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## Strateas.Carlucci

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After becoming the first Australian label to show at Paris Men's Fashion Week, Melbourne's Strateas.Carlucci is returning to the City of Light with a womenswear collection designed to take the brand to even greater global heights.

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It's a chilly winter afternoon in Melbourne but Peter Strateas and Mario-Luca Carlucci are focused on Paris in the spring time as they work to complete their new range to show during the spring summer collections in the world's fashion capital.

Strateas is finessing designs as Carlucci juggles a telephone call to a modelling agency while simultaneously booking flights to Paris and greeting this journalist: in short it's business as usual for the talented Australian design duo.

"It's always a manic rush to the finish line but everything comes together in the end," laughs Carlucci. "Being based on the other side of the world has its challenges but we wouldn't work any other way."

The modern, industrial feel of their minimalist East Brunswick studio is indeed a world away from the history

and romance of Paris, but the splendid isolation has allowed Strateas.Carlucci to hone a distinct and desirable aesthetic that in June saw the label become the first ever Australian menswear brand to show on the official schedule in Paris during Men's Fashion Week. The duo's dark and brooding collection of oversized trenches, blazers and luxurious knits in high tech fabrications won plaudits from the global style press in town for a week of shows that included Givenchy, Saint Laurent and Louis Vuitton.

"It was an amazing experience to show alongside the world's best labels and the response was really gratifying," says Carlucci. "But we haven't really had time to sit back and reflect on it because we've been working on the next collection."

That new range is the women's collection the duo will show in Paris later this month as part of the newly established Australian Fashion Chamber (AFC) showrooms, designed to promote Australian talent in the City of Light.

"It is great to have the support of the AFC getting behind everyone and pushing us," says Strateas. "We are excited to see what the response will be to that initiative."

Strateas.Carlucci has had an overwhelmingly positive response since high school friends Peter Strateas and Mario-Luca Carlucci founded the brand in 2012 after running a more casual and youth-focused street wear label called Trimapee.

"Trimapee was successful but we just grew up and wanted to do something more sophisticated," says Strateas. "Our aesthetic was changing, we were maturing and we had a vision to take our new brand globally."

They aimed high from the beginning, travelling to Paris in 2013 to present their collection to buyers from a small showroom in the Marais.

"We thought we'd throw ourselves in the deep end and see what happened," says Strateas.

Accolades swiftly followed. In March this year Strateas.Carlucci was a finalist in the prestigious International Woolmark Prize after snaring the Tiffany & Co National Designer Award and the International Woolmark Prize for the Australian region in 2014. Strateas.Carlucci now has stockists in Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia and the USA, and are focused on strengthening existing buyer relations as well as building new ones.

"Taking the collection to Paris each season and also showing the collection on the official calendar has opened many doors, and given us great opportunities," says Carlucci. "As we are still a relatively small business we handle most of the distribution ourselves...our aim is to build the right relationships and work with the best stores that want to support and grow our vision."

The appeal of the label is its signature darkly unisex aesthetic, which is rendered via precision tailoring and exquisite draping that is a world away from the bikinis and board shorts stereotype often associated with Australian fashion.

"We send a message of luxury and sophistication with our clothes and we are as global as the next brand in our way of thinking," says Carlucci. "You do still run into buyers who are surprised that our label comes from Australia but if anything it adds value to our brand as a point of difference."

Being based in Melbourne has allowed the duo to refine its androgynous, asymmetrical aesthetic in a progressive environment conducive to pure creativity and new ideas.

"Australia is still quite young as a country compared to the rest of the world, so we are still growing, evolving and learning and it's really fun to be a part of that as creatives," says Strateas. "Melbourne is a city with a

diverse culture, and magnetic energy we are constantly drawn to. From the people to the surrounds, we are always inspired by the city's variety."

The relaxed lifestyle and stimulating ambience of what is consistently voted "the world's most liveable city" also assists the pair with maintaining design originality and upholding their considerable work ethic. "It's nice to be detached from the craziness of Paris or New York and work in our own bubble because you can easily become distracted and devoured by other things in bigger cities."

Strateas and Carlucci will present the brand's new Myopia collection in October. Based on the impermanence and unpredictability of memory, the range employs silhouettes that elongate and twist, and textures that blur and blister.

"The starting point was this idea of memory and how it manipulates to fade and change over the course of time," says Carlucci.

The pair experimented with drawing from memory while blindfolded during the design process.

"We drew parts of the collection blindfolded as a playful experiment, and we found we had these amazing misplaced details, so if you were drawing a blazer the pockets were displaced and the sleeves were out of proportion," says Carlucci.

Distortion is also embedded in the fabrics: silks are crushed, basket weave knits bubble with unusual textures and a polyurethane coated fibre is woven into a cotton/linen blend to create rigid, highly sculptural shapes and silhouettes.

"We've managed to create these very minimal, textural forms but, using high quality fabrics, means they still sit softly on the skin and fall gently around the body," says Carlucci.

The pair's background studying industrial design (Carlucci) and graphic design (Strateas) at Melbourne's RMIT University means they approach the creative process differently to designers who attend fashion school.

"We look at things a little less traditionally and draw on the pure design skills we've gained from independent study," say Carlucci. "We try to push our boundaries every season because we don't want to become complacent. Sometimes those risks pay off and other times we may fall flat on our faces but it's the risk taking that furthers our practice and keeps things exciting."

The priority for the future is maintaining design integrity while growing international sales.

"We want to continue to grow our brand while ensuring every collection is stronger and continues to push our creative limits," says Strateas. "Each season if we can design a better collection to the last we are getting closer to where we want to be."

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