AUSTRALIAN ink

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Left to right: Megan Oliver, Rhys Gordon, Cliffe Clayton and Kian Forreal.

INNER VISION

251 Crown Street,
Sydney, NSW
www.innervisiontattoo.com.au

INNER VISION is one of Sydney's best-known and respected tattoo studios, opening its doors 14 years ago when owner, Cliffe Clayton, returned from touring the US and spending four years studying under the world-respected John 'The Dutchman' van 't Hullenaar in Vancouver, Canada.

The shop started with a crew of one in the back streets of Surry Hills doing great custom Japanese tattooing at a time when few were doing it in Australia. From there the reputation of the shop and artist line-up grew into what it is now – a premier street/custom tattoo shop with five full-time artists and a regular crew of international guests making yearly visits.

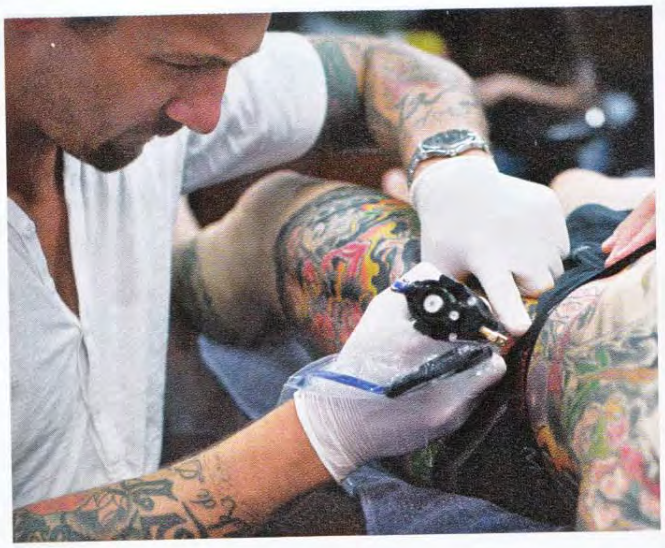
Open seven days a week, the studio recently moved from its old terrace location to a spacious new shop across the road. Studio Manager and Australian Ink's resident tattoo advisor, Kian Forreal says: "It was definitely the end of an era, but the new shop at 251 Crown Street is four floors of shop space with lots of natural light and room to move and be creative. Everyone is super happy with the new shop. We really needed more space."

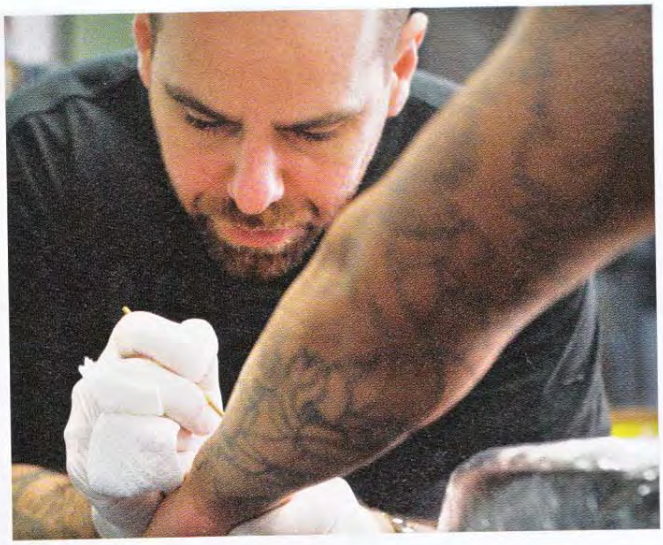
The studio caters for diverse clientele, open for walk-ins on the weekend and custom during the week. "People will always travel for quality. We get investment bankers, artists, mums, blue-collar workers, restaurateurs, musicians – pretty much the entire spectrum of people that want the best tattoo they can find. We stand behind our work 100 per cent," Kian says.

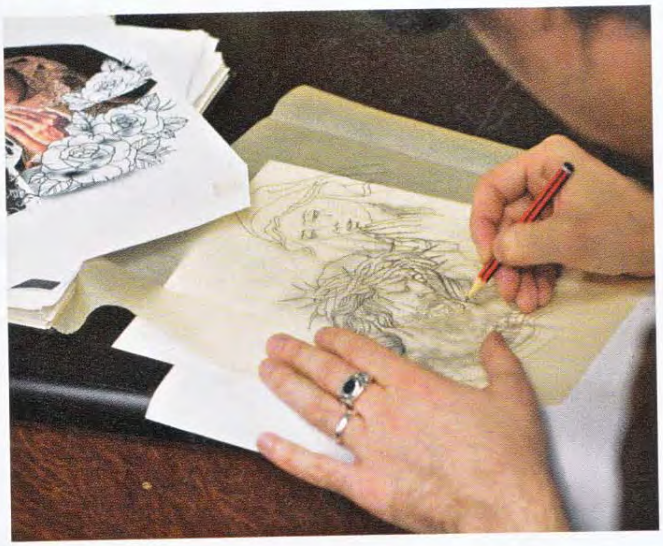
With thousands of pre-drawn designs in both classic and contemporary styles, there is an extensive reference library for anyone looking for custom work. Photographic portfolios of all current studio artists are available, with each of the artists capable in most styles yet choosing to specialise in their own favourites for custom work. The studio also has a rotating roster of guests that are good all-rounders as well as specialists.

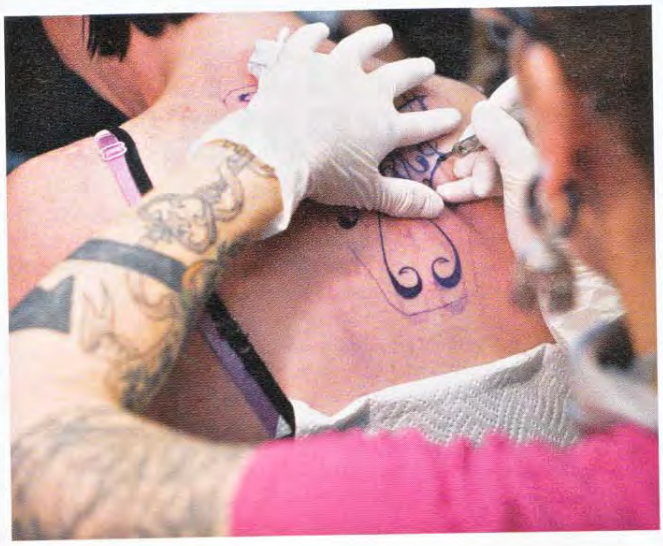
Ensuring the standards are met through a combination of highly artistic, skilled tattooists with true passion, great client communication and hospital-grade sterilisation procedures, Inner Vision puts its success down to its employees. Kian elaborates: "We are very discerning about who we hire and what we look for in potential artists. You must have a high regard for tattooing in general and a great portfolio to back it up. We also prefer at least 10 years shop experience."

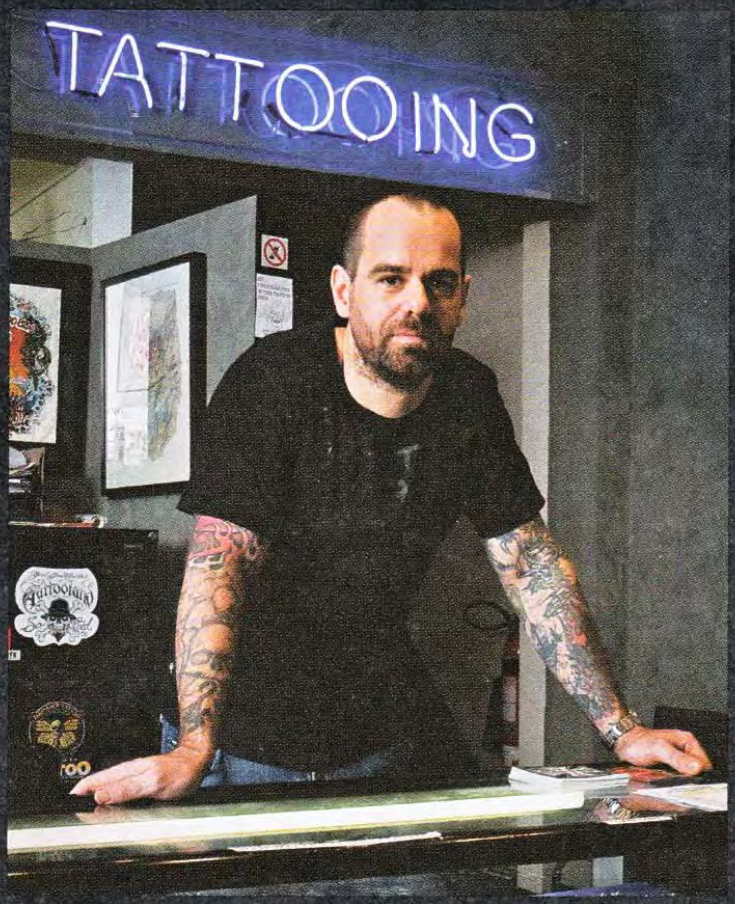
photos by MATT LOWDEN











AUTHENT/INK

Australian Ink's resident tattoo advisor Kian Forreal talks you through first impressions, doing your homework and shop etiquette when getting your first tattoo.

Tattoos can be viewed a lot like book covers in the modern world – used to differentiate oneself from the masses and stand apart from the all-pervading mediocrity of urban culture. Unfortunately, even some tattooing is part of this lukewarm landscape.

Tattooing has become so mainstream, so accepted by soccer mums, bankers and everyone else, and so co-opted by the status quo, that the tattoo-curious first-timer, the serious collector and anyone wanting that authentic tattoo experience needs to look deeper into the rabbit hole to find the real artists out there producing master-class tattoos.

Nothing is more important than one's first tattoo, as this sets the tone for the rest to come. And rest assured, there will be more. There always is, as few people who get a good tattoo stop there. By the same token, a bad experience can turn a person off for a few years, but a good experience stokes the fires and has first-time clients thinking about their second, third and fourth tattoos while the machine is still putting in the outline of their first.

I have done half sleeves, full sleeves and even entire back pieces on first-time clients who had the foresight, desire and determination to take the leap of faith. In the end, they were all very happy with the decision and came back for more. They wear their tattoos proudly now, knowing they made the right choice by not accumulating small 'tester' tattoos in the sweet spots of their arms, chest and back, spoiling their skin for when they decided to get their 'real' tattoos once they saw what was possible and the fear of the unknown was gone.

Although tattoo laser fading and removal is accessible and affordable now it can easily be avoided in the first place by making the right decisions before getting tattooed. This means choosing the right artist and the right shop and having the right attitude yourself.

If you're not sure about what I am saying, go down to the beach on any summer's day, have a look at all the small, blurry tattoos people have randomly placed on their bodies and ask yourself 'is that how I want to look after getting tattooed?' The answer is probably no.

There is definitely an art to getting a great tattoo and making yourself look

good forever. You are representing yourself when you permanently mark your skin, and too many people overlook the obvious fact that tattoos are for life and should be taken a bit more seriously than a haircut. Pretty girls with crappy tattoos are not a good look anymore and well-groomed men in nice clothes and expensive watches don't suit haphazard tattoo work on their arms.

Do your homework on the Internet, and take your time to find an artist whose work you like in the style of your choice. Many good artists specialise in a particular style, so be certain your artist is well-versed in yours. For instance, a portrait artist is probably not the best person for tribal designs or traditional Japanese work and an artist who specialises in black and grey is not the artist to go to for bright, colourful pieces. This may seem glaringly obvious, but many clients seem to think they are challenging their artist's skills and doing them a 'favour' by encouraging them to go outside their normal scope, when the fact is most tattoo artists spend years developing their own style because it's where their true passion lies.

Don't be discouraged if your artist is out of state or even overseas – travelling to get tattooed is a common thing now and many people happily do so to get the tattoo they desire. Make contact with your chosen artist, organise consults to find out how they prefer to do business and then you can get the ball rolling.

After all that, one of the most important things to do is to gather photo references of things you like and/or want to incorporate into your tattoo. These can be tattoo photos (for inspiration, not copying), pictures from art books, paintings, prints, statues, etc. Any visual clues as to the direction you want to go really make the consultation process much easier for both client and artist.

Listen to your artist and respect what he or she has to say. If you were drawn to a particular artist's work based on their portfolio and their attitude is agreeable with you then by all means put some faith in what they say and give them some license to create something nice for you. Did I mention respect? Have respect for the person about to mark you for life. Show up on time, be sober, clean and calm and try to refrain from bringing an entourage with you. Tattooing is not a spectator sport. Once you find an artist you can relate to and work well with the rest, as they say, is history.

Oh yeah, and be prepared to wait. Most good tattoo artists have a waiting list for a consultation, in some cases up to a year or two. This is usually a sign that you're onto something and once in you'll get the tattoo you most definitely deserve.

Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 16 years international experience and specialises in traditional Japanese tattoo work. He has worked all over the world and has studied under some of the leading tattoo artists of today. He is based in Sydney at Inner Vision Tattoo, Surry Hills. For more, visit www.kianforreal.com *or, for information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal, please visit* www.fadeyourtattoo.com.