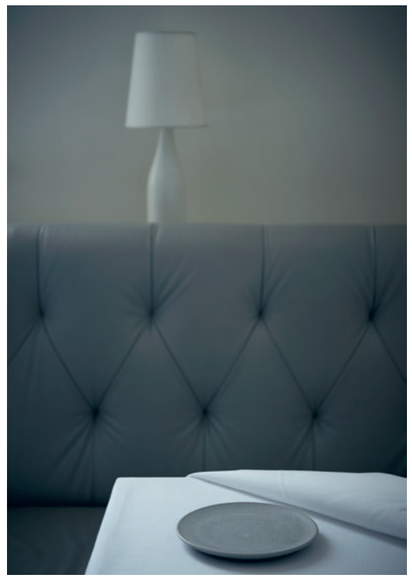
“Everyone in the district comes past and has a story about their grandfather who used to work there or something like that… I guess there’s this feeling of being the custodians of this amazing building, and with that comes a real sense of privilege.”

And with that comes great rewards. “Having created this home with Greg and my family just makes it all the more special,” says Marx, pausing for a moment. “It’s that sense of peace and that you’re in the right place.”

# 7. Where friends come together.

Josh *Murphy* —

The tiny mining town of Rosebery, just inland from Tasmania's remote west coast, is a world away from Collingwood. But for leading chef Josh Murphy – who alongside Andrew McConnell was the head chef and business partner at much-lauded Moon Under Water dining room at the Builders Arms Hotel, which went out on a high earlier this year – elements of his hometown still resonate in Murphy's attitude and philosophy to both his work and his life outside of it. While his output as a chef has seen him make a name for his sophistication of flavours and humble innovation in approach, the unassuming notions of "genuine hospitality", as Murphy puts it so simply – and providing a context for people to come together – guide his attitude to food and life.



# Josh *Murphy* —

People do things a certain way in Rosebery, Tasmania. The tiny mining town, perched at the northern end of the towering West Coast Range, which sweeps Tasmania's most remote flank, is home to a few shy of 1000 residents.

It's cold, quiet and everyone knows each other. There aren't any cafes or restaurants, but there's a vibrant food culture of a very different kind.

"One of the first things that comes to mind when thinking about growing up in Rosebery is that idea of the backyard barbecue," smiles Murphy. "There would be barbecues all the time. Everyone could walk to each other's houses and so there would often be 10 or 20 people – neighbours and kids – getting together.

"The flavours I remember were like those classic rice salads with cucumber and mayonnaise, potato salads and things that could be premade. So you'd just line them up on the table while someone stood at the barbecue and cooked sausages and chicken thighs – and off you go."

# “I like cooking with fire; it’s a bit more permanent. There’s nothing fleeting about it.”

While Murphy’s palate has certainly developed in the time since – during which he has and worked at some of Melbourne’s most prestigious and innovative kitchens including Circa, Three One Two and Cumulus Inc before turning Fitzroy and Collingwood’s pub dining experience on its head with Moon Under Water – there’s still a strong link between his experience in small-town Tasmania and his current food philosophy.

“I think it’s just about genuine hospitality, which is not an easy balance to find,” he says. “There are so many links in that chain, from me in the kitchen all the way down to the person clearing your table at the end of your meal. It’s quite a process to make your experience feel like I want it to feel from the kitchen.”

It’s a sensibility that has echoed throughout several establishments that Murphy has had a hand in, none more so than Moon Under Water, which proved itself yet another McConnell-influenced exercise in fine-dining quality, eschewing pomp or pretention for warmth, humility and generousness, and becoming an absolute fixture of Fitzroy, Collingwood and its surrounds. For Murphy, who is in the planning stages of a new solo venture in the Collingwood neighbourhood – which he thinks of as a kind of home away from home – it’s an outlook that will resonate throughout any kitchen that he’s in charge of.

“If you focus on tricks, well, there’s a new trick every month and you tend to concentrate on the wrong things,” he says. “I like cooking with fire. It’s a bit more permanent; there’s nothing fleeting about it.”

“I’m about serving things quite simply, not doing too much – just simple flavour combinations, good produce and working with good producers,” he continues. “It sounds like a cliché, but it’s one of the most interesting parts of the career that isn’t so obvious when you first start – the relationships that you build with suppliers or producers. It might be someone who just does oysters, or someone who imports specialty Korean dry goods. You’ll have a relationship with someone like that often for your whole career.”

Murphy’s path to becoming a celebrated chef doesn’t adhere to the usual tropes of a childhood passion or an intrinsic desire to cook. Rather, it was an experience of personal hardship that led him to the kitchen. In the year after high school, Murphy was struck by a motorcyclist and suffered a broken



**“It was just his attention to detail, and detail that you don’t even realise is there until it’s pointed out to you.”**

pelvis, femur and various other serious injuries. After six weeks in hospital, he faced six months of rehabilitation and was bound to the family home. Planning and cooking the family meal each night became a way to pass the time. “I eventually decided to see if I could make a career out of it,” he says.

He moved to Melbourne in his late teens and took up an apprenticeship with Jose and Sandra De Oliveira at Prahran Hotel and The Palace in South Melbourne, before finishing his apprenticeship with Michael Lambie at the famed Circa at The Prince, before McConnell took over as head chef. Suffice to say, he had an immediate impact on the young Murphy.

“It was just his attention to detail, and detail that you don’t even realise is there until it’s pointed out to you,” he recalls. “Also, it’s just that intense creativity. Those two aspects combined were something that, as a young chef, I’d never really witnessed before.”

Murphy would follow McConnell to Three One Two, before playing a key hand in the foundation of Cumulus Inc, one of Melbourne contemporary dining’s game-changing establishments. “Melbourne hadn’t really seen a restaurant that was so casual, but the product was transferred from fine dining,” says Murphy. “Suddenly you could be sitting there with an open kitchen and everything happening around you.”

Opening Moon Under Water with McConnell on the doorstep of Collingwood was another step in the journey for this prolific, driven young chef. But despite having created one of Melbourne’s most renowned eateries, Murphy’s tastes still gravitate towards home. He describes the idea behind his new eatery, which is slated for early 2017, as reflecting an elegant update on the idea of the Australian barbecue – a coming together of Murphy’s small-town roots and the kind of nuance and attention to detail that can only garnered at the highest echelons of the industry.

“The idea of roast chicken on the barbecue with a really beautiful rice salad is still what comes to mind when I think of good eating,” he says, pausing for a moment to ponder the thought. “In a social or familial sense, I like something that you can get ready earlier and then it’s done and you can just all hang out and chat.” A smile. “Keeping it simple and super informal.”

# 8. A place for reflection and story.

**Lou *Weis* —**

If there's one assertion that surfaces during a conversation with Lou Weis, it's that design does not exist in a vacuum. The widely renowned creative director, film producer and writer has made a career forging connections between design objects, cultural narratives and histories. While he has built a significant profile on the Melbourne design scene as the former director of the State of Design festival among several other endeavours, his ongoing Broached Commissions project – which he founded with Vincent Aiello and has completed high-profile commissions and participated in major exhibitions throughout the world – sees him meticulously research specific events in Australian history and commission limited-edition, bespoke design objects for the home that engage with and tease out their material and narrative strands. Working alongside a close-knit team of collaborating designers, Weis creates works that invite reflection and invoke story.

# Lou *Weis* —

Lou Weis is unapologetic in his assessment of the history, scope and language of Australian design, not to mention his place in investigating it.

"We wanted to deal fundamentally with the question of 'What is Australian design?'" he offers, point blank.
"You hear this question right across the creative industries – 'What is Australian Food? What is Australian architecture? What is Australian painting?' – and it's my view that many countries that we admire for having a highly distilled version of a national or regional culture do so because they had extended periods of isolation. Migration stopped and the culture looked inward at its craft and art, and reflected upon itself over and over again through generations."

By contrast, Australia is defined by migration. Coming into being at the point at which the Industrial Revolution gained its footing, we have never closed our doors to a global influx of people, traditions and cultures. Our lives and our homes are filled with the traces of a culturally diverse history and aesthetic.

## “Our aspiration, as Broached, is to create intimate objects. The story that goes with them is only important to about 50 per cent … the others are drawn to the textures and forms and those qualities.”

“We’re defined by being relentlessly modern,” says Weis. “So, what is the identity of a relentless participation in globalisation? People look to the applied arts to describe authenticity, but what does it mean to be authentically globalised? What is the aesthetic of that?”

Broached Commissions’ output goes a long way to espouse such ideas, creating luxury domestic objects that don’t just trade in opulence, but narratives and histories.“Our aspiration, as Broached, is to create intimate objects. The story that goes with them is only important to about 50 per cent of people who buy them; the others are drawn to the textures, forms and artisanal qualities,” says Weis, who operates from a small studio at the corner of Spring and Collins Street, just a short walk from Collingwood. “We need to get both right.”

We shift our attention to a tea set that rests on a cabinet to the left of Weis’s desk. Its forms and materials are both elegant and gently, subtly irregular – perfectly realised but anomalous in character.

Designed by Trent Jansen along with Indigenous Tasmanian artist Vicki West and ceramicist Rod Bamford – as part of the wider *Broached Colonial* collection – the *Briggs Family Tea Service* is as much a family portrait and socio-historical citation as a series of domestic objects.

Comprising Tasmanian free settler George Briggs (a porcelain teapot with a moulded copper base); his wife Woretermoeteyenner, of the Indigenous Pairrebeenne people of northeast Tasmania (a sugar bowl made with polished bull kelp and a brass handle); and their four children (who take the various forms of a milk jug and three cups, each porcelain with various bull kelp and wallaby pelt accents), the pieces reflect the intermarriage between white and black Australia.

It forms a shrewd allegory for wider design languages and aesthetics, and their transformation in different geographic and cultural contexts. “The whole mission of Broached is to look at design when it migrates. Specifically, what happens to Modernism, what happens to Chippendale, what happens to Nouveau when it migrated to Australia?”

## “Within a home you have the opportunity for objects that trigger memory through touch, through smell, through sight, through sound.

Another work from the *Broached Colonial* series sits atop a filing cabinet in the corner. The *Dream Lantern*, designed by Chen Lu, tells the story of Mary Bryant and her family – who were the only documented case of convicts successfully escaping Australia – all the while taking the form of an ornate, beautifully detailed “luxury version of a lantern” which “docks and charges like a mobile phone”.

Weis has been an innovator in several fields. Having studied English literature at university, he set up *Inside Film* magazine’s Melbourne office in his early twenties and became increasingly interested in the filmic medium, establishing a post-production facility and going on to work on various documentary projects and collaborate with various artists, designers and architects.

Increasingly, though, Weis came to realise that his strength was in “sculpting language” and creative direction. If it is a designer’s job to realise a brief, then it is the commissioner’s job to research, expound and craft the most relevant and rigorous brief possible. “Most of my work has not been about creating language for public consumption, per se, but as a shared document within a small group of collaborators, who then go off and use their skills to create a plastic form based on that written text,” says Weis, who has also worked as a creative and editorial strategist for high-profile clients including misschu, Hotel Hotel, Elenberg Fraser and Baker D. Chirico. “Sometimes it has taken me two years to research and write one page,” he continues. “Because it’s never meant to be publically read – it’s intended to be enough for the designer to be inspired – I’m quite happy for all the thematic concerns and directions within that document to never see the public light of day.”

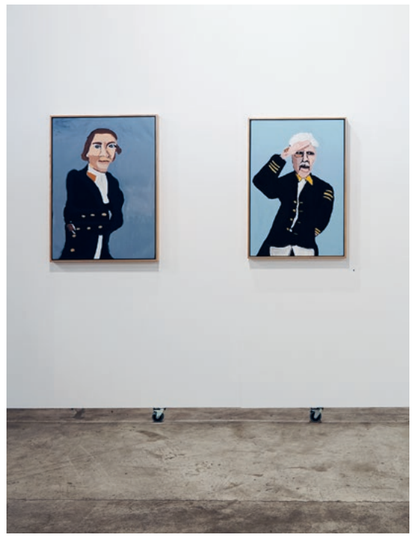
But for Weis, design is not merely an intellectual pursuit, but something to coexist with. Indeed, it’s the design object’s entwinement in our day-to-day that gives it such resonance. It lives not alongside us, but with us.

“In order to have intimacy – an intimacy with objects, in which you can truly reflect – you need privacy,” he says. “Within a home you have the opportunity for objects that trigger memory through touch, through smell, through sight, through sound. And you never know what those objects will be for someone.”

# 9. A place to launch a journey.

**Nicola *Stein***
**& Dianne *Tanzer* —**

For Dianne Tanzer and Nicola Stein – the business partners behind Gertrude Street gallery and roving representational platform This Is No Fantasy – home is a state of mind. In a rapidly changing art world, the duo, along with their third director Jemma Clark, have carved their own path at the forefront of a new mode operating both inside and outside of the traditional gallery. Their bricks and mortar space – formerly Dianne Tanzer Gallery – is a kind of launch pad for introducing Australian artists to new markets and far-off audiences. Put simply, their home base in Fitzroy serves as a conduit to a much wider world.



# Nicola *Stein* & Dianne *Tanzer* —

Dianne Tanzer's eponymous gallery, now operating under the guise of This Is No Fantasy, may have been a fixture of Gertrude Street for the best part of 20 years, but her idea of home rests in a somewhat less tangible realm.

"Bricks and mortar don't mean what they used to," she offers. "Home is in your head."

It's an attitude that Tanzer applies to work and life. Despite her extended career as one of Melbourne's most respected gallerists, she describes herself as "personally non-acquisitive" and doesn't bask in her own art collection. Both her home in nearby Carlton and her gallery in Fitzroy are places in which to reset and plan the next worldly endeavour.

It's the same for her business partner and co-director of This Is No Fantasy, Nicola Stein. "In contrast to a traditional idea of home, this is a base from which we identify and create opportunities for artists," she says of the gallery.

## “Our biggest role is being involved in strategy and direction, and putting our artists in the right places, in front of the right people and in the right context.”

“Being an exhibition space is one part of what we do, but it’s a really small part. Our biggest role is being involved in strategy and direction, and putting our artists in the right places, in front of the right people and in the right context.”

Indeed, This Is No Fantasy’s missive is about finding the most relevant ways to operate, show and sell the work of leading Australian artists in what is a shifting, borderless, globalised art market. The days of waiting for people to wander through the door are over, and the gallery’s activities are more akin to a roving representational platform, showing their artists – Juan Ford, Natasha Bieniek, Michael Cook, Petrina Hicks and Jacqui Stockdale among them – at a string of major international art fairs. In the process, they’ve helped set the model for a new way of working and encouraged other small Australian outfits to do the same.

“Some like me won’t just open a bricks and mortar gallery again in the future,” says Tanzer, who originally worked in radiology, as a matter of fact. “The art world has changed.”

This Is No Fantasy was founded in 2012 after the retirement of Helen Gory Galerie, for whom Stein, a former lawyer, was a director and Clark a gallery manager.

The last four years have been a whirlwind to say the least, with the outfit showing at various editions of Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Stage Singapore, Sydney Contemporary, Art16 London, Volta New York and Art Platform Los Angeles among several other fairs in and outside the region. “It really happened organically and developed a fantastic momentum,” says Stein.

But while a life of international travel and art fair openings might have a “seductive” ring to it, as Tanzer suggests, the realities exist elsewhere. “It’s not romantic at all,” laughs Stein. “It’s a tenacity that we have that helps drive artists and vice versa. There’s a dynamic at play, which is directly tied to dedication and drive, and working together is really about resources and support and stamina.”

The focus of all this labour and commitment is both lofty and unassuming in its bearings. “You like to be connected with things that have longevity – you want there to be a continuum in your career and your life and what you’re part of,” says Tanzer, before Stein finishes her sentence.

**“Being around artists and creative forces drives you and is an incredible privilege.”**

“And that your role has impact,” she says. “That you’re part of the trajectory of art history in some small way. It’s about being part of something bigger: Australian identity and history and culture. Those are big themes and it’s exciting to be part of that discourse.”

And it seems to be working, with four of This Is No Fantasy’s artists – Chris Bond, Jacqui Stockdale, Tom Moore and Abdul Rahman-Abdullah – curated into this year’s prestigious Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art and countless others partaking in institutional exhibitions and residencies throughout Australia and the world.

“Being around artists and creative forces drives you and is an incredible privilege,” says Stein. “When it works, it’s great – it feels like we doing something right and we’re doing something good. It’s very rewarding personally for us and really endorse the way we’re doing things.”

But there are plenty of more humble rewards closer to home. Tanzer wanders off on a story about a recent acquisition, in which she placed a major Juan Ford work with a young collector. “There was no fuss or effort,” she says.

“He had been watching Juan’s career and has a real interest and when this painting came in, he just loved it and bought it,” she smiles. “You get a kind of vicarious pleasure as a gallerist.”

“It’s great when someone walks in and you can just see that the work resonates with them,” says Stein. “When you see someone quite young, not necessarily with a lot of money, develop the kind passion and the bug, and you see their collection and their passion develop, that’s impactful and incredibly rewarding.”




# 10. A place to share.

Troy *Wheeler* —

For Troy Wheeler, butchery means a lot more than running a neighbourhood shop front. While you get the feeling that the country boy would still be at home raising a head of cattle in hometown of Barham on the Murray River, his adopted home of Collingwood does him just fine, and his approach to his craft has seen him help change the face of butchery as we knew it.

Via Wheeler and Andrew McConnell's Smith Street business Meatsmith, Wheeler plays the role of rare breed advocate, specialist wholesaler, restaurant collaborator, multifaceted retailer, advisor, teacher and student. Nurturing relationships – with rare breed farmers, with customers, with collaborators – and the basic act of sharing knowledge and food are at the heart of Wheeler's world.


# Troy *Wheeler* —

Troy Wheeler is not one for extravagant language. He's approachable, talkative and affably direct. But waffle on, he most certainly does not. He grins at questions of business philosophy, instead preferring to direct the conversation through a prism of straight-talk: the who, why and the how.

"There's nothing better than sitting down to some good food and a great glass of wine at home with your family and friends," he offers in his typically direct manner, leaning on the glass display case by the towering front window of Meatsmith. "It's good to be part of that process for people."

If there's one theme to emerge in our conversation, it's that of the butcher's role beyond the counter. The job isn't so much in selling product, but in helping people have a positive experience in sharing quality food. The butcher isn't there to simply peddle for a producer, but rather plays a fundamental role in making a home cook's meal with family and friends the best it can be.

## “Andrew and I both share the same values around the provenance of where your product comes from, the quality of the product, the story behind it.”

“Meatsmith isn’t about everything being really high-end,” says Wheeler. “We wanted to find a happy medium in which we can give a really smart service, but it’s accessible for all kinds of people who love food.

“Our staff are amazing and have really great food knowledge and give really great customer service, and creating a space around that – having really low counters so you don’t have that barrier between you and the customer, having a really great range of offerings, so you’ve got some in the top of the range and some really great, cheaper stuff.”

Meatsmith, which Wheeler opened with award-winning chef Andrew McConnell in 2015, is no ordinary butcher. While the striking retail outlet – which is marked by towering ceilings, marble counters, vintage equipment and luxury of space – deals in anything from specialised chef’s knives imported from France and Japan, various hand-selected groceries and books, all the way through to a curated range of wines from small producers in Australia and overseas, it’s the core product that really sets it apart.

Specialising in rare breeds from small producers, dry aged meats, premade dishes such as terrines, as well as house-made mustards and pickles, Meatsmith is as much about advocating for producers and sharing their stories.

“Andrew and I both share the same values around the provenance of where your product comes from, the quality of the product, the story behind it and the hard work that farmers put into their produce,” says Wheeler. “Meatsmith was about us being able to give them an avenue to showcase that and to tell their stories to the general consumer. Andrew does that through his restaurants and his food, so for us to create a retail context for that was really exciting.”

The conversation falls on one of Meatsmith’s key suppliers, as we take the tour of the production facility at the rear of the building – an impressive “vertical factory” encompassing various preparation areas, a commercial kitchen, a smoke oven for hams, dry age cool rooms, walk-in blast freezers and a processing and dispatch facility for Meatsmith’s 19 wholesale customers, which include McConnell’s seven restaurants and other leading eateries around Collingwood and the inner city.

## “I really enjoy cooking when I have the chance... I love roasting up a beautiful, big, rib eye and sharing it with some friends and family.”

“The producer I deal with most is probably Katy Brown, who owns Glen Eyrie Rare Breeds Farm outside of Elmore,” says Wheeler. “She is a pig farmer and breeds all of the rare breed pigs that exist in Australia at the moment and works to reintroduce all these species and develop their numbers.

“We speak weekly and she can talk underwater about pigs.” A laugh. “For us, it’s not only because it’s really great pork, but it’s to create awareness about these breeds.”

Wheeler’s interest in the specificities of breeding and ethical production can be traced back to his early years, growing up on a cropping and cattle farm outside the tiny Murray River town of Barham. Having left school at an early age, he landed a job in the local butcher shop, where he was exposed to all manner of different approaches and breeds, from purebred Angus and Hereford to Murray Grey.

“Because it was such a small place, you got to know all the farmers around the community and saw some really interesting products coming through,” he recalls. “I found it really interesting that they were all so different – the make up of them, the type of meat – and then I started thinking about why people don’t sell product for what it actually is, like they do in Europe. Why don’t they give the necessary background about what makes a certain breed different or unique?”

He would eventually land a job in Melbourne, working for prestigious butcher Peter Bouchier, becoming manager within 12 months of working his first shift and going on to work with him for 13 years. He would meet McConnell around the time he was establishing the Builders Arms on Gertrude Street and would end up managing their meat and dry age facilities before embarking on their Meatsmith endeavour.

Wheeler is the first to admit that, since opening Meatsmith, his time at home has been limited. But when he is there, the formula is simple. “I really enjoy cooking when I have the chance,” he smiles. “I love roasting up a beautiful, big, rib eye and sharing it with some friends and family.

“I think it’s a really great experience, sitting down and sharing some good wine and some good food with those closest to you. Just keeping it simple.”

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