



FJ Markets no longer stalled, but racing

Description



Life can be a laugh: Fletcher Jones market stall volunteer Dianne Gaetani, with Jax, and stallholder Lisa Austin whose stall specialises in “garage-nalia”.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] F[dropcap]or a dedicated op-shopper and sucker for the secondhand like me, walking into the Fletcher Jones Markets is overwhelming to the senses.

And I am not the only one.

Since *Bluestone Magazine* moved into a small office above the markets, I have been privy to the comings and goings of the dozens of people who venture in for a look around. And they all do what I did on my first visit: stop, stare and sort of slowly exhale when they realise this is second-hand heaven, market Mecca, op-shop overload.



“When I first saw the place, I fell in love with the place,” says stallholder **Eric van der Wal**, a retired federal public servant who has collected antiques all of his life and is now selling off a few pieces as a hobby.

Eric is one of 26 different stall holders who, between them, have filled two levels of what was once the Fletcher Jones factory floors with an eclectic and colourful variety of collectables, antiques, clothing, vintage, vinyl records, ephemera, furniture, dining wear, trinkets, soaps, wind chimes, musical instruments, artworks and a mind-boggling array of bits and bobs.

“People can wander through here and find something whether they are a serious collector, or whether they are just looking for some nice little piece to take home that is cheap,” Eric says.

But it wasn't always as alluring.



Stallholder Eric van der Wal who joined the markets after retiring to Warrnambool: “When I first saw the place, I fell in love with the place”.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] M[/dropcap]any of the stallholders remember the “difficult days” when the markets were part of the Mill Markets group, run by the then-owner of the Fletcher Jones complex, **Ian Ballis**, whose company went into administration in mid-2012.

While the future of the Fletcher Jones site hung in the balance, the markets stalled and then barely clung on as the derelict factory began to continue to fall apart around them.

But then businessman **Dean Montgomery**, who hails from Geelong but now lives in China, bought the 2.3ha site in early 2014 and began an entirely new chapter for the factory.

Fears the markets would be “moved on” were not only put to one side, but the entire space has seen significant amounts of money spent on repairs and making the markets look clean, water-tight and professional.

As one stallholder says, snapping her fingers, “we were so used to being told things would get done and they would never happen, to now being told something will get done and it happens like that!”



A feast for the eyes: every nook and cranny at the markets is filled with an eclectic array of collectables, gifts and goods.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] O[/dropcap]n-site manager **Troy Kelly**, who began 12 months ago, said the markets were part of the long-term vision for the complex, which will [centre on the Warrnambool Motor Museum](#)

that is now under construction at the far eastern end.

“We would hope to continue to make the markets bigger and better as part of a mix that will bring a whole variety of different people here, and who can make a day of it,” Troy explained.

That mix will include the car museum, scheduled to open in 2016, the markets, the art studios [at Factory Arts](#), and the new [Outlaw Gallery](#), all overlooking the refurbished Pleasant Hill gardens that now have the help of paid gardeners provided through Western District Employment Agency (WDEA).

“In just the time I have been here we are starting to see a real increase in foot traffic and that is only going to get better,” Troy said.

Eric has noticed the same shift.

“Everything is looking and feeling a lot better,” he says.

“There is so much enthusiasm around what can be done and it is great to be a part of that.”



Original vinyl: from gramophone records to retro records, the turntable is still very much in vogue at the markets.

[box]The FJ Markets are at the western end of the Fletcher Jones factory, Flaxman St, Warrnambool. Open seven days from 10am -5pm. You can also [find them on Facebook here](#) .[/box]



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