

Voyeuristic Chic.

PREMA SURRY HILLS.

With its gothic vibe and an element of voyeurism, Francesco Ruggerino's new Prema salon in the metro-chic district of Surry Hills is certainly turning heads. Situated amidst the heart of Crown Street's popular cultural locale, the second Prema salon continues to spread its holistic philosophy by connecting beauty, fashion and wellbeing within an edgy, creative hair environment. *By Jenny Burns*

Francesco Ruggerino committed hours upon hours of thoughts and ideas to his vision for the new Prema salon in Sydney. His ideals were for a salon that wore many guises – fashion-forward and edgy, yet welcoming. Mysterious, yet memorable. A salon that showcased unique design elements yet was supremely functional.

The results of those hours of mental toil have paid off indeed. Enter Prema mark two, smack bang in the thriving hub of popular urbane Surry Hills. The design of the salon reflects the eclectic and artistic nature of the places and people within Surry Hills, yet still maintains the professional philosophy and vibe of Prema's original eastern suburbs business.

"I wanted to create a place that is memorable, appeals to the senses and is cool and creatively inspiring," Francesco explains. "And I think we've really achieved that. The salon is dark, yet warm and inviting at the same time. Our design targets the fashion forward, but also allows for a warm feel that encourages locals to come in."

There's no denying it, Prema is certainly one hot tamale when it comes to unique salon designs. But for Francesco, his latest business is not just about edgy design elements – functionality is key.

"We opened Prema Surry Hills not only to grow our brand and facilitate the career path growth of our people," Francesco adds, "but also to be able to house separate parts of our business under the one roof. Our education program is now facilitated through this new space, plus we conduct all of our photographic work in-house as well as our communications and marketing."





Prema Surry Hills is not only multipurpose, it is also a moveable space with elements that can be changed and integrated to suit the creative needs of the salon. The result is 116 square metres of edgy salon area that provides creative inspiration for the stylists and a comfortable, interesting environment that clients enjoy escaping to for hours on end. The design defines intimate, individualised spaces and merchandising requirements are resolved within creative architectural elements. In addition to the educational and photographic studio facilities, the full-service Aveda salon incorporates five basins, 21 styling stations, a communal colour table, iPod operated sound system and a retail area featuring Aveda's plant-based hair, skin, body and lifestyle products.

On the eco-chic front, Prema seamlessly merges environmentally sustainable design principles with authentic craftsmanship. Created by Squillace Nicholas Architects, the project was conceived of and executed with materials that respect Aveda's environmentally conscious design principles. Prema Surry Hills also embraces Aveda's global environmental mission by using recycled and sustainable materials where possible throughout, a philosophy that commenced when Prema Bondi Junction was opened in 2004 and has continued with the establishment of the new salon.

"To create a link between our Bondi salon and our new Surry Hills premises, we have used the same themes but added a fresh twist," Francesco reports. "The shop front of Prema Surry Hills is a re-modelling of the well recognised open timber screened sister salon shop front at Prema Bondi Junction. Design features include elements of steel and glass appropriate to the style of the fit out, while still maintaining the identity and brand of Prema that clients can relate to. The recycled timber and rusted steel shop front frames create views from within the salon and tease out the voyeuristic tendencies of passersby, making a graphic impact on the streetscape."

Recycled building materials playfully contrast luxe applied finishes throughout the space, creating an eclectic vibe. The recycled timber railway sleepers used for the shop front were sourced from Metropolitan Demolitions. The timber architraves and timber window frames used to frame individual stylist stations are also recycled items from the Heritage Building centre and various other restoration suppliers.

On the inside, custom eco-paint finishes from Porters were applied to the walls. The ceiling was simply spray painted rather than re-lined to reveal the aesthetics of the existing concrete slab above. The basin room is a dedication to rock 'n' roll icons, with colourful, punchy images that line the walls.

Prema's lighting was designed to spotlight each cutting, colour and washing station, providing adequate lighting equally to the client and colourist/hairdresser, creating a sense of drama and focus. The light fittings are a combination of raw industrial styles juxtaposed with edgy decorative fittings. The make-up station utilises specialised lighting colours to work with make-up artists' needs.

The salon flooring is an epoxy floor product applied over an existing terrazzo floor, creating a surface that is practical, easily cleaned and maintained. Stenciled motifs were incorporated within the finish to reinforce the Prema brand. High quality sanitary fixtures and fittings from Reece service the bathroom, kitchenette and colour room.

The old motto of 'benefit from experience' is very apt at Prema, where Francesco has been fortunate to be able to implement the small missing details discovered in the team's Bondi Junction business within the new salon design. Cutting stations are spaced out to allow for client intimacy. The photographic and make-up area add another dimension to the brand supporting editorial possibilities for staff and external parties. The design also incorporates a magnetic blackboard and projector to allow for training and education use.

Overall, the Prema design aesthetic has a somewhat Gothic feel, which Francesco says was inspired by the Tim Burton cult classic, *Edward Scissorhands*.

"Prema has a magnetic pull for the passerby and the design of the salon automatically draws people into the space," Francesco clarifies. "It has so much to say, but is also mute at the same time – just like Edward."

"Personally, I love the old windows, striking basin area and photographic studio. The old steel on the bench tops and Edward Scissorhands motifs stenciled on the floor I also like. The retail and front desk area continues to incorporate the rusted steel look from the shop front, drawing people into the reception area. In this space, people tend to browse through our spacious retail selection, ask for our price list, take a closer inspection of the design elements or even enquire what the pleasant aroma is coming from our Aveda Shampure candles. All of these elements create a strong retail space that works incredibly well as its own area and provides for an excellent retail experience for the guest.

"Every time people walk by Prema, they stop and stare. They take photos; they point and look inside through the glass. Every morning there are fresh fingerprints on the shop front from people peering into the salon overnight! Prema Surry Hills has become an iconic landmark and talking piece."

Prema's salon design expresses a journey of dedication, hard work and a commitment to assembling and creating not just a new hairdressing salon, but a hairdressing experience. This creative playground is built on the foundation of integrity and skill that acts as a vehicle of inspiration and achievement for Prema staff.

So when it comes to the finished product, is Francesco thrilled with the results?

"Absolutely!" he enthuses. "It is a remarkable location and takes salon invention to a whole new level."

"This design works well with our brand. The Prema trademark encourages creativity, much like the salon design. It's intricate, it's raw and real, just like all the materials we use." **C**