



homegrown

SISTERS SUSIE AND LYNDA HOLT ARE ON A MISSION TO SAVE THE WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA, ONE PAIR OF READING GLASSES AT A TIME.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY LAURA CHAPMAN

SHARING A BOND THAT TRANSCENDS sisterhood, Susie and Lynda Holt run their business as if it's an extension of their family. "We just love our customers," says Susie. Having co-founded Holtsee Australia in 2017, the sisters make colourful reading glasses in bold shapes designed to empower women at every stage of life. "The whole basis of our business is to make women feel confident and fabulous about themselves," adds Lynda.

"It all started in the mid-2010s when I needed to get reading glasses, but there was nothing out there," explains Susie (pictured above, right), 61. "I ended up with these daggy old ones from the chemist. I realised there was a big gap in the market for fabulous frames."

A few years later, Lynda, 56, found herself in the same predicament. "We went to a local shopping centre and were laughing so much trying on these awful glasses in chemists and junk shops," she says. "We looked at each other and said, 'We have to design our own. We have to save the women of Australia!'" And so, with no experience designing glasses or running an online business, the duo dived in headfirst and their eponymous brand was born.

"We never once thought this would be impossible to do; we always had faith we could do it," says Susie.

Although Lynda and Susie came from careers outside the design world, they each had an obvious creative streak which manifested in various side hustles over the years. "I did nursing when I left school and ended up working as a nurse immuniser, but on the side I did floristry," says Susie. Lynda had a similar experience. "I worked as an international flight attendant, but also had a little jewellery business," she says. "I loved it, but it was a lot of work, and in the end, we really wanted to do something together."

Starting small, the sisters initially launched a curated range of reading glasses in 2017. "We wanted to create funky frames without the huge price tag," says Lynda. "But we evolved organically because a lot of our customers eventually needed prescription glasses, so now we have a prescription lens service as well."

Constantly adapting to their loyal customers' design requests, Holtsee's line-up now includes sunglasses and bifocal readers. "Our rural customers love the prescription lens service because they can try our 'fabulous five' at home, without the need to travel into town," says Lynda. "That means, although we have a great returns policy, we don't get many returns because customers can have fun with the frames and decide what they want at home."

In their quest to empower and inspire women, Susie and Lynda have instinctively created two-way bonds with their customers that go beyond the transactional. "We always say, 'We don't sell glasses, we sell fabulousness,'" says Susie. "We've got customers who've got close to 20 pairs, so they become good friends, we get to know them, and we really listen to them."

Forging a genuine bond with like-minded women has come naturally to the Holt sisters, who are known to personally dish out styling advice and tweak designs for their band of followers. "We often get photos from customers asking if a style is too bold, then as the years pass, that customer will invariably go bolder and bolder and bolder," says Lynda with a laugh. "But our favourite thing about the business is getting emails and feedback from customers. Our customer love drives us; we feed off it." *CS*
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