





Designer Nick Young (left) seeks inspiration from the everyday, with his mood board (above) and studio (opposite) reflecting his approach to design. Here, his sketches come to life.

nice day for a lark

Nick Young, the creative mind behind Two Ruffians, is putting the fun back into design with his range of pop culture-inspired homewares, prints and clothing

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On a recent photo shoot, Nick Young, the owner and designer behind Two Ruffians, came face to face with a young builder who decided to take the mickey out of his leather satchel. Nick explained he'd been given it as a gift, and that it had in fact become pretty handy, thanks very much. "The builder replied that if he'd been given a dress, he wouldn't wear it!" recalls Nick, laughter burring his London accent. "So I went home and drew 'Mr Bag', a thoroughly modern man about town who sports a bushy beard, flat canvas shoes and carries a cool tote. Without the beard, he'd look like a member of Bucks Fizz; without the bag, he'd be lost."

Nick is a master at extracting the extraordinary from the ordinary, turning everyday encounters into smart sketches imbued with pop culture references and irreverent humour. His designs are then screen-printed onto card and fabric, a skill he taught himself after moving to Australia from the UK with his stylist partner Clair Wayman.

"I was like a mad scientist at first," he says, eyes lighting up at the memory. "I set up an ad-hoc screen-printing studio in my laundry, and more than once I got so frustrated I almost gave up. Then, about six months into it, I had a textiles designer friend from the UK visit me to learn about screen-printing and, just like that, I had become the teacher. It suddenly felt so natural." >



Nick's lively designs are as equally at home on clothing (above left) as upon vibrant homewares, such as these bold, graphic and neon-hued cushions (left). An eye-catching selection of Two Ruffians' trademark geometric scarves and tea towels (above) is displayed in a corner.




Nick immerses himself in the screenprinting process (left) to produce his playful range of cards (above). Having become a dab hand with the tools of his trade (below), Nick creates all his pieces by hand, including this parrot print (bottom). "When I started out, I wanted to know every part of the printing process, and I'm still learning," he says.

< Although his childhood in rural England was not particularly arty, Nick's creative impetus swung into action the minute he set foot in hustling, bustling London. "I fell in love with the music scene; acid jazz, rare groove and soul really hit a chord with me," he says. Then [British graffiti artist and activist] Banksy's stencils started popping up and the masses started paying attention. The local art students I hung out with had a profound influence on me; they're still with me when I design." Nick was studying business and finance at the time but he soon put down the calculator and picked up a sketchpad. "It just took me a little bit longer than most to fit into my shoes," he says.

A steady stream of music permeates Nick's Melbourne studio, where he designs, prints, stitches and sews everything by hand. Every drawing tells a story, as good design should. The brazen cockatoo emblazoned on soft tea towels owes its impish grin to singer Noel Gallagher of Oasis. The fluoro-fantastic 'I Left Johnny in the Trolley' sketch gracing the cover of thick greeting cards mischievously references *MasterChef*-crazed parents who, in their frenzy to get home from the supermarket and oil the wok, have left their child behind.

It's clear Nick's one of those rare creators who doesn't fret over the 'correct' way to process a design. "I never think, 'I couldn't possibly do that or use that colour or print that design' because, after I created *Two Ruffians*, I realised the pedestals I'd always put my creative friends on were all in my head. Some people are accountants and some people paint. The accountants buy the art and the artists struggle for their art. I read a quote by [American print designer] Vera Neumann recently, which said, 'A bland cocoon is a dull existence'. Colour and humour are really important to me. I'd be miserable without them, wouldn't you?" he asks, pencil and eraser in hand, readying a sketch.

For more information on *Two Ruffians*, visit tworuffians.com. 



Nick's tips for letting your inner creative loose ...

1 "If you want to design, just do it. Put pencil to paper. Don't worry about other people's opinions; be an individual. The world is big and you're going to need to stand out."

2 "Use the internet as a resource. I referenced the internet obsessively when I first started printing. You don't need a lot of space or equipment to print cards, artworks, small accessories or homewares. Everything you need to know is on the net and people are all too happy to help."

3 "Surround yourself with inspiring books and magazines. Look at how prints are constructed and work back. Ask yourself, 'How can I create something like that?' With a little hard work, the chances are that you can!"