

# BOOM TOWN

**NEWCASTLE'S CBD IS  
THRIVING WITH NEW  
BUSINESSES THANKS TO  
PRIVATE INVESTORS AND  
THE COUNCIL**

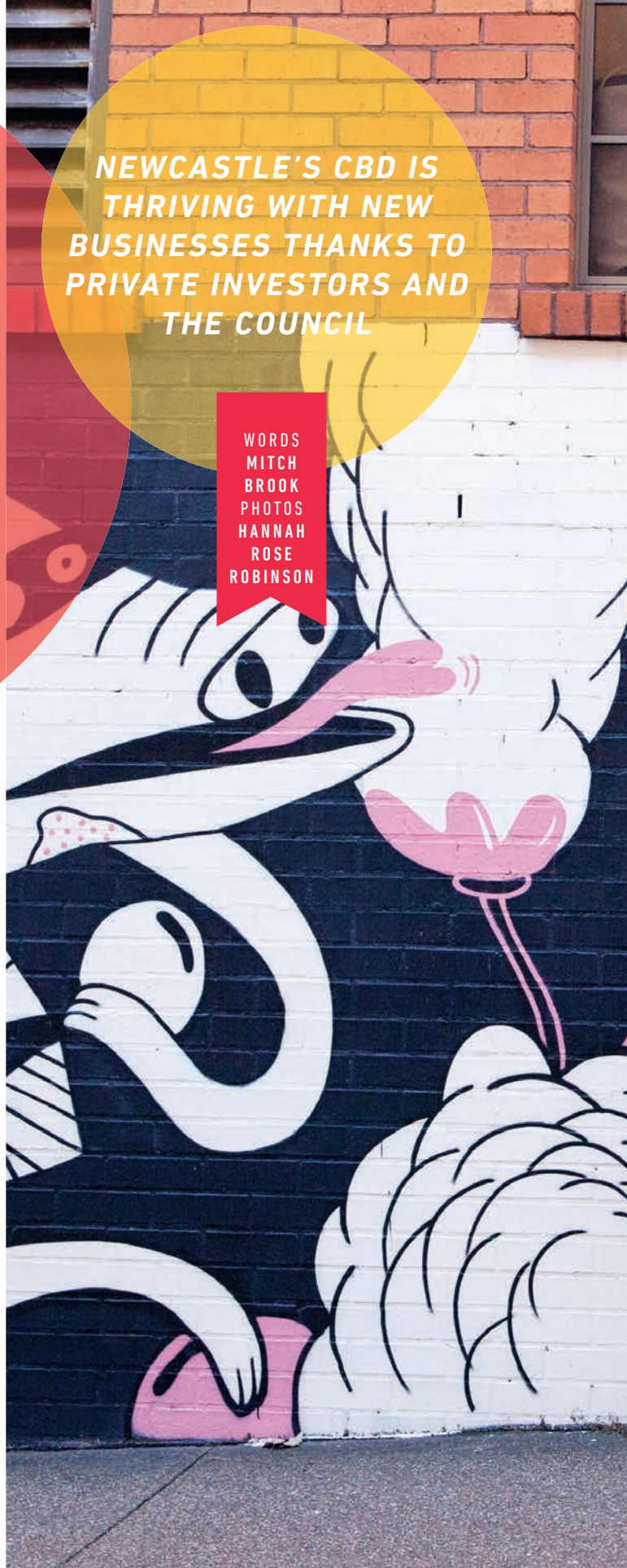
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There was a time when Hunter Street in Newcastle's CBD was the main hub in the city – a place residents would go to shop in the giant David Jones store, eat at restaurants and meet with friends. But during the late '80s and '90s, the street emptied dramatically.

"I was brought up in Newcastle, so I'd seen Hunter Street in its heyday," says Christine Rockley, an artist who creates natural-history illustrations in a studio space on the street. "It was vibrant. To see it go downhill like it did was pretty horrific."

A number of factors contributed to the city's commercial decline. First there was the 1989 earthquake. Then, in the late '90s, BHP withdrew major industrial operations from Newcastle. More recently, large shopping centres built in satellite suburbs, and the closure of the Hunter Street David Jones store, drew shoppers away from the CBD.

Walk down Hunter Street now, however, and it's plain to see that the CBD is coming back to life. Colourful street art adorns some of the walls, locals wander under the trees with kids in tow, patrons settle in at cafés, and ➤➤





# Things to do in Summer in Newcastle



**FISH OFF BLACKSMITHS BREAKWALL : SANDBOARD AT STOCKTON DUNES**  
**FRESH PRAWNS AT THE MARINA : Beach Volleyball at Nobby's Beach**  
**USE AN OVL TO CROSS THE TRAIN TRACKS : ROCK POOL DISCOVERY**  
*Fossilick For Fossils* : *Treasure at the Centenary Centre* : **HAND CUT CHIPS AT BAR BEACH**  
**BIKE THERAPY AT GERRY'S TRACK : OUTDOOR CINEMA AT NOBBY'S HEADLAND**  
**GRASS TONIC AT KING EDWARD PARK (BYO CARDBOARD) : Bushwalk at Glenrock**  
**BAREFOOT AT LOWLANDS : SHOP AT THE FARMERS MARKET**  
*Kayak At the Centenary Centre* : **DISCOVER A NEW BOOK IN NEWCASTLE LIBRARY**  
**PIN THE TAIL ON THE DONKEY RALLY AT WHEELER PLACE : LEARN TO SURF**  
**TUNNEL AT FORT SCRATCHLEY : Go Heritage at the Maritime Centre**  
**ARTHUR'S TOWER CINEMA : HORSESHOE BEACH DOG WALK**  
*Watch the Mad Skills at The Newcastle Beach Skate Park*  
**AT THE NATIONAL PARK NETBALL COURTS**

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cyclists ride past. While the change is still gaining momentum, the street is once more seeing an influx of people. This is largely due to planning which focuses on filling empty properties in the CBD with artists and retail businesses. In 2008, Marcus Westbury, a Novocastrian cultural project manager and festival director, founded Renew Newcastle.

"The idea was to come up with a system that allowed creative people to use those empty spaces to try out their ideas," says Marcus. "Over the last five years, we've done that about 180 times, including galleries and businesses and other creative projects. It's a way to allow people to try to do creative things in the city easily."

"We're a not-for-profit organisation and started with 10 empty CBD locations," says Christopher Saunders, general manager of Renew Newcastle. "We work with artist studios and outlets for creative retail operations. We have about 60 current participants. Christine is one of them."

The projects that Renew works with receive a studio or retail space for their work on a 30-day

rolling-term lease for a weekly fee of \$25.

Sometimes these pursuits go on to take up commercial leases, sometimes not – it's all part of the Renew Newcastle plan, says Christopher. And the building owners aren't left out either – Renew takes care of maintenance, insurance and some building works.

"The projects stimulate business and activity in and around the buildings, contributing to a more desirable neighbourhood and helping attract

longer-term prospects," says Christopher. "It's hard to lease an empty space covered in graffiti."

Zookraft is one creative practice occupying a studio space in a Hunter Street building, which overlooks a leafy part of the Hunter Street Mall. Illustrators and designers Carl Morgan and Lara Schubert work together to create work for both

commercial and fine art.

"We took up this space in 2009, in the second round of Renew Newcastle's applications," says Carl. "Back then, I could sit at my window and see a dozen people walk past in a day. Since then, this

**"ARTISTS CAME FROM  
ALL OVER AUSTRALIA  
AND OVERSEAS TO  
PAINT WALLS ACROSS  
THE CITY"**

strip has changed dramatically. I see a dozen people out there right now. The area offers a great boutique shopping and café experience.

“Aside from our graphic-design business we put on a creative festival called Look Hear,” adds Carl. “It comprises talks and exhibitions. We also ran the Hit The Bricks street art festival [in December 2013 and 2014] – artists came from all over Australia and overseas to paint walls across the city.”

The impact of Zookraft’s events on the city is still evident – along Hunter Street, and elsewhere, you can see the art, like a giant whale mural by Mike Makka, French artist Tyrsa’s typography, and the colourful, intricate animals of Beastman and Phibs.

Walk down Hunter from Zookraft and you’ll find Nook Store, Brodie Bannerman’s streetwear outlet.

The small shop is lined with racks of tees, watches, skateboards, singlets, snapback caps and other clothing by labels such as Ziggy Denim, Vatic and Silent Theory.

“We started about four years ago as part of Renew Newcastle, and we were on that scheme for about nine months,” says Brodie, whose business is one of several that have graduated from Renew projects to take on commercial leases.

“We moved locations twice, on short-term leases, but we signed a two-year lease for our current location last August,” he adds. “We stock a whole heap of independent Australian brands, and we have an in-house streetwear label called One Undone made up of clothing like shorts and t-shirts – it’s actually our most popular range.” ➡➡



#### CREATIVE CLASS

(Clockwise left ) An Emporium mural; Christopher Saunders from Renew Newcastle; artist Christine Rockley; illustrator Carl Morgan; Hunter Street Mall



Brodie says he's noticed an increase in foot traffic on Hunter Street, due in large part to the cafés moving in, and the boutique retail offerings.

"The coffee shops have done well on Hunter Street," says Brodie. "And you have niche shops like ours bringing in people looking for something a little different."

While Hunter Street once relied on David Jones to attract the public, this boutique-oriented retail experience is what the street offers now. The focal point for this is The Emporium, located in the same building that once housed the retail giant. The space is divided into areas for pop-up stores to show their wares, including Chia-Chi Yu's handcrafted leather goods shop called CCY Studio; Lloyd Kellett's custom industrial homewares and furniture at One Man's Trash; and Renee Verdon's womenswear label Vous. These are all locals who are taking the opportunity to extend their creative businesses. In the process, it's given the space a real buzz; the shared community spirit fostered by these creative people is clear.



**NEXT GEN**  
(Clockwise top left) Doughheads; Ali Sobel-Read; Brodie Bannerman

### **"WHEN I FIRST MOVED HERE, I WAS SHOCKED BY THE AMOUNT OF ARTISTS IN THE CITY"**

"I hand-make ceramics: from beads and jewellery, to large wall hangings. I also do silkscreen prints on clay," says Ali Sobel-Read of Potteryali, another Emporium shop. "I've been here since late last year, after moving from the US in June. I started my ceramics business in the States and shipped everything over. I had this excellent chance to get started here anew."

While her establishment here is fairly recent, Ali says she's seen an improvement in Hunter Street even in that time.

"It's fabulous what Renew Newcastle has done with the city," she says. "When we first moved here, I was shocked by the amount of art in Newcastle – there's a wealth of creativity here."

The Renew Newcastle team hopes that these creative offerings will draw people to the CBD, as David Jones once did. It appears to be working; a number of independent businesses have set down roots on the street. Bar and tapas restaurant Cazador is one establishment helping to draw the crowds – as is Reserve Wine Bar, an upmarket restaurant and wine venue, and Doughheads, which sells gourmet doughnuts in delicious flavours like Iced Vovo, Cookie Dough and Maple Bacon.

"There's a lot more diverse, interesting and creative activity happening in the city now," says ➡



**GOOD VIBES**  
Cool joints such as Cazador, have Hunter St buzzing says Nuatali Nemes (right)



Marcus. “Some of the projects we’ve started have gone on to become permanent fixtures in the city. It’s a place where the idea that you can create your own stuff has taken hold – that’s really important.”

“None of the activity on Hunter Street would be happening if it wasn’t for Renew Newcastle,” says Nuatali Nemes, Lord Mayor of Newcastle. “We’ve recently committed \$90,000 to the project. Renew Newcastle has been extremely successful, but the work isn’t over yet!”

Both the local council and the State Government have plans for improvements in Newcastle. As well as the current revitalisation of Hunter Street and coast areas, there are plans for the Newcastle Art Gallery and Blackbutt Nature Reserve. With more projects scheduled, including public transport, an airport redevelopment, and the connection of Hunter Street with the Honeysuckle Precinct on

the foreshore, residents can expect the activity and vibrancy of their city centre to continue to grow.

“Activity creates activity,” says Nuatali, who’s keen for creative types to make their mark on the city.

“When the type of people you’re attracting are creative, inventive and entrepreneurial, more of those same types of people are attracted.”

“Hunter Street is full now, and you can see the activity,” says Christine Rockley. “Everyone is getting to know one another a lot more. I love working here because I’m among [likeminded] people, and there’s energy that I’m glad to see is returning.” ★

#### Travel info ↓



Jetstar has great low fares to Newcastle.

Visit [jetstar.com](http://jetstar.com) to book

#### SEE FOR YOURSELF

##### **The Emporium**

Boutique shops like Vous, One Man’s Trash, Potteryali, CCY Studio and others; 185 Hunter St Mall [renewnewcastle.org](http://renewnewcastle.org)

##### **Nook Store**

An exciting collection of clothing from local streetwear designers. 1076 Hunter St; [nookstore.com.au](http://nookstore.com.au)

##### **33 Degrees South**

Boutique operators selling natural soaps. Shop 22 Market Square, 119 Hunter St [renewnewcastle.org](http://renewnewcastle.org)

##### **Four Point Gallery**

A gallery showing local emerging artists. 681 Hunter St; [fourpointgallery.com](http://fourpointgallery.com)

##### **The Olive Tree Market**

Enjoy local arts and crafts, as well as gourmet food in Civic Park. It’s usually held

on the first Saturday of each month; [theolivetreemarket.com.au](http://theolivetreemarket.com.au)

##### **Hunt&Gather Markets**

Boutique designer markets in Pacific Park on the third Saturday each month; [huntandgathermarkets.com.au](http://huntandgathermarkets.com.au)

