



CHRIS HOPKINS

# Reaping what she sews

A crafty lady has turned a hobby into a business. By Luna Soo

To say Nicole Mallalieu is a creative type is something of an understatement. The founder of her own design company selling easy-to-understand sewing patterns for bags and purses has been, among other things, a milliner, a garment pattern maker, and a leather worker, making briefcases and bags by hand. She recently launched her first book, *You Sew Girl*, and makes clothes for herself and her child.

Such is her urge to create, Mallalieu can sometimes be found knitting in post office queues. It's no surprise to discover she's been sewing since she was three.

"I used to sit on my older sister's knee and learn to sew with needle and thread," she says from her Melbourne studio. "When I was five or six I pestered her into teaching me how to use a sewing machine. By high school I was designing and making my own clothes. Mum

was really worried – all I did was make clothes and not go out and make mischief!"

The creative bug had well and truly bitten, setting Mallalieu up for a lifetime of crafty pursuits. After graduating from RMIT's fashion course in 1989, she found freelance work doing clothing alterations, garment illustration and pattern cutting. She later moved to England and Ireland to continue her career.

The urge to share her creative knowledge – coupled with Ireland's bad weather – led Mallalieu to return to Melbourne in 2002, where she became a sewing teacher with a dream of starting her own business.

"I started making and selling patterns and teaching people to sew. I get a real buzz out of teaching. I like the idea that the little bit of what I do can go beyond me, that it opens up other people's creative worlds."

Her own creative world – and business

– was opened two years later with the launch of Nicole Mallalieu Design. It's an achievement based on hard work, determination and, as she says, "sheer bloody-mindedness".

"The first year of being back here wasn't easy; I was teaching and making items to sell in shops and at market stalls and waitressing just to pay the rent," she says. "But there's no point just dreaming the dream, you have to make the effort if you want your business to succeed."

That effort has paid off; now, Mallalieu's sewing classes attract people from across Australia and her sewing patterns and accessories, available through her online shop, are so popular she employs several workers to help her run the business.

"I'm doing what I love, so I'm really lucky," she says modestly. "Business is my hobby and my hobby is my business."

As part of this business, Mallalieu attends several craft fairs a year and will have a stand at this month's Melbourne Craft and Quilt Fair. She will be selling her bag patterns and offering sewing advice. Her patterns, which are "designed to teach people how to sew better and faster", can also be found in her first book, *You Sew Girl*, which was published this year by Harper Collins.

"I was excited about the book but also scared – scared of what other people would think of it. It's a bit like being naked in public – you're exposed to the world once you're in print. Luckily the book's been really well received."

It took Mallalieu about 18 months to write the book, which is full of crafty tips she's learned along the way – sometimes the hard way.

"I make mistakes all the time, it's part of the learning process. There's the phrase, 'there's no such thing as a mistake, just another opportunity for a design feature', but there's only so many design features you can have," she says, laughing.

Having found her lifetime of crafting so fulfilling, Mallalieu wants to help others unleash their creative side – and possibly avoid creating too many "design features" themselves.

"It's more exciting teaching someone how to make something than making it myself." ■

*For more information, visit [nicolemdesign.com.au](http://nicolemdesign.com.au)*

*The Melbourne Craft and Quilt Fair is on from July 28–31 at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. For more information, visit [craftfair.com.au](http://craftfair.com.au)*