



**PROJECT**

Aesop Chatswood

**LOCATION**

Chatswood Chase Shopping Centre, NSW

**DESIGNER**

Ryan Russell

**GLAZIER**

Glass Craft Glass & Glazing

**PRINCIPAL GLASS PROVIDER**

Viridian

**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER**

Abbot Design P/L

**GLASS SPECIFICATIONS**

Viridian VFloat Clear™ toughened glass



Aesop

# Aesop Fables

Text - Samantha Senior  
Photography - Dianna Snape

While we may leave with bags full of the latest fashions and wares, too often a visit to a shopping centre can leave us feeling unfulfilled and even slightly exploited. In an attempt to get shoppers to leave their woes at the door and embrace the shopping opportunities that lie within, many centres seek to cocoon consumers in a hermetic environment isolated from the outside world. Once inside, it can be difficult to know whether you're in Sydney, Stockholm or San Francisco. Stores themselves, particularly those that are part of a chain or larger group, rarely offer any guidance. More often than not, the desire to maintain uniform branding across all outlets stamps out any visions of injecting character into individual stores.



Melbourne based design studio, Ryan Russell, has rebelled against such uniformity. "As a practice, we approach every project as a unique opportunity to reveal the hidden personalities of our clients, their businesses and, where appropriate, their location," says Director, Ryan Russell. "Maintaining a brand across multiple sites doesn't have to equate to carbon copy designs."

Ryan Russell was recently named as the winner of Viridian's 2010 Vision Award for Creative Use of Glass in an Interior Application - Commercial, for its design of Aēsop Chatswood. Located in an inner Sydney shopping centre, Chatswood Chase, the store is part of a retail group that sells premium quality skincare products made from the best scientific and botanical ingredients. Aēsop Chatswood is the third Aēsop store that Ryan Russell has designed. While each store is instantly identifiable as part of the Aēsop group, they also have their own individual characteristics.

"For example, Aēsop Doncaster features wall tiles laid in a brick pattern that subtly shifts in plane and texture aiming to create a sense of movement within the space, metaphorically echoing a breeze through gum leaves. This is reflective of its Melbourne's eastern suburb surrounds."

Conversely, when contemplating how to inject a sense of Sydney into Aēsop Chatswood, the designers were inspired by the riparian conditions inherent in the city's culture.

"Essentially, we examined the effect of sunlight as it dances across the waves on Sydney Harbour, the movement and tactility of sailing and the discreet process of swimming and bathing. The store relies on customer movement to subtly shift the action of light on the material surfaces of the exterior and interior to represent these conditions," says Ryan.

The materials palette, lighting, washplane and shopfront are the main conduits for Aēsop Chatswood's riparian theme.

"The soft materials palette of limed marine plywood, off white colouring, coir flooring and aged brass throughout the store provides a subtle reference to yachting and boating, as well as complementing the signature Aēsop dark brown bottles for display," explains Ryan. "The limed ply gives a warm hue to the space, which is also enhanced by the coir flooring. All lights in the front of the house area are halogen, also enhancing the 'sun' effect."



Designer - Ryan Russell





The custom washplane of aged brass of the testing area, combined with carefully positioned and discreet lighting, sets the stage where the customer engages with the product and water directly.

"This element is designed to amplify and remind the individual of the process and joys of swimming and bathing as it casts the hands and face of the tester in a soft golden hue when products are tested. This is also a direct reference to sunrise and sunset across the harbour, the times when the process of bathing generally takes place," says Ryan.

"Aesop products are sumptuous in their stimulation of the senses, but simple and pared back in presentation and philosophy. The material detailing and lighting in is designed to reflect this," shares Ryan.

Aesop's shopfront continues the riparian theme. A façade of floor-to-ceiling vertical glass blades, manufactured from Viridian VFloat Clear™, create reflections that flicker as customers approach the store, subtly echoing the dance of light across the waves of Sydney Harbour.

"I guess you could say that glass is the hero of Aesop Chatswood's design," says Ryan.

"It complements the plywood and antique fittings and makes a huge impact within the shopping centre environment."

While the glass blades were chosen primarily for aesthetic reasons, they also provided two key functional advantages. The open nature of the façade enables the centre's fire detection system to operate at all times, even when the door is closed, while also permeating the scent of Aesop products into the centre.

"Our approach to all materials is to try and use them to both dramatic and functional effect. With 70mm of space between each piece of glass, the design has the add-on effect of allowing the products' scent to waft into the shopping centre. In an environment where stores are competing furiously for a slice of shoppers' attention, this is a significant benefit," says Ryan.

Ryan Russell worked with structural engineer, Abbot Design P/L to ensure the suitability of the glass blades. Concerned about the glass potentially bending during the toughening process, it was decided to toughen each piece individually.

A façade of floor-to-ceiling vertical glass blades create reflections that flicker as customers approach the store.





"While it was a minor possibility, any warping would've deviated from the linear form and been detrimental to the overall design. Toughening each blade individually ensured the best possible and most consistent outcome," says Ryan.

With the shop positioned on a corner within Chatswood Chase, Aesop enjoys a second, less prominent frontage. Three 1200mm wide, floor to ceiling glass panels provide uninterrupted views into the store.

"We specified VFloat Clear™ toughened glass on this aspect as well, due largely to its high light transmission and clarity," comments Ryan.

Ryan says the feedback from the client has been fantastic.

"We always work closely with the client throughout the planning and design process so there are no surprises when we reveal the finished result. I think in this case, we've all been blown away by just how effective the glass blades are. They provide a unique element, while their simplicity ensures they don't overshadow the whole design."

As well as winning the Vision Award, Aesop Chatswood received a commendation in the retail category of the 2010 Interior Design Awards.

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