

AUSTRALIAN **ink**

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AUTHENT/INK

Australian Ink's
resident tattoo
advisor Kian Forreal
on guest artists

EVERYONE INVOLVED IN TATTOOING or getting tattooed has heard the terms 'on the road' tattoo artist or 'guest artist'. But what does it really mean for you the client, and what does it mean for the artists themselves who are travelling and making tattoos in foreign cities around the world? I'll try to give some perspectives from both sides of the coin.

Being a successful guest artist is an art unto itself. There are many reasons for this, but the main one is that guest artists are perpetual outsiders in someone else's domain, tattooing someone else's clients. They'll have no authority of their own in a shop full of artists that may or may not be on the same artistic level as them, in a city without a safety net. Usually, they'll find themselves in a kind of hierarchy-limbo; guest artists are at the mercy of the shop owner, but are free to leave at any time if they wish. Yet aside from tattooing, the guest's second full-time job (someone would even argue their first) is to keep everyone in the shop happy or risk being cast out for a perceived slight, bruising someone's ego or just plain causing jealousy. A daunting task in a creative environment, let me tell you!

The joys of travelling are obvious: new sights and sounds, new people, new experiences and carefree adventures of every sort. As a tattoo artist, the purpose of being 'on the road' is to gather new ideas, be exposed to exotic cultures and artwork, and to be free to try new things. Most important, though, is to gain fresh inspiration from the talented folks that lead the world of tattooing. If you're lucky and charming enough, you can work shoulder to shoulder with them and learn a few things along the way. I did this for 10 years before settling in Sydney, and it definitely moulded me into what I am today. I would not change it for anything.

Outside of the shop, however, there is a downside to being a travelling tattoo artist that few removed from the experience can actually see, and it does take its toll. You learn to live with less; cheap hotels are your home, and eating out for every meal is a given. Carrying all your tattoo gear in your suitcase means there is a lot less room for other things like a variety of clothes, shoes, books and creature comforts. It can be an ascetic life to some degree (apart from the copious amounts of alcohol you drink!) and it is very, very hard on relationships. If a guest artist does manage to maintain a relationship while travelling, there should be an award for the travelling artists' partners that survive the ordeal.





That said, it is a fantastic experience sharing art and techniques. Taking what you learn in one town, seeing what tricks they have up their sleeves in the next and combining it all together in return amounts to a true cross-cultural tattoo pollination. It really shows up in the end product.

Nothing knocks you off your high horse better than when you're the big fish in town and a virtual unknown tattooer rocks in and his or her work blows you away. It's great for the local artists to get free outside influence, help and inspiration, and great for the traveller to get a place to work, learn and lay his head. The perfect symbiotic relationship.

One of my good friends refers to tattoo shops as embassies. It is not uncommon for a locally unknown tattoo artist to roll in from another city halfway around the world, with only a referring name, and be treated like family. A place to work, a bed to sleep in, home cooked food to eat and new drinking buddies. I have had this experience too many times to mention and yet it still blows me away every time it happens.

But what does the client get out of all this? Well, I would argue that the client gets a tattoo that they would not normally have access to in their hometown. They'll get a mixture of styles, techniques, inks and aesthetics that could only have been obtained from an artist who has made all those voyages around the world, seeing and learning those things themselves and putting it all together in their own special way. You cannot learn tattooing from a book or DVD, period. And you can only learn so much sitting in your studio alone or with coworkers bumping out Cherry Creek flash.

You will probably pay a bit more to get tattooed by a guest artist. He or she has extraordinary expenses associated with constantly travelling and living out of a suitcase, and usually gets paid less than a full-time artist by

the shop. And the artist may or may not be there to touch up any problem areas in the tattoo, or continue on a large piece.

That said, if travelling artists build up enough of clientele in a certain place and get along with their employers and co-workers, they will most certainly make a return journey to tattoo friends of clients, finish work, continue large pieces and, of course, touch up finished tattoos. When it comes to getting tattooed by a guest, if you find the right artist then the rewards far outweigh the risks.

And as I said in my last column, it is all about choosing wisely. Check out the artist's history and portfolio. Find out where and with whom the artist has worked. He may just be a fly-by-night scab vendor bullshitting his way around and working in any shit shop in any red light district he can find. Or he may be another Filip Leu boy-genius doing a world tour before taking the tattoo art scene by storm! Caveat Emptor.

In the end, get a feel for the shop and the artists there. A bad shop might have a good guest artist now and then; a good shop will often have quality guest artists; but a great shop will never have a bad guest. Compound this information with the rigours of getting a good tattoo as discussed in my last column and you can't go wrong. For real!

Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 16 years international experience and specialising in traditional Japanese tattoo work. He has worked all over the world and has studied under some of the leading tattoo artists of today. He is based in Sydney at Inner Vision Tattoo, Surry Hills. For more, visit www.kianforreal.com or, for information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal, please visit www.fadeyourtattoo.com.

CASH & CARRY



MOOVBOOTS

The brainchild of two globetrotting sisters, Meisha Strykowski and Bryony Proctor, who got sick of wet ugg, MoovBoots are sheepskin lined stylish Wellingtons. The first range was released in four stylish designs; from 'Lemon Tea' to 'Bococo' they come in two heights – Mid calf and tall, with this range inspired by Alice and her adventures in Wonderland. The new Supergloss range is out soon, ranging in price from \$230 - \$380. Have your own adventures after visiting www.moovculture.com

INSTANT ROCKSTAR

Sometimes it's all about the packaging! Instant Rockstar, our favourite hair care brand, is now distributing its products in 100% recycled packaging. Working to reduce their 'environmental impact' everything from their paper and cardboard to their 50 and 100ml plastic has been designed to be better for us and the environment. No need to worry about your personal footprint any more – now you can make your hair look fantastic and feel great about the product of choice.

KIAN FORREAL WICKED ENERGY DRINK

Kian forreal finally relented and is lending his imagery to a commercial product, and its one he uses on a daily basis: Caffeine infused energy drinks! Lets hope this product tastes as good as the can looks! Edition #1 rendered by Tattoo Artist Kian Forreal will be the first of a series to hit grocery store shelves this coming summer. Bring out your Wicked side! Check out www.wickedenergy.com.au for more info.

ROADKILLTOYS

Toys with a twist or simply twisted toys? We're not sure, but we do know that Twitch the Raccoon, Grind the Rabbit, and now Splodge the Hedgehog all come with their very own death certificate. Perhaps the best part of this gooey mess, however, is that you can take the blood and guts in and out of them, which are sealed into the carcass by a zip on both sides. Just unzip the belly and let the blood and gore ooze out. Get yours at www.roadkilltoys.com