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## Bejewelled in a gilded gallery

It's a space of opulent design, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

MELBOURNE'S treasures are often discovered by chance. This is certainly the case with Pieces of Eight, a new contemporary jewellery gallery in Russell Place, between Bourke and Little Collins streets.

Designed by architect Nonda Katsalidis, his daughter Melanie and project architects Fitt de Felice, the gallery is on the ground floor of the unitised modular apartment building, a building primarily made in a factory.

For Nonda and Melanie Katsalidis, herself a jewellery designer, the collaboration was organic and evolved over family meals. The duo worked on the previous Pieces of Eight fitout, in North Fitzroy (now a workshop). "We knew what we wanted to achieve, but there wasn't a specific plan at the outset," says Ms Katsalidis.

What was planned from the start was a facade that would stop people in their tracks and draw them to the windows. An overscaled steel and glass circular frame, loosely based on a compass, is lined with gold foil fringing.

"We made this [foil] for the opening. It's just stayed with us," she says. "It catches the light, as well as animating the interior."

The Pieces of Eight



The concept for Pieces of Eight evolved over family dinners.

Gallery showcases the work of more than 50 artists — local and international.

As well as jewellery, there are sculptures from New York-based artists such as Phillip Low. Locals include jewellers Lucy Folk, Mark Edgoose and Nina Oikawa. And to ensure the artists are given sufficient attention, there are display cases and drawers directly below containing more of the artists' work.

"Crucial to the cabinet design is lighting and security," Ms Katsalidis says, pointing out the steel drawers.

While most of the jewellery designs are highly refined, the fitout for the two-level gallery is raw, with an almost industrial aesthetic. Bluestone-tiled floors combine with exposed concrete ceilings. And rather than conceal elements, such as water pipes, these are highlighted in yellow, the gallery's signature colour.

A central spine wall/display case in the centre provides an exhibition area for artists and designers. "Every artist has work on show. Each illustrates the diversity in their approach,"

she says. Reminding people the artist's hand is behind each work is a large mirrored hand by Tim Fleming.

A nook at the rear of the gallery has been designed for commissioning work (the gallery has a substantial patronage for wedding and engagement rings).

Katsalidis says the ground floor is "opulent" in comparison with the small workshop and office on the mezzanine level.

Here, the mechanics of the design are fully exposed. Galvanised steel doors, discarded from the building

works, have been cleverly fashioned into desks. And pin-boards made of steel use magnets rather than pins. The small studio is also robust, lined in steel, with hardy rubber flooring.

Although Pieces of Eight is a relatively compact space, the fitout takes advantage of the gallery's high ceilings and punctuated slot windows on the mezzanine.

As well as providing sight lines, there are also louvre windows to provide audio connections. "It's almost impossible to feel shut off," says Ms Katsalidis.