



Facing page: Martin and Cherie Lacis (below left) wanted their living room to look like a funky cafe. Above: Philip Schemnitz' designs for Carlo Ippoliti at city bar Cookie.

brother-in-law, a carpenter and builder.

For St Ali, he used the windows that were part of the building's former office and factory fit-out. An old dining table with turned legs is in the middle of the space and the front of the wide coffee bar was created from a stack of old floorboards: "\$25 goes a long way in a demo yard," he laughs.

Demolition yards also appeal to builder and cafe owner Martin Crostin and partner Sarah Crostin. Their former Brunswick East cafe, Small Block, has a wall of huge metal numbers, once used in country petrol stations to indicate fuel price, that are the kind of one-off gems that can only be bought second-hand. eBay, of course, is the bargain hunter's friend and, for El Mirage, their new cafe just a block up the road from Small Block, Crostin found the cafe's entire collection of used school chairs online.

Although it may sound as if there's an absence of traditional architecture in this movement, in fact, its earliest proponents were architects Six Degrees whose Meyers Place bar, Wall Two 80 and the Public Office designs inspired so many of the bars and cafes that followed. Its organic, artistic and imaginative approach made other places seem as if they'd arrived straight off the factory floor. Six Degrees' style (whether its own or imitated) is now a fixture of Melbourne's cafe scene.

Another highly influential architect is Phillip Schemnitz, whose collaboration with the owner of Revolver and Cookie, Camillo Ippoliti, has created two of Melbourne's iconic bars.

With his hand-drawn designs and belief in complete flexibility (as we speak, he's debating a change of wall colour for the bar set to open above Cookie in just

a few weeks), Schemnitz has done the impossible — designed a fabulously cool bar that somehow feels like home. But try to pin him down as to how it was achieved and Schemnitz will only admit, "I like to experiment and be flexible; let the tradies have some freedom. I don't like to have a fixed plan: you need to be able to change things as you go."

This freedom echoes the brief given to architect Maurizio Toneatto by the Lacis family.

"We gave Maurizio carte blanche to do something interesting", says Martin. "I knew I wanted somewhere to show off my collection. I didn't have anything in particular in mind. I really just wanted Maurizio to fill in the gaps."

Toneatto designed a space that he hoped the Lacis would find inspiring. Although the design is simple, the details make it exciting.

For instance, the wrap-around finish on the kitchen bar was inspired by a similar bar in a cafe in Collingwood, and Toneatto searched Melbourne to find a manufacturer who could re-create the moulded-Perspex design he wanted.

With so many wonderful objects to show off, clean white with a few dashes of bold colour were chosen to accentuate the striking mid-20th century designs of favourite chairs and tables. While incorporating all the required elements, the Lacis' kitchen has that wonderfully eccentric and imaginative style that Melbourne's best cafes achieve so effortlessly.

But don't ask Martin Lacis to compare them. He cheerfully admits, "We don't go out for coffee". With a kitchen like his at home, why would you?