



SHARING THE LOVE OF LEARNING

Picking up new skills from interesting, passionate people is at the heart of Laneway Learning.



“I’d say the sky’s the limit but we’ve had classes on asteroids, aliens and dark matter, so I guess there isn’t a limit!”

From urban beekeeping to beginners’ Italian, evening classes are becoming increasingly popular in cafes and bars across Melbourne, and now Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Singapore, where people from all walks of life come together to upskill in areas that take their fancy.

One unique provider of such classes is Laneway Learning. Co-founder Lucie tells **be.** why this style of learning resonates so well in communities, and how their ideas for classes come about.

How did Laneway Learning start?

Laneway Learning is run by a group of friends with a passion for learning. We think that everyone loves to learn new things, but evening classes are often too expensive, too long and too much like school.

We came across the Brooklyn Brainerie (brooklynbrainerie.com) in New York, which offers cheap classes in random subjects, taught by ordinary people from around the city. We loved the concept and decided to start something similar in Melbourne.

What has surprised you along the way?

We’ve had a few nice surprises, not least how quickly Melburnians first took up the idea and helped us make Laneway Learning a reality.

Every now and again we’ll get a class idea that takes us by surprise too. I remember

meeting someone who wanted to “teach people how to do cool braids in their hair”. I thought it sounded like a bit of fun and figured we could probably get enough people for one class. It’s probably been our most popular class and has gone so well that our teacher, Theresa Winters, has gone on to start up her own business called Braidiance (braidiance.com)!

Where do you get the ideas for your classes?

The classes we run depend on who comes to us with ideas, and we have people from all walks of life. Our teachers are all people from the local community who have a passion for a particular topic and want to share it with others.

We had Russel Howcroft from the Gruen Transfer teaching a yo-yo class, we have a fantastic wine-tasting teacher who runs a ‘One Night Palate Trainer’ – she has such an original, unpretentious way of teaching – and I love it when we get scientists to talk about their research and the latest happenings in their fields, including someone from the CSIRO teaching about solar power, and a psychiatrist talking about neuroplasticity.

I’d say the sky’s the limit, but we’ve had classes on asteroids, aliens and dark matter, so I guess there isn’t a limit!

Why do you think the concept works so well?

I think that the concept works because it’s accessible, interesting and, most of all, fun! It’s an alternative social event that fires up the brain cells.

The spaces we run in are perfect for learning but keep it pretty relaxed and we change it up depending on the class; it

might be semicircles of chairs, a workshop with long benches where people chisel or scribble away, or we might even throw out all the furniture!

A lot of evening classes seem to happen in offices or university rooms, with white walls and wiped-clean tables. We find people relax and enjoy themselves more when the lights aren’t quite so bright and they have a coffee and a bowl of soup in front of them. And if they are enjoying themselves, hopefully they will end up learning more too.

Which classes always sell out the fastest?

Our classes have a limit of just 24 people to keep it friendly and to allow teachers to give some personalised attention to everyone in the class.

People have a real thirst for knowledge and therefore most classes we offer, no matter how strange, strike a chord with someone. It is really hard to predict which classes will sell like hot cakes, but in general anything foodie or hands-on tends to attract the most people.

Any new classes to look forward to over summer?

Definitely! Maybe you would like to learn to play ukulele? How to start a worm farm? Or what classical music is all about?

Whatever takes your fancy, just keep your eye on the website and sign up to the newsletter to find out about new classes as they are released.

lanewaylearning.com