

Just the kit for Portland culture

## **Description**



Simon Greening decided the only way to fix the problem of there being few funky shops for young people in Portland was to open his own with his brother, Jason.

**By Carol Altmann**

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] I [/dropcap]f you are young and living in the country, there are two ways to approach a lack of groovy shops in your town: either keep feeling depressed about it, or try and do something to change it.

**Simon and Jason Greening** are two Portland brothers who are taking the latter approach and have decided to pursue their long-held dream of owning a business, while also catering for a clear gap in the town by opening a very cool comic and art-based gift shop, Culture Kit.

**“We grew up here and wanted to stay in Portland, but a lot of the younger people here say there is nothing to do, so we decided to create something a bit different,” Simon explains.**

“At first we thought about an upmarket bookshop, but we can see how hard it has been for The Little Bookshop (which closed at the end of last month), so we went for the comics and graphic art,” he says.

Simon, 27, has a graphic art and design background, and it shows in the shop’s interior decorating, which has transformed a former florist on the corner of Julia and Percy streets into a uber-cool space with bright yellow walls, marine ply display cases, a stack of empty milk crates and two couches on either side of a communal jigsaw puzzle.

Add some chillout tunes fresh from the ipod and the space is just the sort of place people would like to linger. At least that is the plan.

"We are ready to do the slow, hard climb," Simon says.

"We have tried to keep our overheads as low as we can, and our level of debt as low as we can, so it stays manageable while we grow."



Part-owner Jason Greening tries the chillout lounge in Culture Kit which specialises in comics and art-inspired gifts.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] J[/dropcap]ason, 30, has accountancy skills and worked in a variety of jobs before joining his brother with Culture Kit. Both he and Simon continue to work in low-pressure jobs elsewhere in Portland, just to keep the income ticking over while the business builds.

Jason, who was unfortunately away at the time *Bluestone* dropped in for a spontaneous visit, has a night-time cleaning job, while Simon works at the local IGA supermarket.

Eventually, of course, the pair hope to be living off their comic sales and what Simon describes as "short run, high-quality, hand-made" gifts, such as screenprinted cushions, art magazines and personal care products aimed at discerning men.

Culture Kit took its first risk by opening at the start of winter – on the Queen's Birthday long weekend – but despite the often challenging weather, it is slowly building a loyal clientele.





Some of the characters that can be found hanging around the building, reflecting the changing face of comic culture.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] C[/dropcap]omics, in case you hadn't noticed, have come a long way from the days of the being a disposable read that would keep the kids quiet on the train.

Now there is an entire industry aimed at the late-teen or adult reader, with many based on television shows or movies, some from Asian (particularly Japanese) culture, or simply a niche market – like zombies – that has its own cult following.

And then there are those comics that are purely for collecting.

"Some people buy them to read, while other people order in a particular comic and don't even open them," Simon says.

Serious comic buffs will also buy the same comic several times if it is released with alternate covers.

"We try and look after everyone, from the comic nerds to those who just want the more traditional stuff like Superman and so far that seems to be working," Simon says.

**[box] Culture Kit is at 40 Percy St, Portland. You can find them on [the web here](#) or follow them on [Facebook here](#). [/box]**

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