

CAROLYN IMLACH

{ SOAP MAKER }

Walking into Est is like falling head-first into a giant perfume bottle. Even before you reach the shop door, the aroma of essential oils pervades the air. Once inside, apron-clad Carolyn Imlach is just visible in the tiny workroom at the rear of the store. It is day six in the soap-making process and Carolyn is blending geranium, lavender and lemon oils into a thick olive oil mixture, which is just beginning to cure. It is a critical stage in the production process and one that Carolyn rarely entrusts to anyone else. “I can tell immediately if something needs a little bit more lavender or a little less geranium,” she says.

When the soap has fully cured (a process that can take up to 10 days, depending on the weather), it is rolled into balls, each bearing the fingerprints of its maker. It is physically demanding work but Carolyn finds the process meditative.

The former textile product manager turned to soap-making when she was made redundant several years ago. Having spent hours in the State Library researching traditional soap-making methods, Carolyn combined her love of cooking and an interest in olive oil to develop a range of soaps, lip balms, salves and bath oils, which she initially sold at weekend markets. Now, Est Australia products are sold at more than 100 Australian retail outlets as well as in the United Kingdom, Singapore and Hong Kong. All are handmade using Australian extra virgin olive oil and, where possible, unrefined natural and organic ingredients.

When not making soap, Carolyn is kept busy visiting the many artisans who supply her shop with a beguiling mix of handmade products, many made to her specifications.

The products include finger-knitted sisal bags from Tasmania, nail brushes made from plant fibre, and delicious caramels sourced from a tiny village in rural France.

(Est Australia, 134 Auburn Road, Hawthorn East. Full details, page 186.) ❀

INSPIRATIONS

{ MELBOURNE'S YARRA RIVER } “Running the bush tracks along the Boulevard removes me from the noise and chaos and gives me time to reflect. When you are in a still place it allows ideas to flow.”

{ STEP BACK ANTIQUES } “I go there for props for the shop. Jane and Deborah are passionate about what they do and find the most amazing stuff.”
(103 Burwood Road, Hawthorn.)

{ H LEFFLER & SON LEATHER MERCHANTS } “It makes you feel like you want to create something when you walk in here. Lots of interesting leather, buckles and cowhides.” *(50-66 York Street, South Melbourne.)*

OPPOSITE: Carolyn Imlach finds the process of rolling soap balls meditative.



