



Europeans' sense of style, particularly in Italy and France, is unmistakable. Talita Schramm, stylish owner of Esther Boutique, has just got back from her first brush with Europe, and talks to Helen Hayward about how taken she was with it, and how it might inspire us here.

europaean style



Story by: Talita Schramm & Helen Hayward
Images by: Talita Schramm



When Talita Schramm visited France and Italy for the first time during our winter, Europe's spring, she was struck by how well-dressed nearly everyone was, and by how poised they were. It was as if being well turned out, in sneakers or high heels, was the most natural thing in the world for them. While the French and Italians weren't more beautiful than the people anywhere else, they did seem, to Talita and her friends, to have a vested interest in always looking their best.

Perhaps, Talita mused, it was because her time was spent in central Florence and in Paris' St Germain, that she was able to bring this first impression home with her, intact. Whereas if she'd strayed further afield, by say, hopping on a bus to the suburbs, she may well have found the streets, and the people on them, less overwhelmingly attractive. However from where Talita and her friends sat in busy sidewalk cafes, everyone, it seemed, had one eye on the passers by. People watching, she discovered with delight, was a completely acceptable thing to do. It wasn't that Parisians or Italians had nothing better to do after lunch than observe passers by, it was that noting and enjoying people's outfits was as central to their experience of city life as the coffee they drank and the lunch they ordered. Gossiping, ordering a double espresso, and being clothes conscious was for them all part of the same thing – European style.





Seeing all this, taking it in both as a traveller and a fashion buyer in her own right, made Talita passionate about encouraging Tasmanian women to invest more in the way they dress – to use their imaginations, fashion magazines, and stores like her own – to dare to dress with style. She'd like to see more women with the confidence to mix and match what they wear, to take a few risks, and to develop the kind of sophistication that she so admires in the European scene.

When Talita first walked around Florence, wide-eyed at the beauty and tradition on every street, she found it hard to imagine that there hadn't been a mistake. How could Europe be under the financial strain it currently is, and for its big fashion houses to be so packed with people? Cartier, Hermes, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Gautier, Bulgari - all these were teaming with customers, despite an otherwise sluggish retail market.

Yes, she admits, these are expensive shops, the top end of the market, and clearly the people who shop in them are far from representative of society. But even so it was clear to Talita that 'making an effort', in terms of personal presentation, was something that Parisians and Italians instinctively did – and not just the rich and wealthy. Rose-coloured glasses or not, the people Talita watched saunter past her sidewalk café were the height of European style. Not always beautiful, but always attractive – a casually studied elegance. They had about them an energy that, she felt, was reflected in the verve with which they dressed.

Pulling on tracksuit pants to visit the corner store just wasn't something that she saw anyone do in her whole five weeks in Europe. A young tanned woman on a bicycle, wearing a white shift and blue high heels, a baguette in her basket, wasn't an advertisement for mineral water - it was a regular part of that particular woman's day. A style lover herself, it struck Talita that what might have been a cliché in Australia – high heels on a bicycle – passed without notice in Paris. Equally an elderly couple, arm in arm in the park, both immaculate in white with a small white dog, pressed themselves on Talita's attention for the fact that the man was, if anything, better dressed than the woman.

Seeing all this, taking it in both as a traveller and a fashion buyer in her own right, made Talita passionate about encouraging Tasmanian women to invest more in the way they dress – to use their imaginations, fashion magazines, and stores like her own – to dare to dress with style. She'd like to see more women with the confidence to mix and match what they wear, to take a few risks, and to develop the kind of sophistication that she so admires in the European scene. Why not slip on a dress tomorrow morning, she suggests, rather than the jeans that lie tossed on your bedside chair?

Classic pieces, tailored jackets, playful accessories, elegant leather shoes, bright colours teamed with neutrals – these are the things that Talita would like to inspire more women to wear. And not just for special occasions, but for everyday wear. Perhaps, she asks, it's the traditions of the big fashion houses, the fact that a Hermes bag or Gucci shoe has been a cultural symbol for a very long time, that accounts for the distinctiveness of European style. Traditions handed down from one generation to the next have given the French and Italians an instinctive appreciation of beautiful things, an eye for quality that – despite globalisation – remains unique to them. And it's this eye for quality, and joie de vivre, that she would most like to encourage here in Tasmania.