



You looking at me?

The stories behind
the world's 10 most
photographed faces

FASHION

Style school:
swotting up on
the rag trade

LIFE

Trysts with
the friends
you can trust

HOMES

Hot-shot local
designers
kicking goals

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After the party's
over, get up
and glow

TRAVEL

Campervan
cruising for the
whole family

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Jarvis Cocker
melts into the
foreground

Design forward

Melbourne's creative future is shaping up well.
Andrew Stephens reports.

PICTURES ROB BANKS

Helen Kontouris is having a little sit down in her new chair. The chair looks like a giant piece of tomato fettuccine, suspended mid-twist. How can this thin ribbon, apparently just a strip of red felt, support any weight — even that of this small, stylish woman?

Rest assured, this chair (known as the 101, seen right with Kontouris) is extremely comfortable and sturdy. The careful design — a marriage of clever engineering and deft intuition about comfort — has made what might have been a cold manufacturing exercise into a pleasant surprise.

Kontouris — whose name nicely echoes the contours of her mellow work — is one of a clutch of new designers beginning to break onto the local and global scenes with great promise.

Kontouris is only 30 but her folio is plump full of interesting goodies. The 101 chair is now in production and fronts the store at Schiavello, the sleek Australian interior-design house at Southbank. And her La La Lamp, manufactured by Italian design company Kundalini, is selling at the exclusive Space shop in Church Street, Richmond. It's so popular that the day we go to have a squiz, the shop has sold out.

Kontouris began her professional life as an interior designer and found, once she'd started her own business with a partner, that they were designing everything in the rooms they'd been commissioned to fit out — from the ground up. And so she moved into furniture and object design. As she shows me her work, there's an impressive range including cafe chairs, a modular airline or nightclub communal seating system, porcelain cups, a completely flat plate with a small recess to cradle the spoon, and salt-and-pepper mills.

It's no wonder, then, that Kontouris says next year is going to be big. But she won't say too much: there are at least 10 design items in production and she has done some impressive deals. When she's asked what she's working on at the moment, she says coyly: "Lots." And that's all.

With the Melbourne Museum showcasing the country's smartest young designers in *Freestyle: new Australian design for living* (until February 4), there

