

SE Lifestyle
HD **Inside a rusty tin shed a knitting studio unravels**

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Dean Jones built The Knit Studio in an old shed on his Mornington Peninsula farm, making high-end woollen garments for the rag trade, writes Sarah Hudson FROM the outside it's like any man cave: a centuries-old, rusty, corrugated iron shed, set on a horse farm on the Mornington Peninsula.

But step inside and you enter a parallel universe of high-end fashion. Dean Jones' The Knit Studio is a bespoke knitting mill in Red Hill, which produces cashmere, silk and superfine Merino wool garments for the rag trade.

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Dean says it's a contrasting rural scene that fools many an unsuspecting visitor.

"The stock feed guy rolled up with a delivery of hay the other day and he went to put it in the shed and got quite a shock to see what was inside," Dean laughs.

"People go in there and can't understand how it can happen. How just me, working alone, can produce such garments out of a tin shed." Dressed like a typical Australian male in his uniform of jeans and T-shirt, the 45-year-old says he is nonetheless part of a "fashion family".

His partner, Kate, is general manager of Midas shoes, commuting each day to her headquarters in Melbourne, and has a soft spot for the odd Prada handbag.

Dean himself has been in the fashion industry since he was 18, when he started his apprenticeship at a small, Italian, family-run knitting mill in Melbourne, while studying part-time at the Melbourne School of Fashion.

"I started in the industry just before **Chinese** imports started to take a hold and just before mechanisation took over.

"I learnt every facet of the **business**, making fabric, preparing it, making garments. It was such a varied role, nothing was ever mundane." Over the next few years Dean rose through the ranks of the **business**, moving well beyond "pure nanna hand-knitting", increasing his knowledge when knitting machines were introduced and becoming a specialist in technical programming. He's travelled to Japan 13 times — where machines are manufactured — to learn how to operate them.

Kate and Dean moved to Red Hill in 2000, to indulge their love of horses and it was seven years ago, when they had their daughter Sage, that Dean became a stay-at-home dad and took the opportunity to start The Knit Studio.

While Dean's strong suit is his technical knowledge, "my passion is design". "What drives me is a look, whether I get inspired from a fashion photo on a runway or a new jumper Kate buys when she travels overseas." From his shed studio he operates three machines, making a range of jumpers and accessories, such as wraps, scarfs and beanies in his signature "casual, comfortable" style, which are **sold** at the Red Hill market, as well as at local retailers and in Gertrude St, Fitzroy.

Garments are made in a range of eight colours, with a foray into yak and camel yarn proving no match for the quality of cashmere, silk and wool.

His **bread** and **butter**, however, is his personalised name blankets, made in 100 per cent cotton, and largely made for children.

Dean describes his skill as “industrial craft”.

“I **m** crafting objects on industrial equipment rather than hand-knitting something.

“It’s not mass-produced. Every piece is quite unique and made out of my tin shed.”

MORE ...The Knit Studio, Red Hill, .theknitstudio.com.au or (03) 5989 6309

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