



Time stands still in Reicha's store

Description



Reicha's drapery store in Cobden is, like its sister shop in Terang, a throwback in time to when retail was all about customer service, running up an account and trying things on.

Words and photos by Carol Altmann

Long before online shopping and well before Target and K-Mart, there were places like **Reicha's** in Terang, a clothing and haberdashery store that sold a bit of everything.

That “everything” includes things like buttons, bras and balls of wool; shoes, zippers, sunglasses and hats; hankies, dressing gowns, school uniforms and reels of cotton in every conceivable colour.

It is the sort of shop where customers can still run up an account and the wooden front counter has been polished smooth by the hundreds of hands with which it has made contact over the past 55 years.

But now Reicha's, like so many stores of its kind that have already disappeared, is hanging on by a thread.



Michael Reicha, the son of store founder Les Reicha, has kept the store going since

his mother's retirement but now feels it is coming into its last chapter.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] O [/dropcap]wner **Michael Reicha**, who has worked in the family business for 26 years, is now 56 years old and while he has children of his own, he is a realist and knows their future will not be in the shop.

"We are losing the generations from our shops. They are no longer being passed on like they were because everything has changed with how we shop and where we shop, and so much of it is now online," he says.

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Reicha's survives on the back of a base of loyal customers and providing, as Michael describes it, "the sort of personal service that you can't get online, where people can see, feel and try something on and bring it back if they are not happy with it".

The day of *Bluestone*'s visit, one of those regular customers was buying a rose pink dressing gown for her elderly mother, while another was browsing the lines of women's tops. It might not be described as "jumping", but it was steady.



A rotating stand full of ladies hankies. Just one of the many original items that are still used in the store.

Michael's co-worker **Linda Kenna**, who grew up in Terang, remembers when the two-storey shop had separate counters for men's and women's clothing, and the place was bustling with people buying balls of wool and lengths of fabric to make their own clothes.

"One whole wall was packed just with balls of wool," Michael adds, laughing, "which is hard to imagine now".

The story behind Reicha's is one of tenacity and tragedy.

The business was started by Michael's father, **Les Reicha**, a Lebanese migrant who originally settled in Geelong and – like Sir Fletcher Jones before him – bought a hawker's van and travelled around the western district in the 1940s and 50s, selling his wares.

"He used to come down and sell clothing to the farmers and spend the night at the Noorat Hotel," Michael says.

"Dad loved this area, loved the people, and so eventually he moved here and started in a shop across the road before buying this shop."



Michael Reicha and employee Linda Kenna who grew up in Terang and remembers visiting the store as a child, when it was in its prime.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] T [/dropcap]ragedy struck, however, in 1973 when Les drowned at Peterborough while fishing. He left behind his wife, Elaine, and four children, including Michael who was aged just 13.

Elaine, who is still living, continued on with the business in Terang and a smaller shop in Cobden, while also raising her young family.

"I don't know how she did it on her own, but Mum kept the shop going even with four kids," Michael says.

And while Michael expects "Reicha's" will come to a close when he eventually retires, he is pragmatic rather than nostalgic.

"It is coming to an end...and while it is a battle sometimes, it is still a good battle," he says, smiling.



All buttoned up: Reicha's is still a place for haberdashery and those who like to make their own clothes.

[box]Reicha's Drapery is at 74 High St, Terang, in the 1916 Kelly Building's which are set to be freshened up as part of a Corangamite Council owner incentive program. Reicha's also have a store at 16 Curdie St, Cobden. No website and no Facebook page but drop in to either shop to see retail as it used to be.[/box]



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