



Profile

Rondel Ferrett, Doll Artist

Gathering Stitchers and Friends

Victorian-based doll artist Rondel Ferrett talks about how a school fete, and many creative inspirations since, have helped her form a successful business.

BY EDEN BARRIE

The name for Rondel Ferrets business 'Gathering Stitchers' was born from a comment by a fellow craftswoman, who noted that Rondel had 'gathered' such lovely people around her.

"Most craft people are very genuine, caring, sharing and open," says Rondel, who along with her husband Greg runs Gathering Stitchers from Victoria.

A dressmaker by trade, Rondel comes from a long line of sewers. Her great grandmother was a dressmaker, and her mother was a soft furnisher. Even her father was a fabric dyer! "My grandmother was a milliner. Her sewing was exquisite. You would turn over her tablecloths, and they would look exactly the same each side, all the stitching neat and perfect. I love that."

When asked about the famous school fete story of how Gathering





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Stitchers first came to fruition, Rondel laughs. “I get asked about that story a lot! My husband put it on the Gathering Stitchers website.” Rondel and some other crafters decided to make some dolls to sell at their childrens primary school fete. They soon became quite well known for their ideas and designs. One day a friend asked Rondel for some patterns to sell in her shop and the rest, as they say, is history. Sure enough, it wasn’t long until she wasn’t making wedding dresses anymore. “I remember during the early years making dolls that looked like people – character dolls. It was fun, and I was headed into the place I am today.”

Today, Gathering Stitchers are a successful business, selling patterns

and dolls worldwide. Not to mention running workshops and classes. Rondel gets a buzz hearing what people think of her designs and dolls, and enjoys the feedback. Only taking part in a few shows nowadays, she prefers not to travel so much anymore. “I usually teach classes in the mornings, have a quick cuppa and bite to eat, then I’m working on my dolls designs all afternoon.”

And work she does, happily and busily ensconced in her studio for hours thinking, designing, and sewing. A self-confessed ‘fabricaholic’ (do they have meetings for that?) Rondel absolutely adores the shapes, textures and possibilities of fabric. The hardest part of what she does is keeping up with the

steady stream of ideas floating in and out of her head. “I get an image of something an idea. It could be a face, a hat, even a pair of gloves. Then I see what the doll is going to look like. And I have to work like crazy designing and making her. I always worry I’ll forget! The struggle is more than worth it, though. Every doll I make has a story.”

Rondel’s designs hint of yesteryear. Conceding a lot of her inspiration comes from the 30s to the 50s, she especially loves watching old films to spark her creativity. She harbors a passion for the various stages of costume history, and has particularly vivid memories of visiting the costume museum in Bath, on her last trip to the U.K.



What is also noticeable about Rondel's extraordinary dolls are their gorgeous names, and how well the names suit each doll. "I'll tell you my secret – I have an Auntie who was a schoolgirl in the 1930s. I quizzed her on the names of people she used to go to school with, all her girlfriends names, and everyone else she knew!" Hence we have a May, Iris, Irene, and Mavis. Not to mention Dorothy, Eleanor, and Phoebe.

Names that straight away evoke another era, indeed another time altogether.

With her youngest child now in high school, it's a while since those primary school fetes. Rondel pinches herself daily that not only is she doing what she loves; she's made a career out of it. "I feel absolutely blessed that I can satisfy my creative being. Having Greg beside me helps enormously as well!" Greg has Sales Consultant Training in Account Management, so with Rondel's talent and his PR skills they make quite a team!

One of Rondel's prized possessions are her grandmother's tablecloths, originally made for her glory box. "I would absorb so much just by watching her sew. And I still turn them upside down and marvel at the stitching!"

To see more of Rondel's designs visit www.gatheringstitchers.com.au or contact her at rondel@gatheringstitchers.com.au (03) 9515 3322