

# GRATHELMS

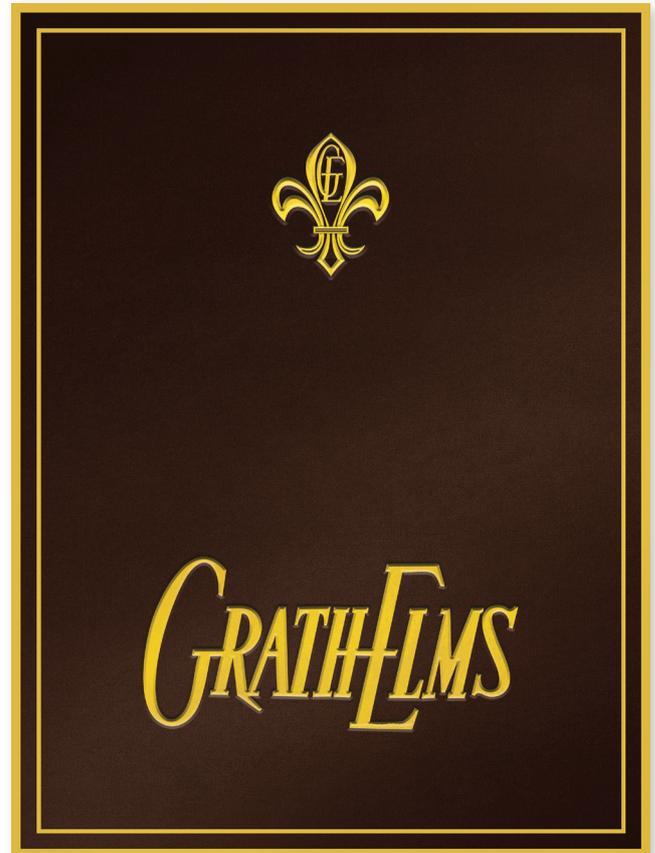
Neil McGrath

“With fashion constantly changing, and constantly the subject of discussion and speculation, ‘what is in and what is out’ is an endless conversation. But there is only one rule in fashion: clothes should always improve the way we look and how we feel.”

Neil McGrath has lived and breathed fashion his whole life. *GrathElms* tells the story of a young man with a dream – to work with haute couture fashion. Raised by a wonderful, eclectic family in the suburbs of Melbourne, Neil’s creativity and passion continues today with private clients around the world.

A fashion label with an ethos of sophistication, quality and style, *GrathElms* tells of how it has touched the lives of unique personalities – both in Australia and overseas. Featuring fascinating meetings and conversations with Coco Chanel, Pierre Cardin, Yves Saint Laurent, the Duke of Windsor, Picasso and more, the book depicts a life of elegance, travel, chance encounters, fashion trends, design breakthroughs, and unlikely friendships.

*GrathElms* paints a vibrant picture of the introduction of Haute Couture fashion to Australia via the runways of Paris.



## About the Author

Neil McGrath is a founder of the GrathElms Couture fashion label, established by himself and his late partner Ron Elms in 1966. Together they dressed many significant figures in the world of fashion and culture, including Lady Anna Cowen (the wife of the then-Governor General of Australia), Eartha Kitt (American singer and actress), and Roma Johnstone, who starred as 'Pearl' in the 1955 stage production of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* ... just to mention a few!

Sample spreads from *GrathElms*

124

was thrilled to be showing our Collections. He realized this Couture style of design was very new, and there were many high-end boutiques anxious for this fashion.

Both John and Ernest had very successful trips in their various cities and regional areas: the orders were amazingly good, and the boutiques were very impressed.

In Melbourne, our hometown, Ron and I felt we should show our Collection to keep it all very friendly and personal. So, to be correct and proper, we designed some gorgeous, gilt-edge invitations and sent them out to all the significant boutiques and department stores in the city. In the mid-60s, Myer was one such department store - it was quite a high-end store at that time, considered the best on Bourke Street. Their huge windows allowed for big, beautiful displays, and the Christmas store displays were the talk of the city (and sometimes the world) even then. Myer held summer and winter high fashion parades each year in the Mural Hall, which attracted Melbourne's high society. The original store even had a special salon, called the *Chandelier Room*, where Haute Couture gowns from Paris could be purchased.

Ron and I felt that GrathElms would be eminently suitable for the Myer clientele, so they were sent an invitation.

In Swanston Street, on the corner of Little Collins Street, there was a fashion building called 'The Hanna Canns Boutique'. This store sold women's fashion, and the charming owners, Mr and Mrs Ironson, made a perfect addition to our invite list. We also sent out invites to Buckley and Nunn, Foy and Gibson, Hicks Atkinson and (of course) Georges. All these boutiques strove to attract a high society clientele, and we knew GrathElms designs would be perfect.

So many orders came in for the first collection - more than we could have anticipated. We had set very high standards and edited our designs so carefully that, in many cases, particular fabrics and designs sold out! Ben and Morrie were very happy; they had plenty of work with all the orders. This season, Ron was very strict about delivery dates and the standard of workmanship; we both checked each delivery before it was sent to the buyer.

In business, Ron and I were very lucky, as we worked together very well. It was doubling a design; Ron was confident, sweeping in with reassurance and rationality. He was always giving reason to my fantasy, and order to my imagination. We were a true complement to each other, often arriving separately at the exact same idea, and we were united in our pursuit of the highest ideal of perfection.

In its first year, GrathElms Couture achieved wonderful success. We and our designs were immediately accepted, and there was a real appreciation for our Couture style of design and our House.

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beautiful new shape and swing

SEE THE WAY PURE WOOL FLOURISHES IN 72+ SUPERB NEW COATS! AND LOOK HOW GRATH ELM'S 'YOUNG ACTION' DO THE SWINGBACK TO ELEGANCE... WITH OUT-AND-OUT FLARE!

The model call is a woman's most valued friend. Grath Elms' look... with an extravagance of fabric poured into their swing! Gains you can sweep along gracefully in, again!

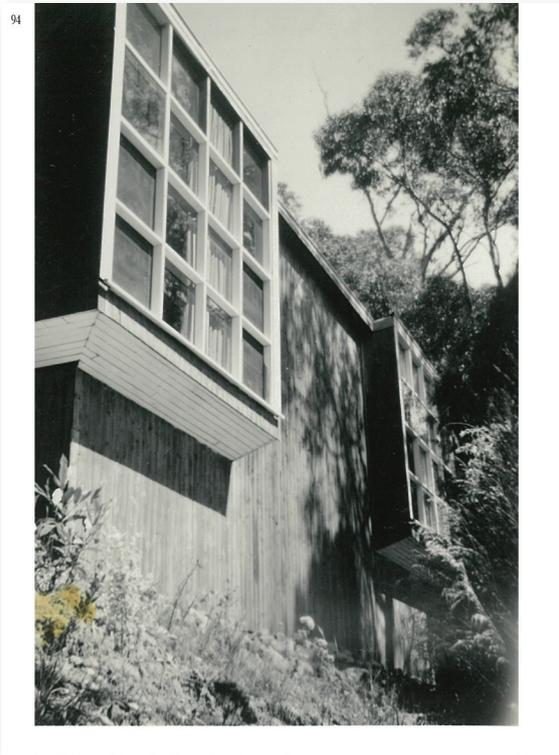
Grath Elms does them in a choice - something you can't buy elsewhere! It's so wonderful!  
Come in person or bring in with you a lot of friends! They'll bring their own to try you up in bright, blazingly plaid (ahh!)... coming over all warm 'n' fuzzy, and broad shouldering to stay like a hot furnace! swing! But, come on in - we've an entire, varied collection for you to view.

MYER  
CITY 66111 CHADSTONE NORTHLAND EASTLAND SOUTHLAND DONCASTER

GrathElms and Antonia bring you coats to hold away the cold - magnificently, in PURE NEW WOOL



Sample spreads from *GrathElms*



Ron at the Kalamita house.

who designed and built the National Gallery of Victoria and Hamer Hall at Prince's Bridge on the Yarra River. Roy was always discussing colours and textures with us; he knew our designs. We also helped him design his Toorak home - after visiting Pompeii, we could give him first-hand information about the ideal Roman house, which is an open courtyard centre surrounded by high windowless walls to give privacy. Roy built his own house in Toorak with this design in mind, and he often asked for our opinion and input.

Another artist friend we met during this time was the now-famous Clifton Pugh. As young men, even with our time and concentration centred on our work as designers, we always managed to entertain and meet many budding new artists or theatre performers. We would often visit Cliff in the bush at his artist colony in Dunmoochin. Ron and Cliff were close and would chat for hours about art over many glasses of wine. Cliff and his girlfriend, Marlene, always made us most welcome. Cliff's style of painting invariably showed an Australian bush scene - one day he took us into his private studio to show us his latest works lined up. All in a row were seven paintings, almost blank but for a tree or a rock, on unpainted white canvasses. Cliff confided how popular his Australian scenes were becoming, and he wanted to show us his new way of painting.

One by one, a bird, a hill, a bush, or a magpie were added here and there, randomly in different places on each canvas. It created a natural-looking scene and, when finished, perfectly displayed the unique Australian landscape.

Later, when given recognition as an artist, Cliff was approached with a commission to paint the Governor General of Australia, Lord

Peter Four

126 **LITTLE COATS**

**GRATH ELMS**  
**GEORGINA**

Below: Casual double-breasted corduroy velvet coat has two side flap pockets and wide collar. Mustard or brown. XXXS-XXV. \$21. (Doronic Coat Showroom, ground floor.)

Above: For the over-thin... pure wool women's coat has a wide belt and circular buckle, and two large flap pockets on the skirt. Black, gold, white, red, pale blue, and lilac. XXXS-XXV. \$47. (Doronic Coat Showroom, ground floor.)

At left: Zesty double-breasted coat in pure wool knobby tweed has a black belt dotted through. Lark, fox, gold, and black. Black, red, white, purple/black, white, or brown/brown/white. XXXS-XXV. \$60. (Mayer Coat Shop, 2nd floor, Bourke Street store.)

The Australian Woollen Wool - Mark 4, 1979

Woolly Turtles Store - Page 5

**GRATH ELMS**  
**GEORGINA**

**PRINCETON**  
E. Blue or Aqua. 10-20. \$42.50

**Emoor**  
C. Grey or Beige. 12-18. \$29

**John J. Hilton**  
IT'S A NIGHT, IT'S A MISTON

D. Gold or Orange. 14-20. \$48.50

E. Blue/Grey or Beige/Purple. 14-20. \$31.50

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they're Pure New Wool  
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