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Spring 2025

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LEADING FROM EVERY ANGLE

Charting The Journey Through Leadership, Resilience, And Personal Growth

GET ME TO THE GREEK

Party With The Gods

8 TIPS TO UNLOCK YOUR INNER WARRIOR

Strength Isn't Just About Physical Power

6 KIWIS ABOUT TO MAKE A GLOBAL IMPACT

Our Innovators Are Thinking Global

OH HI JEWELLERY

High Jewellery From The World's Top Maisons

GOOD Lorde

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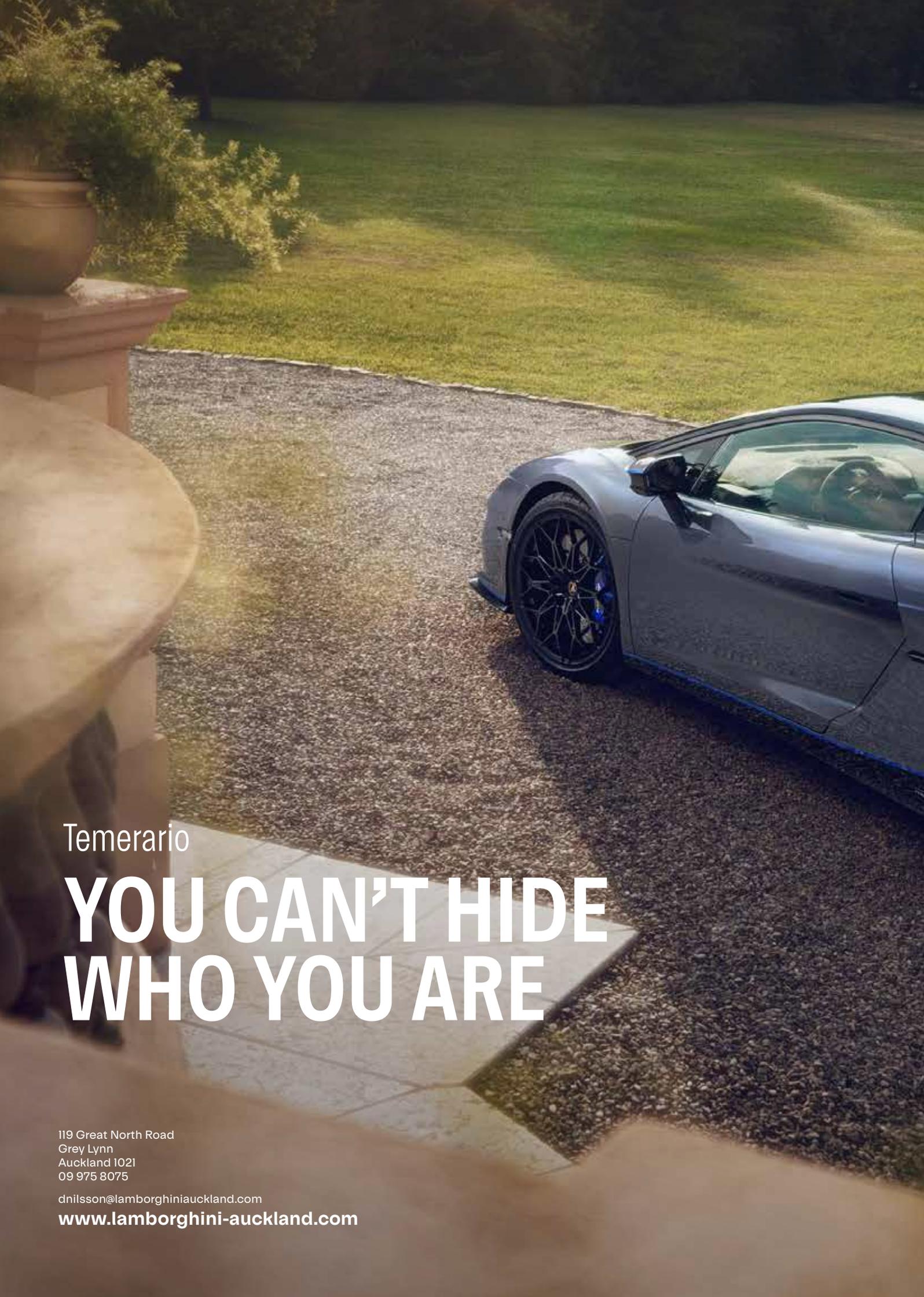


M2WOMAN JOURNEY to EXCELLENCE

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TAKE YOUR LIFE TO THE NEXT LEVEL
FIND OUT MORE P.44

A silver Lamborghini sports car is parked on a gravel driveway. The car is positioned on the right side of the frame, angled towards the left. The background features a large, well-maintained green lawn and some trees. In the foreground, there is a stone wall or balustrade on the left side, partially obscuring the view. The overall scene is set in a bright, sunny outdoor environment.

Temerario

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Meet the Family



M2WOMAN

SPRING 2025 | ISSUE 82



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EDITOR'S *letter*

The moment that has stayed with me most from Journey to Excellence began not with a business case study or a leadership framework, but with Dr. Alia Bojilova recounting the day she was taken hostage in Syria. Armed militia surrounded her and her UN team. They were trapped just 500 metres from safety with no way out. What decided their fate was not firepower, but the ability to hold a conversation. She described how survival came down to listening, asking questions, and finding common ground with people who, only hours before, had seemed like enemies. It was not the kind of negotiation we usually think about, but it was negotiation at its purest. Presence, empathy, and the courage to see multiple truths at once.

I realised as she spoke that while most of us will never face that kind of extreme test, we all know what it feels like to be under pressure. We all know the moments when fear or uncertainty threatens to take over. Alia's story reminded me that resilience is not about being unshakable. It is about slowing down enough to ask the right questions and creating the space where something unexpected and life-changing can emerge.

That thread ran through the whole event. Cynthia Hunefeld talked about humour and helpers as survival tools, the quiet people who show up when the world feels unbearable. Mariele Klering reminded us that resilience can be found in movement when our minds are too heavy to help us. Danu Abeysuriya spoke about AI as a leveller, urging us not to fear it but to use it as a way to become more human. And Naomi Ballantyne reminded us with refreshing bluntness that leadership is not about the title on your door but about the substance of your

choices, your curiosity, and the way people remember how you made them feel.

These lessons echoed beyond that room. In this issue, we also hear how Rosanne Graham is reshaping education in New Zealand and challenging us to stop treating university as the only measure of intelligence. We also hear how Jodie King is helping One NZ become one of the most AI-enabled telcos in the world, while still leading with empathy and trust. And then there is Lorde, our cover star, whose return is not wrapped in spectacle but in radical transparency. Standing in a park with just a guitar, she showed us that sometimes honesty is the bravest performance of all.

For me, what connects all of these voices is the reminder that leadership and resilience are not lofty ideals. They are lived moments. They are the choice to speak when you are scared, to move when you would rather freeze, to laugh when it feels easier to cry, and to be honest when hiding would be simpler. If there is one lesson I am taking with me from these stories, it is that the future does not belong to those who pretend to have all the answers. It belongs to those of us willing to stay human, to keep asking better questions, and to show up anyway.

Héloïse Garrity, Editor

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M2WOMAN

SPRING 2025 | ISSUE 82

On sale 8 September 2025

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UP TO DATE

We keep you in the know in the world of design, fashion, and entertainment.

Florence Pugh was seen wearing a white Rodarte Fall 2025 along with a lavish Bvlgari necklace from their new Polychroma collection at their hosted event in Sicily. As for what she thought of her “Sicilian dream”?
“I’m grateful for everything, especially the love and of course the Aperols.”

FATE FORTOLD

Rooftop at
QT Predicts
Negronis
in your Future



The arrival of September means one thing: Negroni Week is coming.

A celebration of the world's most iconic red-hued cocktail, it's a week to pay homage to the beverage that's been on the most-sipped list since 1919.

Rooftop at QT, perched on the sixth floor of QT Auckland and with sweeping views of the harbour, is known for colouring outside the lines. Not one to follow the status quo, they don't just stir and pour. They taste, tweak, and turn flavours on their head.

The bar team, led by Manager Aurelien Durand, have crafted a menu of bold new takes on the classic - each a little twisted, a little theatrical, and designed to be dramatic from first sip to final clink.

Those who wish to tempt fate and delve into the divine can leave the components to chance as the bar team read their cards and predict their future tippie.

BITTER & TWISTED

The September ritual heralded across the country, Bitter & Twisted is QT's month-long devotion to the Negroni. While World Negroni Week with Campari is technically 22-28

September, the bar team love these drops so much they couldn't bear to only have it on the menu for seven days.

Whether you're a Negroni purist or a cocktail thrill-seeker, this is your chance to revel in the red.

The Moulin Rouge brings sloe gin to the fore, while Scarlet Smoke adds caffeinated Bulldog Gin into the mix. Oh Sweet Ruby blends strawberry coulis for a sweeter touch, and Four Pillars Bloody Shiraz Gin and Mulled Wine Syrup dance together in Flushed Crimson. Carmine Pistacia is for the those who love to push a boundary, with Crème de Cacao and pistachio foam making their mark.

Decisions, decisions. Luckily, the Trio Tasting Flight gives a taste of three different pours, each with its own off-centre personality and attitude.



Whether you're a Negroni purist or a cocktail thrill-seeker, this is your invitation to revel in the red.

TWISTED TAROT READING

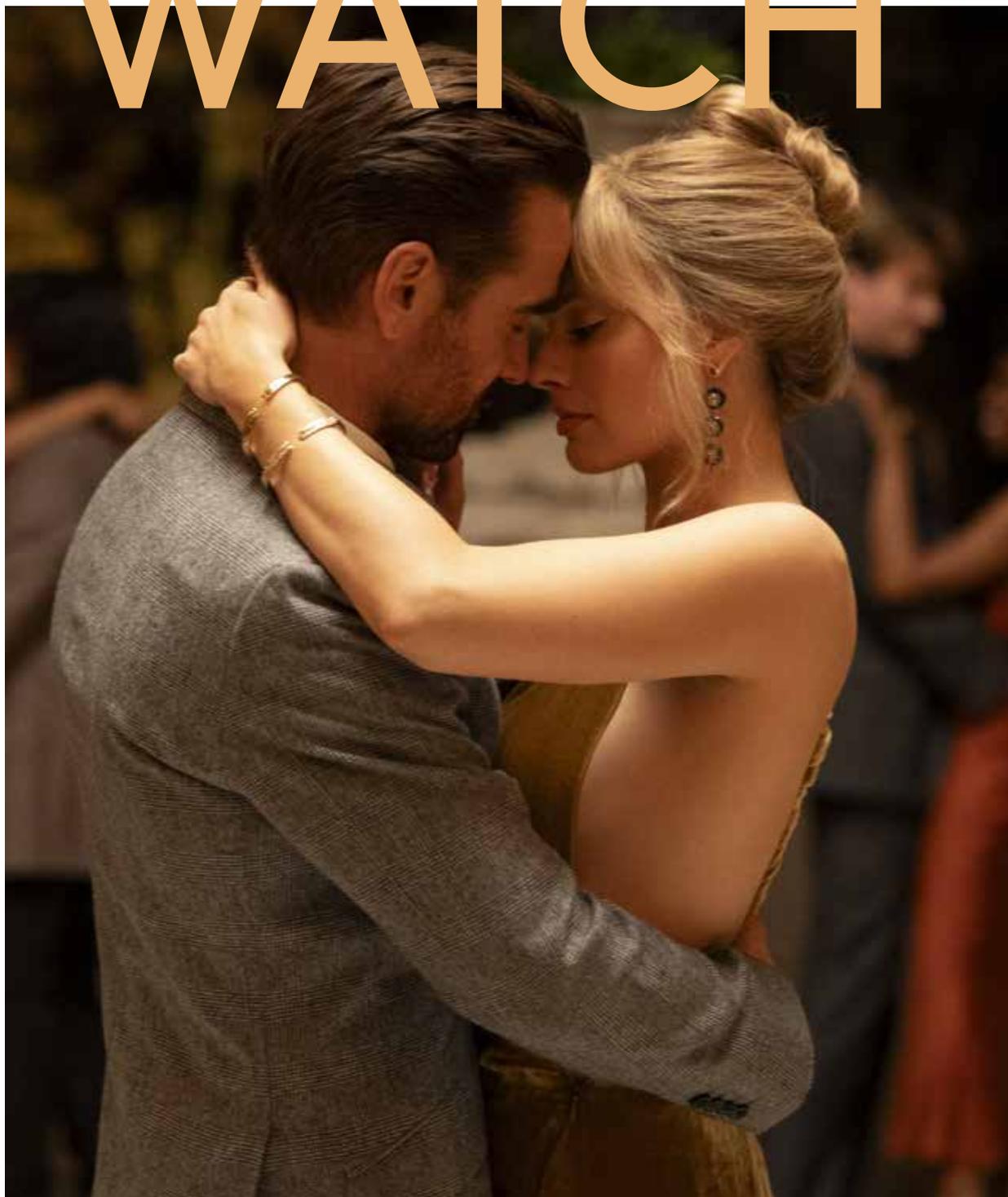
A tableside experience gives the new meaning of 'spirits' at Rooftop at QT - The Twist of Fate Negroni. Fortune favours the bold, the curious, and the ones who dare let the cards decide. For \$28, let destiny choose your tippie with a tarot card reading and hand your drink over to the spirits. Is fate on your side? Leave it to the cards and you may walk away with your drink on the house.

FRIDAY SOIRÉE

There's no better way to end a week. On Friday nights during September, Rooftop at QT turns up the beat and slips into something vermillion.

Red lights glow. Music high. Classic Negronis flowing at a cool price of \$16. Revel in the iconic complimentary french-fry service at 8pm then linger for that final pour on the dance floor.

WATCH



A BIG BOLD BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY

If you aren't familiar with Director Kogonada now is the time. He's consistently brought a new flair and flavour to cinema rarely seen. His films, despite having a focus on architecture and making the environment a character is primarily about what it is to be human. The quiet moments that bring us closer together. Check out Columbus and After Yang if you're ever in the mood to be inspired by our humanity. He takes that another step, reuniting with Colin Farrell for A Big Bold Beautiful Journey where he and Margot Robbie go for a literal walk through memory lane. The pair are single strangers who meet at a mutual friend's wedding and soon, through a surprising twist of fate, find themselves on an surreal journey through their own pasts. Together they witness key moments of their lives, their first breakup, kissing mum goodbye for the last time. This illuminates how they got to where they are in the present...and possibly getting a chance to alter their futures. Beautiful.

In cinemas 18 September

HALLOW ROAD

Directed by Babak Anvari with acting by Rosamund Pike (*Gone Girl*) and Emmy winner Matthew Rhys (*The Americans*) this film is taking you on a wild unique horror filled ride. However it presents itself as a slow thriller as they drive through the night to help their daughter who's just been involved in a car accident. They coach her over the phone as she attempts to keep the other driver alive, but things go sideways as someone else gets involved. Revelation after revelation take you on a journey you were not expecting. Unless you watched the trailer in which case the entire movie is spoiled and you shouldn't even bother. For a film that mostly takes place in a car in the dead of night, it knows how to keep you on the hook.

In Cinemas Now



THE TWISTED TALE OF AMANDA KNOX: MINISERIES

Based on the true story of Amanda Knox this mini series, sorry they call them limited series now, follows her life prior to and after the events that would shape the next 15 years of her life.

While travelling abroad in Italy her roommate was savagely murdered. Knox (played by Anna Van Patten) and her boyfriend Raffaele Sollecito were then charged by Italian authorities and spent four years in an Italian prison. She was eventually acquitted and she has now spent the rest of her time trying to reconcile with the system that put her away as well as clearing her name. The real Knox serves as an executive producer on the show alongside Monika Lewinsky.

Streaming on Disney+

THE CONJURING: LAST RITES

The fourth and questionably final film in the hit horror series. I feel like every single one of these films has been teased as the last one but I'll believe it when I never see it again. Even if it does end the shared universe of

The Nun, Annabelle and even a *Conjuring* TV show will keep our favourite Ghost busting duo around for a long time to come. Michael Chaves returns as director while Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga return as our series stalwarts who have come to a suburban home in 1986 to flush out a demon. This one is the first they ever encountered as a young couple, and the first time they ran away. This time they have no such intentions. While

I tend to laugh more than I scream these movies are always a really good time.

In Cinemas Sep 4



Each issue, Tim Warren, our untamed reviewer of all things that make life wonderful, turns his attention to the bountiful New Zealand gin scene.

Find his detailed video reviews at
@follow.tim.warren

HUNTING THE PERFECT GIN



JUNO - MAIA GIN

Juno Maia is a seasonal spring-inspired gin with distinctive lemon-forward characteristics.

On the nose, the gin presents hints of lemongrass, lemon verbena, and a subtle coriander undertone. Its appearance is light, with an aroma that gradually intensifies. A neat tasting reveals bright, complex flavors. The initial taste is delicate and develops depth, showcasing a balance between bright citrus notes and traditional juniper and herbaceous elements and a wink of pine. Mixed, the gin's flavor profile expands, revealing nuanced layers reminiscent of a spring day; a floral essence and a subtle dusky quality add complexity. A lemon rind garnish enhances the inherent brightness without overwhelming its character.

Impressive through its versatility, it works well solo and in fruity cocktails. A fun drink, it embodies the essence of spring, with a light profile and vibrant citrus-forward taste. Let's mark that an enthusiastic thumbs up for its distinctive and enjoyable flavor.

junogin.com



VICTOR - LIME LEAF

From Thompsons Whisky comes this Victor Lime Leaf gin. It's a bright and distinctive spirit, setting itself apart with a prominent lime leaf botanical that gives it an immediate and delicious aromatic quality.

It's straightforward, yet with a powerful flavour profile. The vibrant and distinct lime note shines through whether you're drinking it straight or with a simple mixer; where it becomes a very easy to drink summery drop. Its boldness means it stands alone, and you don't need a complex mixer to enjoy it. The simplicity allows the quality of the gin itself to be the star. The only downside? It's very morish, leaving you with a constant desire for another glass.

thomsonwhisky.co.nz

1919 - PINEAPPLE BITS

Pineapple lovers, rejoice! The 1919 Pineapple Bits Gin is a fun-loving spirit that pays homage to the classic New Zealand pineapple lump. From the moment you open it, the smell of juicy pineapple is undeniable and sets the stage for a truly unique tasting experience.

This gin isn't shy; on its own, the pineapple flavor playfully slaps you in the face, in the best possible way. The taste is pure pineapple lump, making it a fun and delicious pour. It's best enjoyed simply, over ice with a splash of soda to open up the flavors, or with a subtle, light tonic for a touch of sweetness. This is a special bottle to share at a pool party or barbecue. It's an excellent example of a distiller having fun with their craft and creating something truly memorable.

1919distilling.com



Kakapo - Mānuka honey and Elderflower

This gin is a bright, balanced, and highly versatile spirit that shines in a variety of drinks. The unique botanicals of manuka honey and elderflower are initially subtle, they work together to create a delicious and well-rounded character. The juniper is present but not overpowering, allowing this gin to be a fantastic base for cocktails without dominating them.

Its balance makes it highly adaptable and it's particularly recommended for a Martini, where its unique profile can shine. A splash of lemon or a light tonic can help bring out the subtle honey and floral notes, yet it's equally good on its own with a splash of soda. This gin is a perfect choice for anyone seeking a classic gin with its own subtle character.

kakapodistillery.co.nz

CARBON 6 - CHRYSANTHEMUM

Carbon Six has crafted a truly unique and delicious limited edition with their Chrysanthemum Gin. Right from the pour, the gin reveals a silky texture and an amazing nose, bursting with notes of honey and summer fruits. It's got a robust, almost smoky-sweet aroma with hints of pineapple, cinnamon, and smoked wood.

On the palate, it's a revelation, a syrupy texture coats the tongue, leaving a lasting and unique flavour reminiscent of soothing herb tea. It's complex, with a subtle sweetness that never feels overpowering and a surprisingly light juniper presence. This will appeal to whisky and rum drinkers, as it shares a smoky wood flavor profile. It shines when served with a splash of soda, which amplifies its tropical notes. This is a complete cocktail in a bottle!

carbonsix.co.nz



STRANGE NATURE - PINOT NOIR EDITION

This gin from Strange Nature is a truly unique and special drop, made from Pinot Noir wine spirit with juniper as the only botanical. It has the color of a pale rosé and a bright nose of cherry and other red fruits, with a hint of tartness and a chalky quality reminiscent of Pinot Noir. When enjoyed with ice and soda, the flavor profile opens up even more, revealing juicy notes of strawberry and subtle herbal and peppery spices that all come directly from the grape itself.

This is not a standard pour but a gin for special occasions. It would be a perfect choice for a wine lover and pairs exceptionally well in a martini, especially with a medium red vermouth to create a contrasting and delicious cocktail. The beautiful, dark bottle is also a work of art that you'll want to keep long after the gin is gone.

strangenaturegin.com

LORDE'S

On a sunny April afternoon in New York, a small crowd gathered in Washington Square Park. There was no announcement, no stage, no hoopla. Just a woman with damp hair and an acoustic guitar. The voice was unmistakable. It was Lorde, playing a new song called What Was That. The performance was shaky, unvarnished, and all the more powerful for it.

TRANSPARENT

“I was trying to make a document that reflected my femininity: raw, primal, innocent, elegant, openhearted, spiritual, masc,” she said later. The moment was intimate, almost fragile, and then it was gone. Police asked her to stop, but the message had already been delivered. She was back, and on her own terms.

RETURN



“There’s nowhere to hide. I believe that putting the deepest parts of ourselves to music is what sets us free.”

Born Ella Yelich-O’Connor in Takapuna in 1996, Lorde became an international star before she had even finished high school. Her breakout single *Royals*, written with producer Joel Little when she was only 16, became an anthem of youthful disillusionment. The track went to number one around the world and won her two Grammys. With her debut album *Pure Heroine*, she captured the restless boredom of suburban adolescence and the suspicion of a celebrity culture built on excess. Yet from the beginning she resisted being consumed by the machine. “I don’t think about myself as a pop star,” she once told *Vanity Fair*. “I’m a writer. I make songs and I tell stories.”

Her second album, *Melodrama*, arrived in 2017 to critical acclaim. It was a maximalist exploration of heartbreak and young adulthood. The record was nominated for Album of the Year at the Grammys and cemented her status as one of the most inventive voices of her generation. Four years later she pivoted again, releasing *Solar Power* in 2021. That album was sparse, sunlit, and grounded in acoustic textures. It was inspired, she said, by “climate anxiety, quietude, and a desire to step outside the digital glare.” Reception was mixed. Some admired its restraint while others found it too subdued. Lorde later admitted it was a recalibration, a period when she needed to step back from the expectations that had defined her. “I had tried this kind of refusal on *Solar Power*,” she told *Rolling Stone*, “and there was something missing. I felt those songs touch my skin, but not hook my guts.”

Now she has returned with *Virgin*, her most daring and confrontational work yet. The album cover is an X-ray of her pelvis, complete with a zipper, belt buckle, and visible IUD. “The colour of the album is clear like bathwater, windows, ice, spit. Full transparency. The language is plain and unsentimental. The sounds are the same wherever possible,” she explained in an email to fans. “I was trying to see myself, all the way through.” She added, “I’m proud and scared of this album. There’s nowhere to hide. I believe

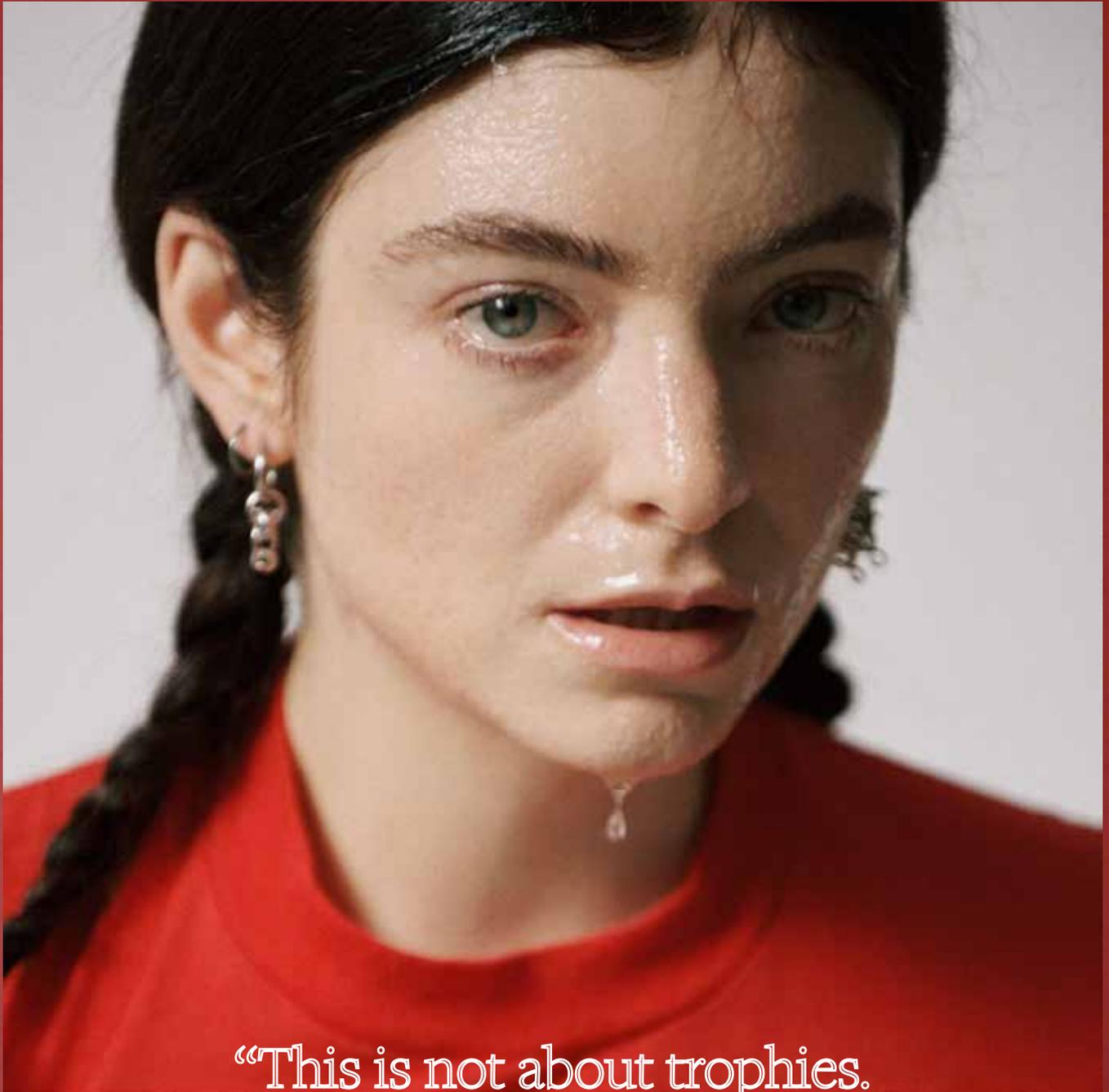
that putting the deepest parts of ourselves to music is what sets us free.”

Virgin is not coy about its themes. Lorde has written about her struggles with disordered eating, about a pregnancy scare, about dissociation while performing. She has also spoken openly about gender fluidity. “I’m a woman except for the days when I’m a man,” she said in *Rolling Stone*. The songs on *Virgin* are diaristic and often uncomfortably candid, but they are also liberating. On *Man of the Year* she describes a moment of imagining herself with men’s jeans, a gold chain, and duct tape across her chest, a fleeting vision that became the seed of a song. “It was a physical sensation of becoming something else for a moment,” she said. The track captures both the seriousness and the playfulness of her explorations of identity.

Musically the record marks a return to electronic textures after the acoustic drift of *Solar Power*. Working with Jim-E Stack, Dan Nigro, Dev Hynes, and Buddy Ross, she crafted soundscapes that are spare but electrically alive. Critics have noted that *Virgin* is not revolutionary in its sound but is profound in its honesty. *Pitchfork* described it as “a gritty, tender, and often transcendent ode to freedom and transformation.” That transformation is not about reinvention for reinvention’s sake. It is about finding a way to be fully human inside an industry that often demands the opposite.

The shock of *Virgin* is not only in its imagery or lyrics but in the way it strips away performance to reveal process. Lorde has always been self-aware, often





“This is not about trophies.
It is about survival. It is about
making sense of being alive
right now.”

critiquing the very culture that made her famous, but this time she takes herself as the subject of critique. She admits openly to having performed through years of dissociation. “I felt myself leave my body sometimes on stage,” she confessed in an interview, “and I could see the girl singing, smiling, doing the job, but I wasn’t there.” *Virgin* is her attempt to end that separation, to inhabit herself again.

There is a visceral quality to this work. On *Hammer*, she sings with clenched intensity about pressure and destruction. On *Clearblue*, the lyrics trace the outline of a pregnancy scare, the kind of detail many pop stars would leave in the shadows. *Favourite Daughter* offers a meditation on family, inheritance, and expectation, a theme that echoes her conversations with her poet mother, Sonja Yelich. The honesty is startling, yet it is delivered with an elegant restraint that makes it less confessional diary than carefully crafted art. Lorde insists on plain language, calling it “unsentimental, transparent, like ice.”

Her explorations of gender identity are equally unflinching. In one interview she admitted, “I’m a woman except for the days when I’m a man.” That line was repeated endlessly in headlines, but within the album it resonates with nuance. On *Man of the Year* she embodies masculinity with humour and curiosity, not as rejection but as expansion. She has described the moment of inspiration at a GQ party when she imagined herself wearing men’s jeans, a gold chain, and duct tape across her chest. “It was like I could feel myself shifting into something else,” she said. This moment of play became an anchor point for her writing, proof that identity could be fluid and playful without losing depth.

Critics have been quick to place *Virgin* within the arc of her career. *Pure Heroine* was the voice of adolescence, a suburban girl refusing to buy into the myths of celebrity. *Melodrama* was the sound of young adulthood, messy and brilliant. *Solar Power* was retreat, a refusal of expectations, and *Virgin* is confrontation. It is the point where she no longer hides behind metaphor or concept. Instead she opens herself up, both physically with her stark artwork and lyrically with her detailed candour. Pitchfork

called the album “a gritty, tender, and often transcendent ode to freedom and transformation.” Other reviewers have noted that while it may not reinvent pop sonically, it reshapes what honesty in pop can look like.

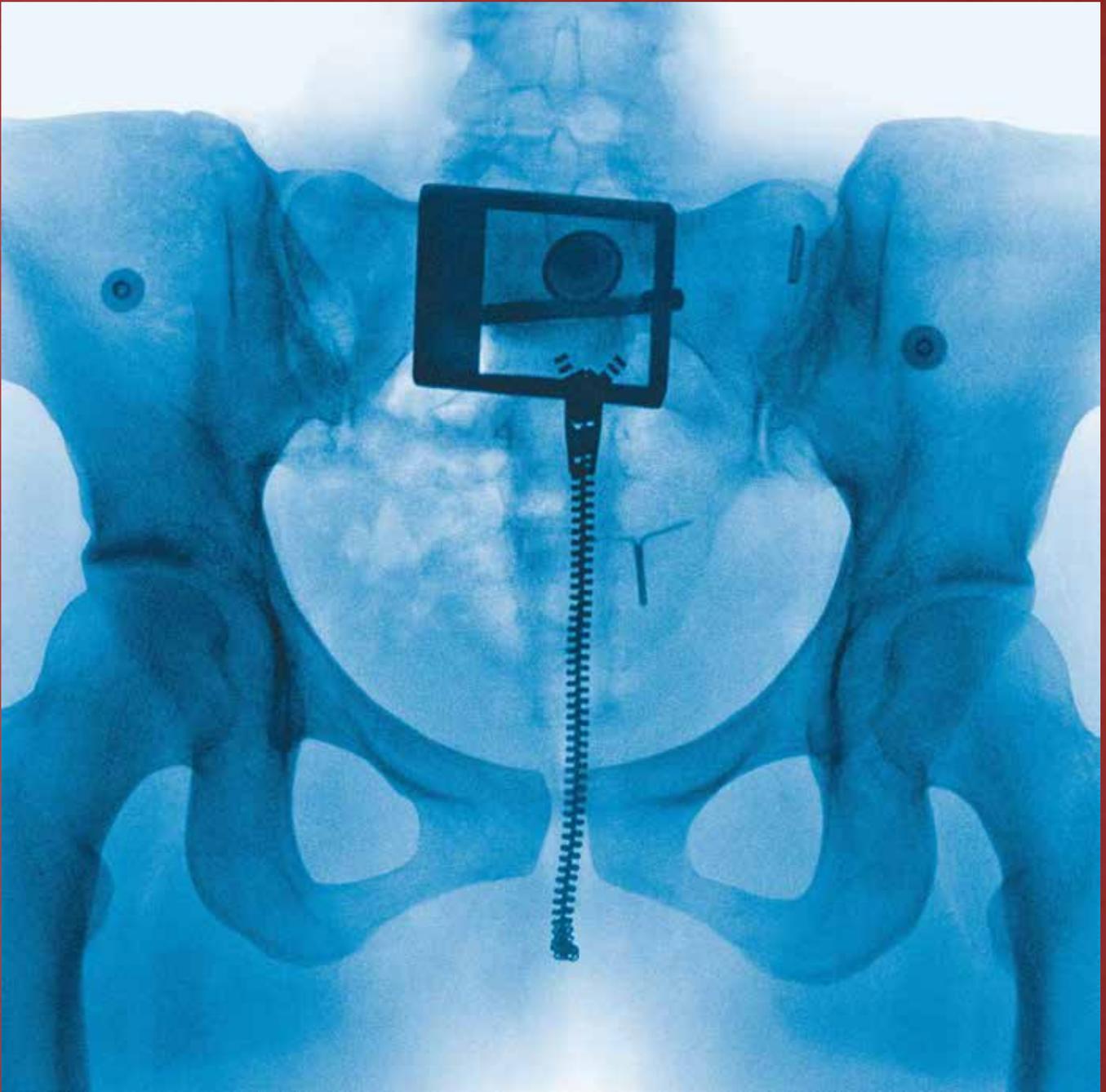
The balance between pride and fear has always defined her work. As a teenager she was praised for her precocity, yet she often rejected the label of prodigy. As an adult she is praised for her candour, yet she admits she sometimes wishes she could stay quiet. The act of creation for her is both exposure and liberation.

Virgin has also reignited conversations about body image and autonomy. In a candid BBC Radio 1 interview she admitted to years of struggle with an eating disorder, explaining how industry pressure around weight and appearance had shaped her sense of self. “I had to learn to live in my body without punishing it,” she said. The decision to place an X-ray of her pelvis on the album cover, complete with visible IUD, belt buckle, and zipper, was both an artistic choice and a personal statement. “It is total transparency,” she explained. “I was trying to see myself, all the way through.” Fans responded with a mix of shock and admiration. *Teen Vogue* praised it as “a gesture of radical honesty,” noting how rare it is to see a pop artist present their body in such stark, clinical detail rather than through glamour.

The album also repositions Lorde culturally. She was once the reluctant star, the teenage outsider who seemed almost embarrassed by her own fame. Now she embraces her position as a generational voice, but she does so on her own terms. She no longer chases charts or awards. “This is not about trophies,” she said. “It is about survival. It is about making sense of being alive right now.” Her *Ultrasound World Tour*, announced alongside the album, will take her across North America and Europe, but even the tour name suggests continuity with the album’s themes of transparency and exposure. It is not a spectacle but a continuation of the conversation.

In many ways *Virgin* is less about reinvention than about integration. Lorde has spoken about wanting to bring together the fragments of herself that fame had split apart. She has been the

“I had to learn to live
in my body without
punishing it,”



suburban girl, the reluctant pop star, the maximalist heartbreaker, the sun-worshipping recluse. Now she wants to be all of them at once. “I was trying to make something clear and unsentimental, something that could hold all the contradictions,” she explained. That ambition, to hold contradictions rather than resolve them, is what makes *Virgin* her most mature work to date.

Even as she navigates questions of identity and transparency, she remains deeply tied to her roots. References to New Zealand continue to weave through her songs, whether in the suburban boredom of *Pure Heroine*, the oceanic calm of *Solar Power*, or the grounded intimacy of *Virgin*. Home anchors her, even as she interrogates everything else. This tether to place may be why her work resonates so deeply. She can experiment with identity and transparency because she knows where she comes from.

The story of *Virgin* is not the story of a pop star reinventing herself to stay relevant. It is the story of an artist who has already proven her relevance choosing instead to prove her humanity. For Lorde, that is the only measure that matters.

Virgin is more than album, it is a statement about what it means to be a woman and an artist in 2025. Lorde has always stood slightly apart from the pop establishment, but this time she is doing more than resisting formulas. She is rewriting what pop stardom itself can look like. By confronting eating disorders, birth control, pregnancy scares, and fluid identity, she is speaking truths that many listeners share but rarely hear reflected in songs that reach a global stage. “I needed everything to be able to choose,” she told *Los 40* when asked about her decision to step away from birth control. The line was not simply about her body, it was about

“I had this deep moment of existential reassessment of my role and this album is my answer.”

her life and her work. The power of choice, to define oneself moment by moment, has become the album’s pulse.

This insistence on transparency reverberates far beyond music. *Virgin* has sparked essays about body autonomy, about the symbolism of the IUD in her album artwork, about the way young women in particular navigate expectations. *Teen Vogue* called it “a gesture of radical honesty.” *Rolling Stone* highlighted her declaration, “I’m a woman except for the days when I’m a man,” as one of the most significant cultural quotes of the year. It is telling that Lorde did not present these revelations with spectacle. She did not drop a high-budget video or a glossy magazine spread. She stood in a park with a guitar and sang. The simplicity made the message unignorable.

Her cultural reach can be measured in the artists who cite her as influence. Billie Eilish has spoken of the way *Pure Heroine* opened doors for a different kind of teenage storytelling. Olivia Rodrigo’s diary-like narratives follow a path Lorde helped carve. Yet even as she influences others, Lorde has made it clear that she does not intend to compete. She allows space for new voices while carving her own direction. “I had this deep moment of existential reassessment of my role,” she admitted, “and this album is my answer.” That answer is not another climb to number one. It is a choice to remain an artist on her own terms.

The *Ultrasound World Tour* will test how this philosophy translates on stage. Named to echo the X-ray imagery of *Virgin*, the tour promises intimacy rather than spectacle. Fans expect it will be less about fireworks and more about communion, an extension of the park performance that felt so immediate and human. In a world where pop concerts often compete with cinematic universes, Lorde is betting that simplicity, clarity, and raw connection will resonate most deeply. She is placing faith not in scale but in sincerity.

The honesty of *Virgin* has not been without criticism. Some reviewers have argued that the album lacks the innovation of *Melodrama* or the daring

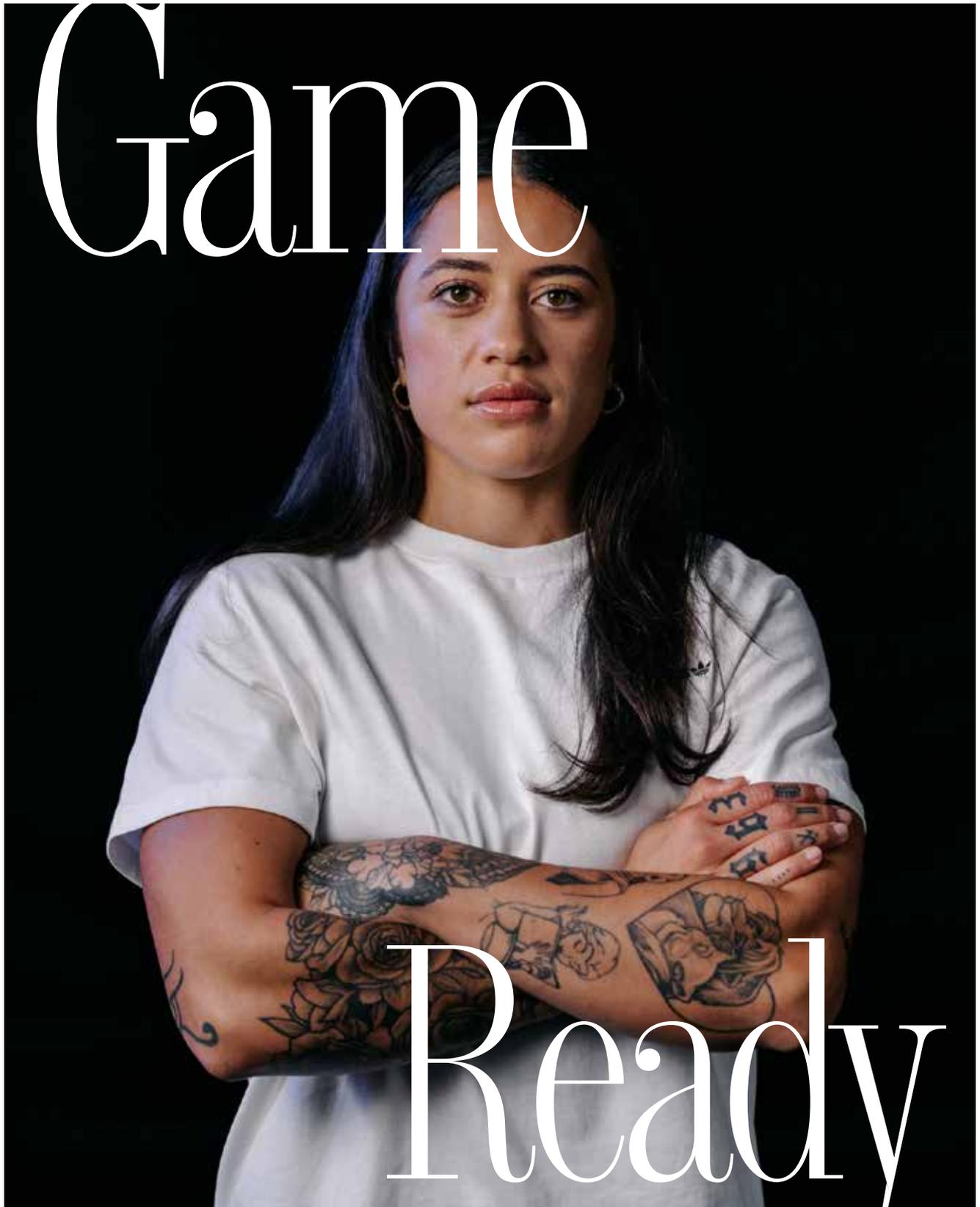
reinvention of *Pure Heroine*. But even those who critique its sound acknowledge the bravery of its subject matter. *Pitchfork* called it “gritty, tender, and often transcendent.” *The Daily Lobo* wrote that while it may not find much new sonically, it offers something rare: an artist willing to tell the truth without disguise. For many listeners, that truth matters more than innovation.

What *Virgin* ultimately offers is a new model for how to age in public as a pop star. Lorde is no longer the teenage oracle nor the reluctant celebrity hiding from the spotlight. She is a woman in her late twenties writing about what her life really looks like. She has struggled with her body, questioned her identity, reevaluated her career, and chosen transparency over performance. These are not subjects pop music often embraces, but Lorde has never been interested in what pop music often does. “I believe that putting the deepest parts of ourselves to music is what sets us free,” she wrote in her letter to fans. That belief drives every note of *Virgin*.

The strength of this record is not in its polish but in its humanity. To listen to *Virgin* is to enter the contradictions of being alive in this moment: vulnerable yet defiant, frightened yet liberated, grounded yet searching. It is an album that refuses easy answers but insists on honesty. It is Lorde’s most personal and her most generous work, an offering to anyone who has felt fractured, uncertain, or unmoored. In her willingness to be transparent, she gives others permission to be the same.

Lorde’s journey has always been about more than music. From the suburbs of Auckland to the stages of the world, she has made a career of refusing to follow the script. *Virgin* is the latest refusal, but also a reclamation. It is not an album chasing youth or nostalgia or relevance. It is the sound of an artist who has already proven everything she needs to prove and now chooses to prove only that she is human.

When she stood in Washington Square Park, unannounced and unadorned, her voice cracked and trembled. It was not a perfect performance. It was something rarer. It was real. That is what *Virgin* is at its core: the return of a voice determined to be real, to see itself all the way through, and to offer that vision, unfiltered, to the world.



There's a quiet kind of power that comes with finally having something built for you. Not adapted, not borrowed, not made to fit after the fact. The RS15 Avaglide, adidas's first rugby boot designed specifically for women, is one of those moments. Developed in collaboration with some of the world's best players and backed by years of research, it signals more than just a design evolution. It is part of a broader shift in how women's sport is seen, supported, and celebrated.

INTERVIEWED BY HELOISE GARRITY



high performance looks like in Aotearoa. The cultural impact of their success cannot be overstated. These are players who have opened doors for aspiring young girls across the country, helped drive the professionalisation of the women's game, and reminded the nation that black jerseys do not belong to one code alone.

The latest iteration of that legacy comes in the form of a new jersey designed with input from Te Puia artist Teresa Murray. It features a woven Turapa panel that symbolises the strength of sisterhood and the multicultural heritage of the team. Every player was body scanned to ensure the fit was tailored to their position and movement. It is a design that honours the individual while reinforcing the collective. It is sport made personal.

In our conversation, the players share the pressures of elite competition, the importance of mental health, and the pride that comes from seeing their culture reflected in the jersey they wear. They also spoke about leadership, self-belief and the quiet moments that keep them grounded.

We caught up with three of the Black Ferns ahead of the launch, each of them bringing their own experience and insight to the conversation. Portia Woodman-Wickliffe has become a household name not just for her blistering pace and record-breaking try count, but for the way in which she has elevated the visibility of women's rugby on the global stage. Now in her thirties, she remains a powerful presence both on and off the field, having recently returned from retirement to score seven tries in a single Pacific Four match. Maia Roos, still in her early twenties, has already become a core figure in the team, bringing a maturity and calm to the game that belies her age. She was the youngest ever player to start a Rugby World Cup final for the Black Ferns and is already shaping what the future of leadership in the squad looks like. Katelyn Vaha'akolo, who made her mark in rugby league before making the move to union, brings raw power and cultural pride to the game, and has fast become one of the most exciting players to watch in the build-up to the next World Cup.

As the Black Ferns prepare to defend their World Cup title, they do so as one of the most successful teams in New Zealand sporting history. With six World Cup wins and a growing global fanbase, they have helped redefine what



**You're heading into your next tour—
how are you preparing mentally and
emotionally for what lies ahead?**

KV: I think a big thing, for me, is my mental wellbeing. It's really important, in order for me to thrive in a performance environment, so I find I need to spend a lot of time making sure that I'm filling my cup leading up to campaigns. We're obviously spending a lot of time away from whānau, a lot of time away from our safe spaces, so making sure my mental and emotional wellbeing is okay is a massive priority for me, and I take care of that by doing things that I love, doing things that make me happy, that are outside of rugby. And obviously, training really hard, so I can make the World Cup team.

MAIA: I'm pretty excited. It's been a few years building towards this moment again; we've put a lot into the preparation over the last three years, and we've been training and playing together more than ever before. I'm just really looking forward to seeing how our team is able to bring everything together and flourish as a team in the lead-up to the second half of the year.

PORTIA: Heading into a tour, the week leading into it is getting as much time with whānau and friends, making sure my family is going to be alright while I'm going to be away. It's banking sleep, getting recovery, understanding if it is a three-week tour, a week tour, or a full-week tour - making sure I'm clear on what the tour is. Is it a game, is

it just camp, having the finer details really clear and understood by all of us in my whānau, so that when I leave, it's not such a big shock and where everyone knows what's happening. Mentally, emotionally, it's a big deal because you're going to be around a lot of people for a really long time sometimes and it's just understanding when your body needs to switch off and when you need to create those connections and hang out with people whom you probably don't hang out with; so understanding all of that and making sure that my family is going to be okay while I'm away.

**From physical training to inner resolve,
what does resilience look like in this
moment for you?**

KV: I think resilience looks like constantly having a growth mindset. I feel like sometimes I look at my progress and if I don't feel like I'm progressing hugely, I feel like I'm failing. Resilience can look like a lot of different things - for me, it's doing things for my emotional mental wellbeing, like I mentioned, but also just being proud of myself and allowing myself to be present at each moment. I often find myself always thinking about the next moment and struggling to stay present, and I think if I can be present in everything that I do, it can help me stay resilient.

MAIA: Resilience can be a lot of different things. When I think about my community at home, resilience is a really strong value

that we hold. I think in this moment, it'll be the resilience to keep training when it's hard, resilience in the games if things aren't going our way and being able to go back to our own processes and pick ourselves back up and carry on.

PORTIA: Resilience is about understanding the highs and lows of the professional game. Going through an injury, going through non-selection, losing a really pinnacle game or losing a game that you probably thought you could have won. Those moments, understanding that you're allowed to feel upset, you're allowed to feel gutted, that is a natural response; and understand that it doesn't define us, it doesn't mean that is the pathway we have to take. Understanding that moment, look ahead - what is our next path?

What I learned during my injury was the power of having a clear path forward and truly understanding it. Every two weeks, I'd get a new programme. I went from not being able to walk, to walking; from walking to running. I learned that the journey takes time, but it's important to celebrate each milestone, every little moment you get to tick off matters. If you've come back from a loss, go back and actually look at the good things that we did, and there might be some really amazing moments in the game that just were perfect and then there were just moments that weren't going our way. Resilience is having an amazing support base - having people who understand your lifestyle,







understand who you are as a person, what makes you tick, what you need in moments of low. Do you want advice or do you just want to rant, or do you want support, or do you need to be left alone? Making sure you have those people around you and having them support you in the best way possible.

Women's rugby continues to redefine the narrative in a male-dominated sport. What barriers have you had to break - on the field and beyond - and how has that shaped your approach to leadership?

KV: Some barriers that I've had to break through as a rugby player is the constant

narrative that we just should be grateful for what we get. As women players, we deserve everything that we work for. There are women in this team who are mothers, there are women in this team who are police officers - we are so many different things, and I think we work really hard to get to where we are. There's a bit of a narrative in women's sports that you get what you get and you should just be thankful, because this is a male-dominated sport and your place isn't really here, but I feel like this team, especially, is really breaking that narrative and that's a real privilege for me to be a part of. There is also this perception that we're not capable of being the best team

in the world. That's been a hard barrier to break through, but I think because we're so connected as a playing group and we've all experienced similar things around being told that, as a woman, you shouldn't be playing at this level... we don't believe any of it - we're women and we're more than capable.

MAIA: Rugby has always been such a male-dominated industry, and I'm so fortunate to be where I am, at a time when women's rugby is really on the rise and we're being given more opportunities than ever before to train and play, and to be high-performing professionals. I joined the team when I was 18, so I was really quite young, but we were

one of the first fully professional women's teams in New Zealand for 15s. And so being able to have the privilege, I guess, of setting the standard of what a professional women's rugby team looks like has been something that we've had to step up to. I think that kind of pressure helps my leadership abilities, because I want to be the best I can be, and I want young girls to be able to look at us and know that they can do the same.

Sport, like business, thrives on performance. How do you balance pushing for excellence with protecting your wellbeing and setting boundaries that prevent burnout?

KV: Yeah, I'm still figuring that out! I struggle because I'm obsessed with getting better. My goal is to be the best in the world. And I know that to be the best in the world, I have to work extra hard. It's easy to forget that actually being the best in the world, sometimes means being the best at doing off-field things and balancing the two, and that's something I've learnt over the last couple of years. I find that if I'm constantly obsessing over rugby and trying to better my performance, it actually makes me really unwell, and I start to lose my confidence a bit. So I think if I can give myself just as much off-field time as I do on-field time, it helps with preventing that burnout.

MAIA: I think knowing yourself and knowing your limits is a big one. Not everyone's peak performance looks the same, and everyone's weeks look different in order to be at their best at the end of the week. I say weeks because I like to take things week by week, as my performance cycle is usually one week at a time, which makes planning a really important step in preventing burnout. At the beginning of every week, I like to sit down, plan out my week and set smaller goals that feed into my big, overarching goal - one step at a time approach.

PORTIA: I think I've learned how to do this a lot more as I've gotten older. I've learned to listen to my body and I also understand what my body can and can't handle. It comes down to how your body is feeling on that day; have I had enough sleep, have I had the right kai, has there been stress going on when my mind is a little bit drifted? It is understanding what it is that I get an emotional response from that can affect me physically and then understanding what I need from there. I'm really good at understanding that sometimes, I just need space from people, whether that's taking a break from social media, or media, whānau, people you see in public who want some time from you. I know if I'm feeling low or my energy is low, we talk about my cup is half empty, and I need to go and fill it. Go and do the things that fill my cup. I love going to the beach, spending time with my whānau, reading or have some amazing kai with my whānau; those things fill my cup.

I think it's also important to have a balance with rugby and life outside of rugby. What does that look like - a lot of it is whānau; my wife and daughter making sure I can spend as much time with them or getting to know what's happening in their lives because we live such a fast-paced life. It's so easy to just go a whole day without actually asking, "What happened in your day?" Like my daughter at school, "How's your sports?" - so just getting time in with whānau, having a little check-in and ensuring we're all on track, and if we're not, what do we do next? But, it's not easy. It's working from 8am till 4pm and you've got to do all the things in between, and recovery and to make sure you're performing and running on high, high levels, so getting time with whānau is my favourite thing and it keeps me going.

There's growing recognition that women need gear - and systems - designed for them. What's the most significant shift you've seen in women-specific design in sport, and how does it reflect a deeper shift in how women are being seen and supported?

KV: It's been amazing to learn that adidas has created a boot for just women - how many other brands are out there doing that? Not a lot that I see! And I think it just shows that there are people and there are businesses that actually care for the success of women's sport, and they actually want to see us succeed, not just in rugby, but in women's



sport in general. I feel like this is just a start. Although it probably should have happened a long time ago, I'm grateful that it's happening now. I think it's the start of something really big, and I hope that I get to continue to be a part of it.

MAIA: I think it's so cool that we're finally seeing women-specific gear coming through, because we're not just "small men", which has typically been the approach to the gear we're provided with. We have very different bodies, so just to have gear that makes us feel seen goes a really long way. adidas introducing the new rugby boots, which are specifically designed for women, is a really monumental step in the right direction. The new adidas boot has added heel arches and support in the ankle that we need, and I feel so grateful that it's happening now.

Leadership within a team often means knowing when to step up and when to create space for others to rise. How have you personally fostered inclusion and cohesion within your team, and what advice would you give to those leading in industries still catching up?

KV: I consider one of my strengths to be inclusivity, so I find I don't really struggle with that too much. To me, it's really important that every single person on the team knows that there's a place for them. Ruby Tui always talks about how there's a position for every single body, and there's a belonging for every person that comes from all different backgrounds. That's something we're really good at in women's sport - the constant reminder that there's a place for everyone here. If I can encourage any leader in any business, it's the need to constantly remind those who work for you, or who work around you, that there's a place for them. And you don't have to fit into a certain stereotype or fit into a certain idea of what an athlete should look like, or what a person should look like, to belong. I really take pride in encouraging the narrative that there is a place for everyone, wherever you go.

MAIA: I've been in leadership positions since I was quite young - I'm still quite young and I've found that that has come with learning how to share that load. I know my strengths and I learn where other people's strengths are. So I find a bit of delegation helps other people to grow. I think that can be seen in both sport and business; the main thing is knowing your strengths and getting to know your team, and connecting with your team so that you can really understand their strengths and where they can bring more of their superpowers into your environment.

Setbacks are part of the story - whether you're on the field, in a boardroom, or leading through change in any industry. Can you share a moment when you had to bounce back, and how that experience reshaped your

understanding of resilience?

KV: I had quite bad mental wellbeing as a teenager and struggled with self harm; there were moments where I didn't even think I'd be here today, so it's pretty special that I get to live my dreams. My Whānau were incredibly supportive of me, but I didn't accept the help. I just thought I could do everything on my own, but a real defining moment for me, and what taught me determination, was their unwavering support for me and the constant want for me to heal and get better. I think that's what taught me resilience. And so now I get to be here and do what I love.

MAIA: Dealing with injuries and niggles can be quite frustrating, especially as while you're doing rehab, you see other people around you growing rapidly because they're able to do things that you can't. And so I think in those moments, it's important to stay present and know that the journey that you're on is for you, know that the work that you're doing will be for a greater purpose and that once you can get back into it, you'll be better off. Where you are currently is where you're meant to be and if you keep working, then you'll end up in the right spot, just focus on not getting in your own head too much about things you can't control.

What does empowerment mean to you today - not just as an athlete or professional, but as a woman navigating systems that weren't always built with you in mind?

KV: I feel empowered when someone tells me not to worry and encourages me to take time for myself. I feel empowered when I see athletes being themselves and putting themselves out there, because I know it's really hard to do; it's really hard to be yourself when there are so many different eyes on you. I find it empowering when women share stories about their culture, and where they come from, their traditions. I feel empowered through my own culture and through where I come from as a Polynesian woman. I'm really proud to be a Polynesian woman - that pride is where I feel my strongest.

MAIA: Empowerment, to me, means feeling like I belong, that there's space for me and for the other women around me and that we're not just here to be numbers. We're here to lead. We're here to create new paths and show that our views and our being is worthy and we're able to do what we set out to do.

In uncertain times, motivation can waver - especially when the outcome isn't guaranteed. What keeps you grounded, and how do purpose, team dynamics, and a sense of shared mission help you stay the course?

KV: What keeps me grounded personally is probably my "why". I think my "why" for the first two years of Black Ferns was myself; I

just played for myself, and it probably sounds really selfish, but I didn't really play for my Whānau or anyone else. But as I'm growing in my purpose, I'm actually realising that my "why" is my Whānau and those around me, it's a chance for me to honour all the gifts that I've been blessed with, by my family and by God. That's what drives me now, that's what makes me want to do this every day. One thing about our team is we really value service, we really value serving one another, we value serving our families, serving this country, it all comes back to service - those are the things that drive our team.

MAIA: I think motivation is something that is not there all the time, so shouldn't it be something that you rely on. One of our team's key values is service, and when you think about service, it's the way you can help the people beside you. So even if you're not feeling great or maybe you aren't at your best and you don't have that motivation, the little kick you might get from serving others and helping them to be at their best and seeing them at their best through your contribution is quite fulfilling. I find that keeps me grounded - just knowing that even if I'm not at my best, I can still help others in that space.

Across your journey, what's one lesson about resilience or growth you wish you'd learned earlier - and what would you say to the next generation of women ready to break their own barriers?

KV: One thing that I've learned is that you could be the fittest or the strongest or the most physical person on the team, but if you don't have confidence in yourself, it's actually not going to do anything for you. My assumption coming into rugby was that it was all about physical performance until I started playing at this level, and suddenly I was feeling doubt about believing in myself. It's so hard to serve a team and serve a business if you don't actually believe that you can do it. And so if I could encourage any young person, I would say, as much time as you give to your training, give that same amount of time to your confidence and to working on the belief that you have in yourself. That's what separates great athletes from good ones, and that's where I strive to be.

MAIA: One thing I'm learning about growth is that it's not comfortable. Change is not comfortable. Growth is really grumbly, and it's not linear. It happens in all directions, and in order to break barriers, you're going to have to work. And it's not going to be fun at all times, but it's so, so worth it. Just being able to prove to yourself that you can do things you didn't think you were capable of is a blessing in itself.





Maria Jose Alvarez: The Business of Science, The Future of Venture

Some people spend years figuring out what they want to do. Not Maria Jose Alvarez.

“I was one of those weird 13-year-olds who knew exactly what she wanted to do with her life,” she says. “And I’m now doing it.”

Raised in a small rural town in southern Chile, Alvarez’s path would take her from running a biotechnology startup by 21, then on to New Zealand, where she’s now the Managing Partner of WNT Ventures, one of the country’s top deep-tech venture capital firms.

Her spark was lit early. “One of my mum’s friends had a kid studying biochemistry. I was snooping through their books and found an organic chemistry book about drug development and manufacturing. I was just in love with that. I knew I wanted to be that person who develops drugs.”

But as much as she loved science, she knew she wasn’t meant to be isolated in a lab. “Biochemistry was very solitary. I liked science, but I also liked maths, and people, and debate. Everyone thought I was going to be a lawyer. But I had this really strange moment, I was like, I want to be a technology broker.”

Alvarez explains the image she had in mind: “In my mind, they were mostly in the US, travelling with briefcases, selling patents for drug development. And I thought that was the dream job. I could do science, sell science, and travel.”

Instead of taking a traditional business route, she pursued biotechnology engineering. “Going to business school wouldn’t help me understand the developments of science. I purposely chose biotech engineering so I could understand both sides. That was always my goal.”

Alvarez took that goal seriously. While still at university, she co-founded VidaOx, a startup that turned winemaking waste, grape skins, pulp, and seeds into a high-antioxidant powder for use in cosmetics and food. “At the time,

vineyards were paying trucks to take the waste across the Andes and burn it. It was legal, but crazy. Huge contamination, huge waste of potential.”

She and her classmates entered a university entrepreneurship competition and won. An angel investor on the judging panel offered to back them. Another university offered them desks in an incubator. She was 21. “It was met with resistance from my university. The dean of my degree at that time called me and said, ‘If you want to do business with science, you should have gone to business school. You’re wasting your time here.’ I remember that moment clearly.”

They persisted. “We raised capital, got some government funding, and ran the company for about five and a half years, all while I was doing my undergrad. We ended up partnering with the largest pasta manufacturer in the country. It was terrifying. It was exciting. And it was hard. It showed me what science could achieve outside of the lab.”

Behind the success was an experience she doesn’t sugarcoat. “It was exhausting and often overwhelming, the kind of rollercoaster you go through when you’re 21 and trying to figure it all out. Our investors were high-net-worth individuals, but they hadn’t backed science before. Expectations were mismatched. But it taught me lessons I still carry today: resilience, humility, and the importance of surrounding yourself with the right people.”

She got her first taste of media attention, too. “We were featured in a TV segment, I think it was even international, because it was still new

in Chile that 21-year-olds were starting tech companies. And we bought into the dream, started hustling, getting press. But we kept hitting roadblocks.”

Eventually, she decided to walk away. “I knew it was time to pause. I felt I needed a break. I had a lot of learnings, and I thought, maybe there’s value in sharing them. Especially with other scientists trying to get their first thing off the ground.”

At the same time, an image from years earlier stayed with her, a New Zealand tourism ad she saw in 2009. “It was just this 30-second video. A family cycling along the beach, sunshine, and mountains. The tagline was ‘New Zealand: Great place to live.’ That was it. That was all it took.”

She sold everything and bought a one-way ticket. “I didn’t know anyone there. I arrived with nothing more than determination and a one-way ticket, but I knew I wanted to build a future here, and to help create the kind of ecosystem I wished had existed when I was starting out.”

She enrolled in the Master of Bioscience Enterprise at the University of Auckland, expecting a more developed venture scene than what she’d experienced in Chile. What she found surprised her. “It was tiny. A handful of people. One fund was one guy. Another fund was two guys. That was kind of it.”

But for Alvarez, the scarcity felt like an opportunity. “Things weren’t going to come to me. I needed to create them.”

She approached UniServices, the university of

Auckland's commercialisation arm. They didn't have a job for her. "So, I volunteered. I said, 'I just want to work here. I want to be around this.'" Within two months, she had a permanent role. She was promoted from analyst to manager and then senior manager. "My job was to scout and find the gems and help make them happen. That's what I want to do. That was what I wished existed back when I was starting my company."

Later, she joined NZGCP, a government co-investment fund, just as COVID began shutting the world down. "At one point, I was managing more than 50 companies. That's not sustainable. But it gave me a crash course. It was great to do at speed."

It also showed her what worked and what didn't. "I saw the differences in how companies presented and how different funds worked. The patterns of what succeeded. What failed. What repeated. I stopped tracking them all; there were too many, but you start to see the same lessons again and again."

WNT Ventures came into her life at the right time. "The mission, the vision, the values, they all lined up with where I saw myself and where I saw the country heading. I joined as a manager, and it was a no-brainer when they asked me to step into the partner role."

Today, she co-leads investments across some of the most exciting frontiers of science, from sensors to synthetic biology, but what excites her the most is the people behind them.

"The first thing I ask myself is: Do I like this person? For me, it always starts with the person. Venture is about backing people who can carry a vision through years of uncertainty, and who I know I'll be proud to stand beside through the highs and the lows. Then, do I see them being able to carry out their vision? Can I work with them for five to seven years? Can we disagree?"

She looks for founder-problem fit. "Sometimes it's deep expertise. Sometimes it's lived experience. But you can't fake the connection to the problem."

One thing that turns her off is ego. "There's this perception that founders need to be superhuman. But I like people who know what they don't know. People who can separate their identity from the company. Because when you tie your ego to the business, any critique feels personal. That's dangerous."

Alvarez is also sceptical of startup theatrics. "All jobs are sales jobs. But charisma only gets you so far. You can learn how to pitch. What matters is: can you actually build the company?"

Market validation, she says, is still the most underappreciated discipline. "We've seen founders hesitate to share their ideas. They're scared of being misunderstood. They say, 'Once I build it, you'll get it.' But the risk is you build something no one wants."

She remembers specific investments where early conviction wasn't based on certainty, but potential. "Every investment is a bet. But sometimes we fund teams to test an idea. If it doesn't validate, that's okay. We gave it a shot. But if it does validate, we double down."

What matters is rigour. "You have to ask the hard questions. And you have to listen to the hard answers."

She's also very comfortable saying no. "If I don't believe in it, I won't fake it. I've helped some founders find other pathways or contacts, even if we're not the right investor. But I won't mislead anyone."

Alvarez sees the capital she manages as a serious moral obligation. "Every dollar we invest is a dollar we're not investing in someone else. I take that seriously. I come from a single-mum-teacher household. \$600,000 is life-

changing money to most people. In venture, some people talk like it's nothing. I like to bring it back to reality."

Alvarez also suggests we have an opportunity to be truly global. "The world isn't just the US. Everyone says they're going global, but that usually means one corner of California. Maybe Singapore. Maybe Sydney. But there's India, China, Latin America. In Chile, we were allocating \$200 million USD per quarter for proof-of-concept research. That was just government grants. Non-dilutive. There are fintech unicorns. Climate tech scaleups. And we still underestimate them."

And while WNT's portfolio covers companies at the cutting edge of deeptech and science, Alvarez jokes that her day "sometimes feels like endless emails, but every now and then, you get those impactful moments that remind you why you started."

"I think that we are in this because we're trying to make a difference and we're trying to make things better and the world better. That's the altruistic goal, you know, but then you need to break it into a thousand other steps, so the day-to-day is actually a lot of admin, but the overarching things are exciting and important."

And according to Alvarez the best moments can be a long time in the making.

"When something you backed at idea stage years ago becomes real, when the founder brings in the device and you can hold it in your hand. That never gets old. We have one company making a breathing device. When we first invested, they just had data. Recently, they brought in the actual product. It looked like something Apple would make. To me, that is the part that is mind-blowing. And I would like to think that I contributed even this little bit to making that happen. That's why I do this work, to help ideas that seem impossible at first become part of our everyday reality."

"We've seen founders hesitate to share their ideas. They're scared of being misunderstood. They say, 'Once I build it, you'll get it.' But the risk is you build something no one wants."

Leading From Every Angle

In this feature, M2woman shines a spotlight on women who have journeyed through leadership, resilience, and personal growth across various sectors—from corporate finance and real estate to technology and logistics and beyond. Each conversation touches on universal challenges: bouncing back from setbacks, finding the right mentors, and building inclusive teams while keeping performance goals in focus.

How do they set boundaries to avoid burnout? How do they use feedback to keep improving? And what keeps them motivated during uncertain times? Their answers offer practical insights showing that effective leadership's essence—clarity, empathy, and accountability—transcends industries and job titles.

A common thread runs through their stories: resilience isn't just about powering through tough times. It's about pausing, gathering the right support, and recognising the human side of work. By sharing their experiences, we hope you'll uncover actionable ideas for leading with purpose and navigating the complexities of professional life.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANILOPHOTO

Leadership, the Four Cs, and Rethinking the Path to Success

As the CEO of Skills Group, Rosanne Graham oversees a national education provider that spans 27 industries, serves 23 thousand learners, and is reshaping itself for a future defined by both human capability and technological change and is helping create the future of industry leaders of tomorrow.



In the role since 2022, Graham has been leading a transformation from industry training organisation to private training establishment, navigating political shifts and sector reforms, while embedding new technologies that are reshaping the business. It can mean long hours and not always the best work/life balance. “My kids often ask me what I do all day. And I laugh and say, I pretty much just sit in meetings. That’s a big part of what I do,” she says. “The thinking time and the planning time is usually in my time. So I might do that in the evenings. I can carve out time during the day, but if you sit in your office trying to do that, there’s a constant stream of people. So I just have to make that time in a different way.”

This can work both ways, though and Graham promotes flexibility and trust in her team. “You’ve got a bunch of outcomes to achieve. Fit it in around your life. If you’ve got something you need to go and do in a day, we just enable that to happen because we know that the person will make up the time and get done what they need to get done.”

It’s also about working smarter. “Sometimes I think we’re unproductive when we don’t have a clear strategy. When you’re really, really clear and say to the business, this is what we’re going to do, this is why we’re doing it, you gain real momentum because you’re not doing all that extraneous stuff.” But she is clear that clarity should never be created in isolation. “If you were to make the strategy on your own, that means you think you’re the smartest person in the room. And that’s a bit of a disaster as a leader.”

Leadership, also demands a willingness to make decisions others may find uncomfortable. “There’s a part of being a CEO which is you have to make difficult decisions. Sometimes people say, you’re a values-based organisation, but you’ve just made a whole lot of people redundant. My argument is always that you have to make decisions for the greater good of the organisation. Being values based is about how you manage those difficult situations. If I didn’t make those calls and that impacted the long-term viability of the business, then that was a worse decision. In my experience, if you put those decisions off, the magnitude of the problem just gets bigger and bigger.” says Graham. “Does it affect you? Of course, and I think it should, because you are talking about people’s livelihoods. I think there would be something wrong with you if you didn’t go home and think that was a pretty dreadful day”.

Graham’s pathway to leadership was not a straight line and she does not see university as the only valid route to success. She is vocal about the need to reframe how society talks about trades and vocational pathways. “We still use the term for the qualification that you gain in year 13, ‘oh, now you’ve got university entrance.’ Why do we say you’ve got university entrance? Only thirty percent of school leavers go to university. So don’t we mean you’ve now



"The moment you think how I do something is the right way, I think you're in trouble. You've got to retain that flexibility of thought and that curiosity..."

achieved NCEA level 3? If you are smart, that's not the only path you'll go down. Think of how many intelligent tradespeople you know."

She sees trades not as a fallback but as work that demands creativity, problem-solving and skill. "Plumbers make very good money and there's a real shortage of them. They're bright people, they're intelligent people. And it is creative." For her, part of good career guidance is being realistic about where industries are heading. "They only take such a small percentage a year of all the graduates into work in clinical psychology, but there's hundreds of them that have the qualification. So then what do you do? I think that's the stuff for people to know, be a little bit realistic about the potential roles within an industry and where the industry is headed."

AI is a revolution, Graham suggests that will impact industries faster than we probably realise. "I think that the rate of change and what it's going to do for our organisations is going to be hard to keep up with. But what I do know is if we don't embrace it, we will be fundamentally left behind."

Graham suggests that leaders themselves must adapt to keep pace. "The moment you think how I do something is the right way, I think you're in trouble. You've got to retain that flexibility of thought and that curiosity because if you're too rigid, you can become a dinosaur quite quickly." AI, in her view, is a tool leaders need to understand and use effectively, not something to resist or fear. It is about augmenting human decision-making and freeing people to focus on higher-value work.

Graham also promotes a set of leadership traits that are important in times like this. "We talk about the four Cs and then one A," she says. "It starts with creativity, because if AI can do the mundane, we have to build those creative, lateral skills. Then there's critical thinking, the ability to look at data, ask the right questions, and draw insights from it. Then communication, because as a leader you have to be able to articulate things to your organisation. And collaboration, you have to be able to work in projects and across teams. If you're only able to operate in a silo, you're not that valuable. Then the A is the ability to adapt. AI is a revolution, but what's the next one in 10 years or 20 years that we haven't even thought about yet?"

For those who aspire to become CEOs, Graham's advice is to try and build experience across all aspects of a business. "Start with a total passion to learn new things... Get building blocks in place. Everyone should do a stint in sales. You sometimes surprise yourself with what you end up loving." She also stresses that leadership is not actually for everyone. "People think that it's the thing that they want to become and they think it's the top of this tree, but the reality is, I've got six bosses, I've got a board. Wherever you get, there's always somebody you're accountable to. It depends entirely on what your skill set is and what you like doing. If you're a CEO, I think you're often a bit of a generalist. You can cope with ambiguity, you can cope with change, you can move at pace, and you don't get overwhelmed by it all."

Graham believes that aspiring leaders should focus less on chasing titles and more on becoming exceptional in their chosen area. "Be the best you can possibly be in the area that you really enjoy, where you can really contribute. If you're fantastic at something, be the best in it."

Leadership Beyond Job Title

Jodie King is the Chief People Officer at One New Zealand, and leads a team responsible for the culture, capability and performance of circa 2,500 employees, while also helping steer one of the company's boldest ambitions to become one of the most AI-enabled telcos in the world. It is a role that demands both strategic foresight and operational precision, from workforce planning and leadership succession to embedding new technology at scale.



It is also the latest chapter in a career that has spanned the public sector, global partnerships, listed companies and private equity. King has learned to adapt her leadership approach to each ownership structure without losing sight of the fundamentals: high-performance cultures built on trust, clarity, accountability and connection.

King's career began at New Zealand Treasury, where she learned the value of trust and relationships that endure well beyond the life of a project. "I am still in contact with people who were in my teams 30 years ago," she says. "My very first bosses when I first started out as a graduate at New Zealand Treasury, and I still am friends with some of my peers and leaders from there."

It was also her first exposure to the public sector's longer-term planning mindset. Decisions could be measured, consultative and deliberate. There was time to understand context and think deeply about issues. It was a foundation that would later contrast with the faster cycles and sharper performance demands of corporate life.

From there, she moved to KPMG in London, beginning a long chapter in the professional services world. Over more than fifteen

years she experienced the intricacies of the global partnership model. "After I shifted across from consulting roles into HR in my business partnering and talent management role, I oversaw a team across nine countries in Europe. The remit included cross-border incentivisation, performance, partner succession planning, high potential employee programmes, coaching support, and leadership learning and development programmes."

Her next role, as Chief People Officer at Air New Zealand, took her into a listed company with a beloved national brand. "It was a brand and a company that's so dear to everybody's heart, and there were always things happening. It was a 24-7 business. You were very conscious of customer expectations, PR expectations, employee expectations. The operational and customer heartbeat was constant, but the strategic, structural decisions you took were multi-year. If you're going to enter into a new international market, purchase or lease planes, that's not a one-year decision, it's a multi-year decision to see through and live with."

When she joined One New Zealand (formerly Vodafone New Zealand), it was her first experience of a private equity-backed company. "We've had a change in ownership structure

during the time I have been with One NZ from being jointly owned by Brookfield Asset Management to solely owned by Infratil. We are currently the largest asset in Infratil's portfolio. Infratil are strong long-term owners, they have flexibility across their portfolio to invest in the short term for long-term growth."

Working under different ownership structures has shown her what leadership principles hold true anywhere and what must adapt. "There are some truisms wherever you go... how you create a high-performance culture, the importance of leadership, the importance of having great people. But how you apply them into different industries with different customer bases and needs, smaller scale businesses versus big ones, into national versus international companies, with different capital structures and value pools, that's the fascinating bit."

She is equally clear on the need to assess both what someone delivers and how they deliver it. "We rate the what and the how 50 percent equally here at One NZ, as we did at Air New Zealand. You cannot have a whole load of individualistic, horribly competitive, sharp-elbowed people that focus only on their area's results. That's terrible for your culture. You might get a very short term, sugar hit of results, but it's never sustainable."

When hiring senior leaders, she looks for traits that signal both capability and fit. “I put a lot of faith in the characteristics and the personality and the how of people rather than the what. Are they the right fit for our organisation in terms of pace and innovation, collaboration and curiosity and hunger for results? And my last test is, would I invite them around to my house and make them dinner? If the answer’s no, then why would I want to work with them?”

“The clinching factor to why I joined One NZ was interviewing with JP (Jason Paris, CEO of One NZ) over a beer and a bowl of hot chips at a local Mt Eden pub talking about our families and noticing how genuinely polite and friendly he was with our server, that told me what I needed to know about what sort of person and leader he was going to be.”

King also warns against common leadership traps. “One of my biggest bugbears is that people don’t listen deeply enough. People listen to respond or to defend their position, not to actually grow something from what’s being said. And some leaders want clones of themselves because that’s their definition of success. They have to learn that effective leaders don’t come in one cookie cutter type.”

Her own evolution as a leader has involved shifting focus from just her direct reports to her leadership span and shadow. “The more senior you get, the more it’s about the cues and signals people get from you in a five-minute interaction; in a meeting, on screen, when I visit a retail store, in the café at work or on stage. Leadership at scale is something I’ve had to think more about.”

She is candid about moments when she has fallen short. “There are days where I go home at night and I worry and rehash things in my mind, generally that’s not about operational or strategic decisions it’s always about people interactions for example I didn’t leave that person feeling good or whole or with their mana intact. I might have been too pointed in my view or told them what to do vs coached them enough. Leadership is a journey. Different situations and different teams and individuals will test your leadership approaches in different ways.”

Yet, while empathy is essential, it is not without boundaries, suggests King. “Empathy should have an outcome. You can understand someone’s circumstances and where they’re at in terms of their performance and still have expectations. You do not let people miss deadlines or turn in poor quality work just because you’re empathetic.”

Her view on resilience is equally pragmatic. “Resilience changes at different stages of your life and looks different for people. The people that are the most resilient are the ones who know themselves the best. They know what fills up their bucket and when they are depleted, they go and fill it. What fills up your bucket will be different to what fills up my emotional, physical and overall energy bucket.”

At One NZ, much of her focus now is on AI adoption, which she sees as both a strategic priority and a leadership test. “One of our strategic objectives is to be one of the most AI-enabled telcos in the world. I am spending

a lot of my time helping this come to life at One NZ. One of my targets is to make sure 100 percent of our people are trained in the AI tools that will help them most in their working environment and in their future careers, and that 100 percent are using the tools well.”

She is open about the uncertainty that comes with emergent technology. “I cannot give anyone absolute certainty about the future of roles, workflows or even how Aotearoa’s education structures need to change and adapt. I do not know definitively how far this is going to play out. But at One NZ we are in the driver’s seat in terms of adoption and leveraging the benefits of AI. We are being very intentional, we are choosing the tools we deploy and they must have customer, employee and productivity benefits. We have strong governance and responsible AI guardrails, and we are doing this thoughtfully.”

She addresses job loss fears directly. “There will be job losses across many industries and companies and equally there will be a lot of new opportunities created. My role is to minimise some of those downside impacts by helping our people retrain and reskill and create that capacity for new and different roles in the organisation. I’m focused on realising the value upside from how we use the tools to create more revenue pools, gain more customers and reduce some of our cost reliance on our service

partners. Ultimately, I would rather our people be so in demand for the AI skills that they have gained with us that others want to poach them for their knowledge and experience, that’s a far better problem for me to have than us be a company burying our head in the sand and not leveraging this technology.”

King’s perspective on work was reshaped when she left KPMG, UK and returned to New Zealand without a role. She spent time in rural Whanganui with her children at her parent’s bach, whitebaiting with her mother and then spent the summer in Auckland focusing on helping the family acclimatise to a very different lifestyle than urban London. “It was quite a profound time. My life could go anywhere vs me having been focused on becoming a partner in a big consulting firm. I had this opportunity to think about how I wanted to live the next phase of my life.”

That freedom gave her a lasting perspective. “I hope at my funeral people are not talking about how good I was at my job. A job should not be your entire identity. I want far more interesting and fun stories being told about me. If your work ended tomorrow and you had enough financial security to take time to make some considered choices, there should be a gazillion other things you would love to spend your time doing.”



“Some leaders want clones of themselves because that’s their definition of success. They have to learn that effective leaders don’t come in one cookie cutter type.”



Leadership Doesn't Stand Still

Justine Gladwell-Hunt's career has been anything but predictable. Moving from the UK to New Zealand, taking on roles across different industries, running a marathon on a whim with barely ten weeks of training, and most recently stepping into the role of National Compliance Manager at Raine & Horne New Zealand, her journey is a study in resilience, adaptability, and leadership. "I've always been someone who dives in first and worries about the depth later," she says. That willingness to take a leap, even into the unknown, is something that has shaped her career and her life.

Raine & Horne is one of the world's most substantial real estate networks and Justine now sits at the centre of its national compliance operation. Her role is both demanding and strategic. "My job is about ensuring we meet regulatory requirements, but also about supporting our people so they feel empowered, not restricted. Compliance doesn't have to be a wall. It can be a framework that helps people succeed." She is clear that leadership in compliance is about balance. "I don't want compliance to just be 'No, you can't do that.' I prefer a style of 'let's look at this together to find a solution.' It's about working alongside people rather than standing above them."

That approach comes from her belief that leadership is about enabling others. "A true leader takes time to understand and listen, while encouraging others to grow in their own right." It's an approach that recognises the human side of leadership as much as

the structural. She has seen too often that compliance is viewed as the department of no, and she wants to shift that perception to something more constructive. "I see compliance as protecting people, protecting their reputations, protecting their future. It's not just rules, it's safeguarding."

Her career to this point hasn't followed a straight line. She started in roles that demanded adaptability and people skills more than technical expertise, but each stage gave her lessons that she now carries into her leadership. "You cannot grow if you don't change and adapt. Each role taught me something new, and every person I met along the way added value, good or bad, to my journey." That adaptability is perhaps most visible in the marathon she ran back in 2007. "I had less than ten weeks to prepare and very little running experience. That experience pushed me physically and mentally. It

proved I was capable of so much more than I thought.” It wasn’t about the finish time, it was about proving to herself that she could endure, and that resilience translates into her professional life.

Resilience, she says, is something you build. It comes from moments where things don’t go your way, or when you face doubts about your own ability. “I often question if I’m good enough, but while you’re busy doubting yourself, someone else is admiring your strength.” That insight is one she has to remind herself of constantly. Self-doubt, she says, doesn’t disappear, but you can learn to see it differently. “It’s not about eliminating doubt, it’s about acknowledging it and still stepping forward.”

Part of stepping forward has meant learning how to handle tough conversations. Leadership can be lonely, especially when decisions impact people directly. She recalls one of her hardest moments, having to let go of a team member who wasn’t the right fit. “It was difficult, but protecting the standards of the team sometimes means making difficult choices for the individual.” For her, resilience isn’t just about withstanding pressure, it’s about facing those decisions with integrity.

Mentors have played an important role along the way. “Having mentors who believed in me gave me the courage to take risks.” She is conscious now of paying that forward. “Just take that first step and grab opportunities with both hands. Listen more, speak less, never stop learning, and

don’t be afraid to ask for help. Reaching out is a sign of courage, not weakness.” That philosophy guides how she works with her own team, encouraging them to stretch themselves while knowing they are supported.

The role of compliance, in her view, is not just regulatory but also educational. It is about helping people understand the why, not just the what. “If people understand the purpose behind compliance, they don’t see it as a burden. They see it as a way to protect themselves and their clients.” This is particularly important in real estate, where reputation and trust are everything. She sees her role as part of a bigger picture, ensuring Raine & Horne continues to operate at the highest standards while giving its people the tools to succeed.

Her advice on leadership is refreshingly practical. “Take the risk. Choose progress over perfection. Realise your biggest mistakes will teach you the most. And always be yourself. Don’t bend to fit someone else’s expectations.” She is quick to point out that leadership is not about titles. “Anyone can be a leader if they choose to lead by example. Leadership is about influence, not position.”

That influence also depends on who you surround yourself with. “Choose your support network wisely. Find the ones who will celebrate your wins, straighten your crown when it slips, and tell you when you’ve got spinach in your teeth. When you find them, keep them.” It’s advice that blends humour with truth, reflecting her belief that leadership is both serious and deeply human.

Her own support network has been critical through career changes, relocations, and personal challenges. Moving to New Zealand was a leap into the unknown, but it reinforced her belief in the value of community. “When you move countries, you realise very quickly the importance of building a new network. You can’t do it alone.” That lesson, she says, carries into leadership. No one achieves anything in isolation.

As Raine & Horne continues to expand, her role will only grow in importance. The complexity of compliance will increase, but so will the opportunity to shape culture and practice. For Justine, the challenge is not just about keeping up with regulations, but about building a culture where compliance is embedded in how people work, not something bolted on at the end. “If you can weave compliance into the way people think about their role, then it becomes second nature. That’s when you know you’ve succeeded.”

When asked what advice she would give her younger self, she pauses. “I would tell her to take the risk, to trust herself more, and to not worry so much about being perfect. Mistakes are lessons. Don’t be afraid to make them.”

Justine Gladwell-Hunt’s journey is a reminder that leadership is not about certainty, but about the willingness to step forward even when you are unsure. It’s about resilience, growth, and the quiet strength to lead with authenticity.

“Take the risk. Choose progress over perfection. Realise your biggest mistakes will teach you the most. And always be yourself. Don’t bend to fit someone else’s expectations.”

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Executive Summary

On Friday 30 May, the Pullman Hotel in Auckland was humming. Four hundred and fifty people packed into the ballroom for M2woman Journey to Excellence, a Friday afternoon dedicated to leadership, resilience, and personal growth, with a side of good wine, great food, and even better company.

Our MC, Mel Homer, wasted no time setting the tone. Within minutes she'd made an "executive decision" that the five men in the room could share a single stall in the men's bathrooms, freeing the rest up for the ladies. The room erupted. Ice broken. Energy set.

This isn't your standard conference. Journey to Excellence is where people come to learn, laugh, and leave with new ideas and new connections. It's designed to help you build a shared commitment to values with your team, deepen relationships with clients, and spark collaborations with like-minded people you haven't even met yet.

From the first pour of Spy Valley wine to the last canapé at the cocktail networking

session, the day was a mix of education and entertainment. Lunch kicked things off at noon, then we dove straight into the good stuff: how to build and maintain resilience, negotiate like a pro, use AI to make yourself irreplaceable, and step into C-suite leadership. A panel discussion pulled it all together before the room shifted gears into cocktails and conversation.

And because no M2woman event is complete without a little competition, there were spot prizes, Champagne magnums, and even a bouquet for the best table take-away. Mel kept the pace fast, the crowd laughing, and the whole thing moving like a well-oiled (and slightly cheeky) machine.

Movement as the Language of Resilience

MARIELE KLERING – MOVEMENT AS THE LANGUAGE OF RESILIENCE

Mariele Klering stood on the Journey to Excellence stage to share a deeply personal story about resilience. But she quickly made it clear that this was not going to be a theoretical discussion. “What do you do when thinking stops helping? When your mind turns against you? When all your usual ways of coping just stop working? That was me during one of the darkest chapters of my life,” she said.

She explained that she had always believed in pushing through with sheer willpower. “I thought if I stayed strong enough, thought hard enough, kept pushing forward, I would be okay. But then it came the moment when thinking stopped helping, and my mind became the thing I needed saving from.” That was when she learned that “resilience isn’t just about how you think, it’s about how you move.”

Her story began in Brazil, where she was burnt out, exhausted, and feeling like “just another number” at work. Even sleep offered no escape, with nightmares about making mistakes at work. Then came a call from a friend offering her a role on a big project in New Zealand. “For the first time in a long time, I felt important,” she said.

The move to New Zealand was exciting but isolating. “Being the only woman in a big technical project left me feeling lonely and homesick. Then 2020 hit and with lockdown I was even more isolated. And then I got the call that I will never forget. My dad had suddenly passed away. There were no flights. No way for me to go home. Everything went dark.”

A self-defence class at a jiu-jitsu school became the turning point. At first she resisted. “It looked intense, aggressive, and super male-dominated. Who am I to be doing this? I’m little. I’m going to get hurt.” But when she walked in, she met Patricia, a world champion and one of the school’s owners. “She saw my pain and made space for me. She showed me how to fall and how to get back up again.”

Those early classes were hard. “Many days I would park my car at the gym, but instead

of getting out, I would drive back home telling myself I wasn’t ready.” Then her sensei said something that cut through the noise in her head: “Life is not going to get easier. You need to get stronger.” That moment, she said, quieted her self-doubt and gave her a way forward. “You don’t need to walk away from this. You just need to move through it.”

Jiu-jitsu gave her a break from her thoughts. “For 60 minutes on that mat, my mind finally went quiet. I wasn’t stuck in guilt about losing my dad. Everything slowed down. In that quiet, I found strength.” That strength gave her the courage to leave IT, start writing a book, and speak up in meetings.

“I used to believe I could think my way through anything. Now I know you don’t build resilience by thinking about it. You build it by stepping straight into the thing you want to avoid and realising you’re stronger than you thought.”

She backed her story with science, noting that “sitting for about 10 hours a day cranks up your odds of depressive symptoms by roughly 40%” and that just “one hour of deliberate movement a week could have prevented one in eight cases of depression.”

Her framework for learning the “language of resilience” mirrors learning any new language: start with a word (one movement your body wants), form sentences (create a ritual), and reach fluency (do it even on the days you do not

feel like it). “Your mind will fight against you. Feeling resistance means you are on the edge of something important.”

She closed with a challenge: “You don’t build resilience by thinking about it. You build it by stepping straight into the thing you want to avoid. Sometimes all it takes is a little movement.”

ACTION POINTS FROM MARIELE KLERING’S KEYNOTE

Recognise when thinking is no longer helping and take action through movement.

Start with one movement your body wants, even if your mind resists.

Create a ritual around that movement to build consistency.

Do it on the days you least feel like it.

Use movement to quiet the mind and create mental space.

See resistance as a sign you are on the edge of growth.

Apply science-backed insight: even small amounts of movement improve mental health.

Remember that resilience is learned through doing, not overthinking.



Building & Maintaining Resilience

CYNTHIA HUNEFELD – BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH SCIENCE, HUMOUR AND PURPOSE

Cynthia Hunefeld, founder of Evithe Biotechnology and an award-winning scientist, has dedicated her work to creating groundbreaking plant-based treatments for inflammation. At the Journey to Excellence event, she stood before the audience and said, “I just flew back from the US and after that China, presenting at scientific conferences, and this is so much more exciting.”



Her journey began decades ago, shaped by a family crisis. At ten years old, her father, then a fit firefighter, contracted sepsis. “It turned him from an athlete and firefighter to a fighter,” she said. The family had been preparing to move to New Zealand. “We were going to move over and buy a pony. I still do not have a pony today, so that is a work in progress.”

In those difficult months, she learned a lesson that would stay with her: “When the situation gets tough, look for the helpers. The helpers are the real superheroes.” The people who made the most difference were often “the quiet people who step up, sit with you for a cup of tea, hold your hand, or drop food at the door without even saying a word.”

Humour, she said, became another survival tool. “When my father was in rehabilitation, we would rearrange the prosthetic legs by the pool, make water balloons from medical gloves, and open the sugar dispenser lid just before someone used it.” That ability to laugh, she said, still helps her and her team navigate difficult moments in business.

Her teenage rebellion was short-lived. “Turns out I am a real nerd, so I really suck at rebelling.” She channelled her energy into science, determined to help people live longer and healthier lives. Before going into the lab, she travelled to the Australian desert, where she learned from Indigenous communities about medicine. “They go to the root of the problem. They do not beat around the bush. I will use the forbidden term in science: holistic medicine.”

Years later, when her father became ill again, she was ready. With his doctor’s consent, she

added a ginger extract to his treatment. “Within the week, he was allowed to leave the hospital.” That experience set her on a path to bring this treatment to others. She studied ethnobotany, completed postgraduate clinical research, and then began an MBA. “My son was born in the second week. That is why Victoria University now has change tables in the toilets. You only have to get that wrong once.”

Her company has now developed a ginger-based product with compound levels “3,000 times stronger” than normal, with no side effects in clinical trials. “Our product was at least 32 times stronger as an anti-inflammatory than a single compound,” she said. It targets both inflammation and disease markers linked to ageing.

Getting there was not easy. “The first question on a grant application is not, is this going to save millions of lives? It is, what is your patent position?” She sold her car and walked home to fund the patent. She also committed to a fully sustainable supply chain, working with Pacific Island family farms to grow organic, fair-trade ginger. “Our manufacturing process just has a waste stream of ginger-flavoured water.”

Evithe now has a herbal supplement ready for market, medical food ready for registration in Asia, and a botanical drug in the pipeline. “We can do this right here in New Zealand,” she said. “It really pisses me off that science funding

is being cut. We can make groundbreaking medicines right here.”

She closed with her takeaways: “Focus on the helpers. A sense of humour really helps. Make the change you want to see. Exercise resets your focus. Find your tribe and bring your team together.” Looking at the people who supported her journey, she grew emotional. “I could not have done this without these people. They show what we can do when we connect tradition, science, and business together.”

ACTION POINTS FROM CYNTHIA HUNEFELD’S KEYNOTE

- Look for the helpers in difficult times.
- Use humour to lighten challenging moments.
- Focus on making the change you want to see.
- Commit to sustainable, ethical practices.
- Build resilience by staying active and maintaining perspective.
- Protect and leverage intellectual property early.
- Find and value your tribe — the right team is critical.
- Combine tradition, science, and business to create impact.



How To Become A Better Negotiator

DR. ALIA BOJILOVA – NEGOTIATING UNDER PRESSURE AND THE POWER OF UNTHINKING

Dr. Alia Bojilova has coached SAS soldiers, Olympic athletes, and negotiated her team's release while being held hostage in Syria. At the Journey to Excellence event, she stepped onto the stage in high heels and smiled. "Do not run in high heels," she said, before telling the audience she had changed her plan.

"I decided this morning that my assumption is this audience already knows everything about negotiation. I wanted to dig deeper and look at the preconditions, the things that support us and are essential for the outcome negotiation seeks."

Her focus was on creating "space between the thinker and the thought" and learning to "practice unthinking a whole heap more often." For her, negotiation is not the old model of win-lose, "big dog and small dog, territoriality, boundary thinking, compromise at best." Instead, it is about recognising that "multiple conflicting narratives can coexist and be true at the same time" and using conflict as "a conduit to agreement."

She described the "balcony view" as essential for negotiators. "You have to see a multitude of perspectives, lean into them, and combine them harmoniously. They do not just fit, they grow something bigger than you could have anticipated alone." Too many of us, she warned, live in "the basement" with fixed solutions, territoriality, and a focus on proving rather than improving. What is needed is "contextual intelligence," the ability to "find common ground even with your worst adversary" and to suspend assumptions in favour of curiosity.

Her own career has tested these ideas in extreme conditions. In 2013, while

serving as a New Zealand Army officer on a UN mission in Syria, she and two colleagues were taken hostage by over 38 armed militia members. "Our probability of survival was zilch to none," she said. "Especially for a female officer in that environment." The team was held just 500 metres from safety, with no viable extraction route that would not ignite further conflict. "Clearly, we talked our way out of our predicament," she said, noting that they achieved "a great deal more than just surviving."

From that experience, she reinforced the military concept of the OODA Loop. "Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. Do not shoot before you aim." In high-pressure situations, she said, the discipline to pause and create space for curiosity is "the single most significant predictor of success." She calls it the ability to "turn woe into wonder" and to see things you thought you knew from a new angle.

Negotiation, in her view, is about "shifting away from the habitual and consciously noticing when it has become suboptimal." It is about "finding common ground with your worst adversary by allowing them to share their perspective" and replacing the rush for answers with "as many questions as you can possibly pack" into the space you have.

Her most unexpected lesson came after Syria. "The most ferocious hostage taker is now, for the last nine years, someone who has run a school for girls for us in the very area we were held. We have educated over 1,000 girls who would otherwise have been nothing but a transactional item past the age of 14."

She closed with a challenge. "My hope is we unthink a whole heap more often, stop being the knowing ones, and see how much better things can get when we create space for dialogue." And with that, she left the audience with a phrase that crosses cultures. "To go far, you have to go slow."

ACTION POINTS FROM DR. ALIA BOJILOVA'S KEYNOTE

- Focus on the preconditions for negotiation, not only tactics.
- Create space between the thinker and the thought to enable better decisions.
- Use conflict as a conduit to agreement.
- Take the "balcony view" to see and combine multiple perspectives.
- Develop contextual intelligence to find common ground, even with adversaries.
- Apply the OODA Loop – Observe, Orient, Decide, Act – before taking action.
- Replace rushing for answers with asking better questions.
- Slow down to go far, even in high-pressure situations.



“Using AI To Make Yourself Irreplaceable”

DANU ABEYSURIYA – ACCELERATING HUMANS IN THE AGE OF AI

Danu Abey Suriya, founder and CTO of Rush Digital, walked on stage with a grin and immediately broke the ice. “When Andre asked me what order I wanted to go in, I really, in hindsight, following the Syrian hostage negotiator was a terrible idea.” The audience laughed, and with that, he jumped straight into the topic on everyone’s mind: artificial intelligence.

“Who here has noticed artificial intelligence in the news cycles lately?” he asked, scanning the room. For him, AI’s current moment is the result of decades of compounding computing power. He compared the Apollo guidance computer to the phone in your pocket. “An iPhone’s processor is about 9,000 times more powerful and roughly 17 million times better on a per-dollar basis than Apollo’s hardware. And what do we use it for? Instagram.”

From there, he shared some hard data about AI in action. Citing an MIT and BCG study of 800 consultants using GPT-4, he said the results were clear: “They completed 12 percent more tasks regardless of complexity, they were 25

percent faster, and about 40 percent of them produced higher-quality output.” His takeaway? “Let’s not overthink this. Train your people, get executive buy-in, and start using it.”

Rush has done exactly that. “One in ten New Zealanders currently use software that we build and operate,” he said, pointing out that figure doesn’t even include the COVID Tracer app. The company introduced leadership training, gave people open access to tools, and offered one-on-one mentoring to help teams integrate AI into their daily work. “The art of delegation, regardless of

whether AI is there or not, seems to be how to unlock AI. All you need to do to get the most out of AI is learn to delegate.”

He illustrated this with the story of Heather, Rush’s Head of People and Culture, who was suddenly asked to take over a commercial, technical managed service unit. She built a general assistant to automate admin, a sales coach trained on her own notes, deep-research bots for market analysis, and leadership coaches for handling conflict. “Our competitors don’t know this, but they’re continuously being monitored by AI now,” he said. The impact was clear: happier teams, stronger performance, and improved revenue and gross profit.

Culture, he stressed, is just as important as tools. He joked about cyber’s rules and the company’s open policy on software, but the point was serious: make it safe to learn, share frameworks, and bring people along. “They’re not going to be replaced by this tool,” he told the audience, “they’re going to be replaced by someone who knows how to use these tools. I didn’t mean it like that.”

Danu sees AI as a leveller. Whether it’s helping someone re-skill after parental leave or step into a new domain, AI can accelerate learning in ways that were previously impossible. “The point is not replacement, it’s augmentation,” he said. “To be irreplaceable with AI, you need to be more human.” Empathy, purpose, and a deep understanding of customers remain the real differentiators.

Rush’s own mission says it best: “We design and build technology to better serve humankind.” AI, in his view, is a power tool — “A saw can build a house or cut it down. It’s not the saw’s choice. It’s ours.”

He closed by returning to the theme of trust. Be transparent with clients, even about the ugly parts. Ask why before you decide how. Think about ethics and unintended consequences from the very start. “When you look back at history, the winners were never just the fastest or the smartest. They were the ones who earned and kept trust.”

ACTION POINTS FROM DANU ABEYSURIYA’S KEYNOTE

Treat AI as augmentation, not replacement.

Start with “why” before deciding “how.”

Make delegation your core AI skill.

Build internal coaches and research bots to accelerate learning.

Create psychological safety so people can try, fail, and improve.

Keep a human in the loop for empathy and judgment.

Be radically transparent to earn lasting trust.



ACTION POINTS FROM NAOMI BALLANTYNE'S KEYNOTE

- Define your values before you chase the title.
- Look at the scale and substance of a role, not just the name.
- Lead with passion for your industry, your business and your people.
- Share your expertise with grace.
- Stay curious about the whole business.
- Debate ideas without ego and respect collective decisions.
- Think like a CEO to broaden decision-making strength.
- Always check decisions against their impact on customers and staff.

How To Become A C-Suite Leader

NAOMI BALLANTYNE – DEFINING C-SUITE LEADERSHIP WITH SUBSTANCE OVER STATUS

Naomi Ballantyne has built three of the largest life insurance companies in New Zealand, sold a billion-dollar business, and hired and developed hundreds of leaders along the way. At the M2woman Journey to Excellence event, she stepped on stage with the kind of perspective that only comes from decades of leading at the top, and she did not shy away from sharing it.

She opened with humour. “I’m retired, so this might be my last chance to speak to an audience like this before Chat GTP takes over from me,” she said. “I am also grateful for the chance to get out of jeans and knits for the first time in a long time.”

Her rise to the top was anything but slow. “I became the Chief Operating Officer of Sovereign Assurance at the age of 28,” she said. “It was the largest life insurance company in New Zealand at the time. I think I can still remember what it took to get there.”

One of her first messages was about the illusion of titles. “Titles do not denote the power or the influence or the worth of a role. A chief role in a ten-person business might not be more valuable than a general manager in a large global

company. If you just want the title because you want to be paid more, then maybe a better route is to move to a more valuable company.”

She reminded the audience that before thinking about what you want to be in the workplace, you must answer a bigger question. “Decide who you want to be when you get there. What are your values that you will not compromise on? How will you treat people? How will you behave when you are presented with a moral dilemma?”

Naomi spoke about the pressures that executives face. “Office politics, incentive schemes, peer competition, shareholder demands... they can all lead to ethical

dilemmas that are easy to give into if you have not already ruled them out of your life.” She added that at the end of your career “it will not be those shareholders or those political colleagues who mourn you the most.”

Passion, she said, is non-negotiable. “Passion for the industry you are in and the value it provides to society. Passion for the business you are in and the role it plays in leading that industry value. And passion for the people in your business who make that happen.” For her, that meant expecting her team to see themselves as “life insurance people first and then technical experts second.”

She stressed the importance of knowledge, curiosity and humility. “Knowledge is not power if you just hold onto it. Sharing your knowledge, that’s power.” And on curiosity, “A willingness to learn about other parts of the business outside of your own technical expertise is enormously important.”

Debate, she said, should be embraced, not feared. “Debate about something is not a personal attack on your knowledge or experience. The good of the business trumps the needs of the individual to be seen to have been right.” She warned against rushing out of a meeting and undermining a collective decision. “You are destroying the culture. Not the decision itself, the behaviour around it.”

Her metaphor for the CEO role was vivid. “A CEO is just the conductor of the orchestra. They have to know what each instrument does, when they should be played, and how to bring them together to deliver beautiful cohesiveness. And when an individual performer is having an off day, they have to help them fix that.”

For Naomi, all executive decisions come back to two questions. “How does this decision impact on our customers? And how does it impact on our staff? Those two questions, considered across every discipline of the business, are what drive competitiveness and culture.”



Panel Discussion

RESILIENCE, LEADERSHIP, PERSONAL GROWTH AND THE POWER OF STAYING HUMAN

As the final keynote wrapped, MC Mel Homer invited three of the day's standout speakers – Dr Alia Bojilova, Naomi Valentine, and Danu Abeysuriya – back on stage for an open conversation. “If there’s anything you think, gosh, she’s got to ask that and she hasn’t, let me know,” Mel said, before teasing that they were first taking a moment to photograph Dr Alia’s shoes. “Your shoes are boring, Danu,” she joked.

The panel kicked off with a challenge: which was harder, negotiating with terrorists or negotiating a pay rise? Dr Alia didn't hesitate. “This is unfair,” she laughed. “Terrorists wanting to chop your head off – they were just humans with good reason in their own universe to behave the way they did. The hardest job I ever had was my first role outside of the military.” Without the clear purpose and deep connection she'd had in the army, she found herself adrift. “Yes, I would take a hostage taker any day.”

From there, Mel steered the conversation to imposter syndrome. Naomi admitted she still feels it. “One hundred percent of the time someone’s going to figure out I don’t know what I’m doing,” she said. In her early days raising capital and running a company, that fear was constant – but ultimately useful. “It stops you thinking you’ve got it all sorted and never need to change. For me, that fear drives forward momentum.”

Danu reframed the concept. “I think imposter syndrome probably needs to be rebranded. It’s probably just giving a shit about your job,” he said. At Rush, they once had a hiring motto: “hire paranoid people” – a recognition that thinking about edge cases, however unlikely, often leads to excellence. “If you care, you want to do a really good job. That’s not a syndrome.”

Alia agreed, calling fear “an indication that something matters.” She doesn’t want people holding themselves back by thinking they’re bound by a label. “If you care, you should be able to see yourself confidently and consciously pausing more often.”

The panel then explored stepping out of comfort zones. Naomi pointed to her retirement. “It’s hugely uncomfortable to be in the silence and figure out who I am now and what value I add,” she said. Alia shared that her recent decision to step away from a set of US companies was “probably the most ungrown-up decision” she’d made, yet it was the most logical for her values. Danu? “Ten seconds ago,” he quipped.

Talk turned to AI, where Danu advised, “Please and thank you – it’s a small chance computers will remember who was nice to them, but the consequences of them not are quite large.” Naomi added, “It’s easy to lose your humanity if you forget to say please and thank you, even to a computer.”

Addressing fears about AI replacing jobs, Danu called fear “healthy.” The real danger, he argued, is ignoring change. “It’s the unintended side effects that usually cause the biggest problems,” he said, urging people to focus on community over individualism. “If we tackle it together, we’ll come out stronger.”

The conversation returned to values. Danu described business today as

“hand-to-hand combat,” where integrity matters most. “In tough times, if you don’t stick to your values, you’ll lose your reputation.” Naomi recalled the early days of COVID-19, running a life insurance company with no playbook. “If we go down, we’re going down well, properly, in the right way.” That, she said, is what keeps teams loyal.

Asked for the one piece of advice they wish they’d had before taking a big leap, Alia urged, “Mind where your mind goes. Start with the end in mind. Our brain is designed to prevent us from stretching ourselves – and that’s the job to be done.”

Danu’s advice was to separate emotion from logic. “Don’t be emotional about a logical decision, and don’t be logical about an emotional decision,” he said, noting how delay and avoidance only prolong discomfort. Naomi’s guidance was to embrace momentum over perfection. “You can make a wrong decision and then change it. People put so much weight on getting it perfect that they don’t make it at all.”

As the session wrapped, each panellist shared their key takeaway from the day. Naomi said it made her miss “being surrounded by really smart, intelligent people” who challenge her thinking. Danu emphasised “getting out of our own heads” and taking time to pause. Alia’s final thought: “Get out of your head and into the world. It certainly needs us.”



ACTION POINTS FROM THE PANEL

From Dr Alia Bojilova

See fear as a sign that something matters.

Pause and ask more questions before acting.

Step away from roles or projects that misalign with your core values.

Start with the end in mind when making big decisions.

Get out of your head and engage with the world.

From Naomi Valentine

Accept that imposter syndrome can be a driver of growth.

Value momentum over perfect decisions.

Step outside your comfort zone to discover new purpose.

Lead with integrity, especially in times of crisis.

Stay authentic – your people will stay loyal if they trust you.

From Danu Abeysuriya

Reframe imposter syndrome as caring deeply about your work.

Anticipate edge cases – the small risks with big consequences.

Keep a human in the loop when using technology.

Separate logic and emotion in decision-making.

Lean into community and shared values during change.



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NCEA BOMBED.



New Zealand's worst-kept educational secret is out - NCEA is a joke and it needs to go. Prime Minister Christopher Luxon finally admitted what everyone except a handful of Education policy wonks have known since ten minutes after NCEA was originally announced: 'The evidence shows NCEA is not consistent and can be hard to navigate... It doesn't always deliver what students and employers need.'

LET'S NOT FAIL AT TOO.

Gosh, who knew that employers look for something beyond warm fuzzies or ‘everyone wins equally’ certificates to find the best new hires? Or that they didn’t select an entire class of equal winners to fill an individual role?

The smart schools figured that out early and wasted little time offering Cambridge International Exams (CIE) either instead of or at least alongside NCEA. These qualifications have proved so popular with employers - and parents - that after 23 years of NCEA a large percentage of higher decile secondary schools now have the CIE option available for students. Why high decile? Because students graduating from these schools are more likely to travel overseas for job opportunities and NCEA qualifications are not as valued as much as the CIE equivalent in most countries outside of New Zealand.

A CHANCE TO SEIZE THE INITIATIVE ON AI IN EDUCATION

So NCEA is headed for the scrapheap leaving an entire generation of school leavers with tainted qualifications? Hardly ideal. Still, at least there’s a silver lining here; the government can use this opportunity to get with the program and address the issue of how to integrate AI into the school curriculum instead of the current mishmash of passing on that responsibility to individual schools and even teachers.

Currently, secondary students are being told not to touch AI at school, but are then expected to suddenly start using it at university, or in the workplace, without any transition. Are we really suggesting kids should spend their Year 13 holidays learning how to collaborate with the most powerful tool of the modern age on their own? Can someone please explain to me the definition of ‘school’ again?

A LITTLE LESS CONVERSATION PLEASE

And yet, somehow, none of this chaos seems to have triggered any real urgency around AI! The government’s first-ever AI strategy was released in July - a glossy, feel-good document called Investing with Confidence that mostly reiterates the values of fairness, transparency and ‘trust’. NCEA kind of talk. It doesn’t

contain a single new regulation, investment commitment, or legislative timeline. It’s more a statement of values: transparency, fairness, human oversight, and encouraging business innovation. It doesn’t do much more than say ‘Hey, AI is here. Use it responsibly. Follow existing laws. Everybody play nice. We’ll keep an eye on things.’

No real action plan either, just a vague promise to ‘think more deeply about this’ in 2026 and maybe act by 2027. We are, apparently, going to stare at the smoke for two years before admitting there might be a fire. So, while schools and universities are already trying to figure out how to deal with AI in the classroom, the New Zealand government is still stuck in O Week.

Uh, News Flash, We’re All Already Using AI, Guys!

And not just in education either. Ask around and you’ll find AI is central to businesses all over the place; in finance, manufacturing, creative industries, technology, science, retail

So, while schools and universities are already trying to figure out how to deal with AI in the classroom, the New Zealand government is still stuck in O Week.

and, increasingly, healthcare. In fact the only jobs not majorly affected by AI are car battery smashers and dredge operators - not that dredge operating couldn’t be improved with AI-driven underwater mapping too. AI’s in our homes, on our phones, in our lounges, bedrooms and cars. Hell, it’s even in our grandparents’ house!

This old-fashioned governmental attitude of ‘let’s set up a committee to look at’ an emerging technology and report back in half a decade or so’ ain’t cutting it no more. AI isn’t an art style that evolves over a generation - it’s a new life paradigm that can evolve drastically over a single day. For example; on January 20 this year OpenAI brought out a price plan that charged \$200 a month for Chat GPT Pro’s unlimited services, then in the afternoon Liang Wenfeng released Deepseek which offered the exact same unlimited service - but for free. Within a handful of hours the world of Artificial Intelligence went from being a nightmare of cartel capitalism to competitive pluralism.

That’s a Magna Carta level effect on future societies across the globe

- in a single day! Perhaps someone should remind our government, there are 700 odd of such days between now and whenever this working party deems it relevant to report back with their findings. It is extremely difficult to imagine how relevant anything such a languid approach would find. Why don’t we just call this strategy for what it really is; ‘we’ll just stall until someone else decides the future for us.’

A WARTIME CONSIGLIERE

The only way for any government to look at this issue is to treat it like a war - as that is the closest scenario to what we have now where our lives are being affected by an external force 24/7.

During wartime did previous governments set up a working party of academics to stroll about popping the odd question about how a lack of weapons was affecting the soldiers’ ability to shoot back at an invading army? No, they created a War Cabinet that met almost daily to find solutions to ensure the soldiers had whatever they needed to defend those core tenets that make any nation unique.

It’s the exact same situation now, AI isn’t going to go away, whether we like it or not. So the question isn’t whether we want to engage with it; it’s how, when and on whose terms. We need first to decide what kind of society we want to have in five, ten, fifty years time. Then we need to tailor a plan where we allow AI to fit within that framework to help us achieve our goal(s). Waiting for global tech giants or foreign governments to decide on our behalf isn’t any sort of strategy - it’s surrender.

NCEA was a massive fail, but so what? We can bounce back, come back with a stronger product that will help prepare our kids for the future better. But if we’re too afraid to include AI in this conversation we are setting ourselves up to fail all over again. And with consequences that go a lot further than just in education.

TRAVEL

The latest in luxury travel and experience.



Deep in the Beverly Hills is the Beverly Hilton, the beating heart of 70 years of Hollywood glitz. Since the 50s it's been home to Hollywood glamour and red carpet events. A lot of celebs have stomped these halls, but it's time for a refresh. The distinctive mid-century modern design and the beloved Aqua Star Pool are synonymous with the era's glamour, alongside buzzy dining destinations, including the famed Trader Vic's.

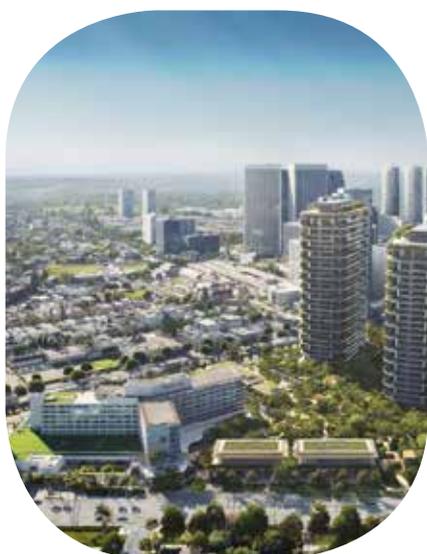


The Beverly Hilton remains a cornerstone of the city's entertainment legacy, hosting Hollywood's most iconic events in the famed International Ballroom. Over the next year and designed for those seeking the ultimate nostalgic Beverly Hills experience, the 70th Anniversary Package will offer a luxurious stay in a Penthouse Suite complete with a vintage car rental from Hollywood Classic Cars and a seven-course Decades Dinner inspired by the hotel's archival menus. The package also allows guests to step back in time and immerse themselves in the hotel's original charm from its opening year with a curation of nostalgic in-room keepsakes and amenities. It's a fun way for movie industry buffs to transport back to the golden age of cinema and enjoy a luxury experience at the same time.



Looking ahead to the future a reinvention of the space is being planned for completion in 2027. This includes elevated new accommodations and fully transformed event spaces to all-new world-class dining and retail destinations. The legendary Aqua Star Pool, where generations of A-list celebrities have not only sunbathed and socialised but created an enduring legacy of Hollywood glamour, will re-emerge as a vibrant social centrepiece.

On top of that new ultra-luxury residences, two next-generation hotels, a private members' club, curated dining and retail, and ten acres of botanical gardens and open space are being planned out. The future has never looked brighter.



Spring Travel Destinations

As we come into Spring New Zealand becomes a great place to explore, but what about further afield?

If you're willing to take the Northern Hemisphere's Autumn for a spin you can find a much more relaxed travel experience.



Japan

Most people are drawn to Japan in Spring to see the incredible array of cherry blossoms, but Autumn has its own charm and a fraction of the tourist hustle and bustle. This makes it a perfect time to visit for people looking to take it a little slower in a sea of reds and oranges. Temperatures hang around 22 degrees in the north and 30 degrees in the south. We recommend Osaka or Kyoto.



Germany

Oktoberfest starts in, you guessed it... September. But goes to the first Sunday in October. It's one of Munich's most iconic events, and should be experienced at least once in your life even if you aren't a beer aficionado. There's still plenty of folk music, fairgrounds and Bavarian culture to get to know. Temperatures are getting as low as 5 degrees and as high as 15, so pack chilly.

The Luxury Future of Abu Dhabi

As I write this the future of the middle east is being brought into question. Iran just had its nuclear development facilities become the test-bed for a dozen bunker busters delivered by two B2 stealth bombers.

Hopefully none of this will be a problem by 2030 though because just over the Persian Gulf Abu Dhabi has struck a deal with Bvlgari to create an ultra luxury resort dubbed Bvlgari Resort & Mansions Abu Dhabi.

It's all in the name really.



Bvlgari has secured a horseshoe-shaped private island with sunset views on one side and views of Qasr Al Watan on the other. The island will be populated with 90 unique mansions, 30 villas and 60 elegant rooms and suites for people that don't need an entire mansion for the weekend. Never fear though, you won't feel like you're slumming it when you have Bvlgari's signature II Caffè Italian restaurant a short walk away and a spa with a 25 meter long lap pool and fitness center. After refreshing yourself you can step out onto an outdoor deck with exquisite sea views. The 2 Bvlgari Suites and Bvlgari Penthouse will be the crown jewel of the resort while the 1,200 sqm Bvlgari Villa with its own private park and beach including



a 20-meter pool will set a new standard in luxury hospitality. Finally resort members can also gain access to the Yacht Club which also has its own private beach.

The mansions range from 1,650 to 2,500 sqm and will include 8 estates with their own private beach. A few of the mansions will also have their own docks for boats up to 25-meters long, so no super yachts please. Calm down.

While it is an island, a purpose-built bridge will ensure your connection to the emirates flourishing art scene, and natural beauty waiting to be explored. Do all this comfortable in the fact that at the end of the day you can retreat back to your private paradise.



GET ME TO THE GREEK

In the middle of the Aegean sea there is paradise. This is Mykonos, one of the islands in the Cyclades group. Among its iconic landmarks are 16th century windmills but it's history stretches way way back, Before the johnny come latelies from Athens arrived in the 11th century BC Carians from the other side of the Aegean had already set up shop there.



It's here that it's said that Zeus and the Giants duked it out, later to be slain by Heracles. The huge rocks scattered around the island today are said to be their petrified bodies. Legends are now drawn from the vibrant nightlife drawing travellers from all over Earth. While we aren't going to be diving into the club and bar scene here today, don't tempt me, we will be looking at the most luxurious places you can stay while you spend your time exploring the streets, people (oh my), beaches, and history the island has to offer.

Myconian Ambassador

The Ambassador hotel sits just 5km out from Mykonos Town, locally known as Chora. It lies above the crystal waters and perfect sands of Platis Gialos Bay, and is a short stroll from the equally gorgeous Psarou Paranga, and Agia Anna. Take your pick. From their jetty you can get instantly into the mix with all kinds of water sports. Once again, take your pick. This place is all about choice. Rooms come with private balconies, crisp linen, marble floors and warm wood accents.

If the quaint restaurants and charming boutiques along the boardwalk aren't doing it for you, grab one of the regular busses into town and get exploring. It's a maze of whitewashed houses and cobbled passages hiding lively bars clubs and tavernas. While you're in town grab a ferry to check out one of the most significant archaeological sites in the Mediterranean, Delos. This island was name chequed in Homer's Odyssey and was an important site long before it became the designated birthplace of Apollo and Artemis. These days it's a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Once you're done there visit the neighbouring island Rhenia or the hidden coves of Mykonos.





Myconian Avaton

Just like Panaptos Escape the Myconian Avaton has easy access to Elia Beach. Take your pick of suites and villas depending on your needs but know that no matter where you go you'll be surrounded by beautiful Cycladic architecture and luxurious contemporary style splashed with Avaton's iconic red.

The largest accommodation is the Apocalypsis Villa big enough for 10 adults in four bedrooms.

Now that's a party. It comes kitted with a large private pool, Designer furniture, sunbeds, lounge and dining areas as well as sweeping views of Elia Beach. A fully equipped kitchen gives you the opportunity for private hosting, getting to know the local ingredients, But if you're going to decide you're in full holiday mode you can always get a fully catered dinner party instead. With so much indoor outdoor flow onto the huge deck this place is perfect for a larger group. Staff are also happy to facilitate personalised service such as in-room massages, spa treatments, and private yoga classes.

The food at Avaton nods to the island's Italian heritage blending the best that Italy and Greece has to offer. Pick up a cocktail from Kokkino the poolside bar, and in the evening wander down to Elia beach to Panorama, their fine dining restaurant, It's foodie heaven.



Myconian Panoptis Escape

Whether you're partying, relaxing, or honeymooning the Panoptis Escape has a villa perfect for you, with its own private pool of course. Its name translates to 'where man meets his gods', I didn't realise meeting gods would be quite such a pampered experience.

Just 12km from the airport (or regular port if you've taken the scenic route to Mykonos). While the villas have all the modern amenities they seamlessly blend with the local tradition of architecture. It sits high with a view and easy access of Elia Beach. Or if you for some reason don't want to explore the crystal clear Aegean Sea you can enjoy the infinity pools. It's out of the hustle and bustle with good surrounding nature you could explore on horseback. The Panoptis Escape has a dedicated 20 person strong team responsible for making your stay a luxurious one, whether it be a stellar private dinner, a rejuvenating pampering session, a world-class spa treatment, a bespoke expedition in the sun-kissed coasts of Mykonos, or even a private helicopter or yacht charter. They're there to make sure your stay is an unforgettable one.

Myconian Deos

A few minutes walk from the Old Port of Mykonos Town is Deos, a suite of terraced suites with private pools and hot tubs with spectacular views of the Aegean and the nearby town. It has all the privacy of getting away from everyone, but all the benefit of being close to the action.

Staying here also has the added benefit of getting guests access to their own private beach of Agrari. It has its own wellbeing centre for tranquility or working up a sweat at the gym, and even has its own studio pop-up boutique for anyone looking for handily close exclusive ready-to-wear garments, high-end accessories, and gifts with a minimalist, avant-garde aesthetic.

The largest stay is the Omega Residence, blending comfort and warm minimalism spanning 120 square meters. It has its own furnished terrace and private catering. A semi-open marble bathroom offers a deep soak tub discreetly screened from the living area.

The Epico Restaurant offers guests a celebration of mediterranean flavours lovingly brought to life by Executive Chef Ilias Maslaris and Executive Sous Chef Kristalia Vousmaki using fresh seasonal ingredients. While you eat continue to enjoy those amazing 180 degree views, and don't worry, no matter your requirements their menu includes something for everyone be it vegetarian, vegan, dairy-free, and gluten-free options.

This is the perfect stay for those wanting a little of everything.





The X-Half Factor

If you're anything like me, you carry your cell phone around with you like a bad boyfriend. You know you gotta break up, but it's oh so easy to keep it with you. One of the reasons I keep my phone with me is the potential for a photo. I'm a millennial, we grew up when photos were hard to come by, check out my lack of baby photos for evidence of this.



In the 90's my parents had to be really sure they wanted to take a photo because they had to pay for the film to be developed. You had to be sure that the flash was on if you were indoors, otherwise the family photo would be black. Today it's so easy, my phone is always in my pocket and if my four year old chooses a moment to be adorable, I can whip my phone out to take a picture. The problem is my phone comes with other baggage. It carries the weight of the entire internet; my emails, addictive social media apps, my credit card details for any spur of the moment purchases. It has become a burden.

Here's the thing. Fuji knows that. They know that I want to break up with my phone. They also know that I'm nostalgic for times before we were all shackled to the internet.

Enter the Fuji X-Half, a camera that is an experience.

The back features two touchscreens, first a tall 3:4 screen for navigating menus, settings, and previewing images. Beside it on the left is a second skinny touchscreen for quickly flicking through different film and filter modes to achieve different results. The benefit of splitting off the filter and film selection into its own screen is that you can see the effects being applied in real time on the primary screen. The business end is a 1-inch back-illuminated sensor and a 32mm F2.8 (35mm equivalent) prime lens, that is friendly enough for newcomers to go wild with, and complicated enough for professionals to squeeze a bit more out of.

Everything from the Frame Advance Lever on the top for taking two in one shots to the date being baked into the bottom corner of the photo makes you want to play more with your compositions, and harken back to simpler times.

Recorded video is of great quality, and it has a surprisingly effective mic, which I wasn't expecting at all. I definitely recommend though that as simple as it is to get running, a few tutorials online will show you how to get so much more out of this camera.

At first I thought this camera was just a gimmick, something slick looking with added filters to make my generation look twice. The more I use it however, the more I realize what a clever device it is. It is a genuine joy to discover how this camera works, and it's small enough to have me leaving my phone behind, and grabbing this 240 gram cutie instead. It almost fits in my tiny woman pockets.

It has an added bonus for me, my kid loves it. I was having the usual parenting experience at the grocery store, high pitched wailing, floor break dancing, the entire four year old works. Until I thought to hand the X-Half to him. Shopping then went from drudgery to delightful, we trotted around the shop, picking out our veggies and I thought to myself, "how cute, and I'm going to have photos of all these vegetables now." I had to laugh when we got home and I reviewed the pictures that my son had taken. Every single one, a photo of my butt. I guess I can't be surprised, my son is the perfect height for rear view image taking. I would have added them here for you to laugh with me, but apparently in a particularly vain moment, I went onto the device and deleted every one of them. I'm sorry friends, you'll just have to imagine that one.

I found sharing the images from the device to my phone to be super easy using the dedicated "X half app". Bluetooth connection to the camera was happy and quick, this surprised me since my phone can be funny about connecting to devices. And although it was easy to transfer the images, I did not find that had me back and shackled to my phone. The X-Half encouraged me to leave the internet behind and "develop" my film later. It encourages adventure, it brings charm to the mundane, it makes each photo charming and classy...unless it's a picture of my derriere.



Leading a 24/7 City Landmark

Craig Wood has been in hospitality for more than 15 years, but stepping into the General Manager role at Rydges Latimer Christchurch was different. It was coming home. “I did a hospitality diploma at Polytech here in Christchurch. To then come back as a General Manager into a hotel in the same city is quite cool”

Coming home also meant stepping into a city that had changed dramatically. The earthquakes had reshaped Christchurch’s streets and skyline, but for Craig there was opportunity in the rebuild. “As much as it was devastating, it was a fantastic opportunity to rebuild something. There is a lot more sense to the flow of the city now. That is often not the case because usually you just keep adding blocks as you go along. Here, it has been thoughtfully put back together.” And there was the personal pull. “Most Cantabrians are pretty one-eyed and always seem to come back at some point. I am not saying I am at the end of my career by any means, but it was nice timing with it all working out.”

Returning to Christchurch also gave Craig the chance to embed the hotel into the life of the city in a way that went beyond the rooms and the restaurant. He has built strong ties with organisations like Full Bellies, which packs more than 1,000



school lunches a week for kids in need, and Trees for Canterbury, which plants native trees across the region. “We donate five staff a month to Full Bellies for three hours to help pack lunches. We take anywhere from 400 to 500 muffins, scones or slices to bulk them out a bit as well. It is eye-opening. People come back asking how they can volunteer in their own time.” The same approach applies to Trees for Canterbury. “We purchase 600 trees and go out on a public planting day. It encourages family involvement from our team. We put on a barbecue and make a morning of it. It is about inclusion and giving back in a tangible way.”



These connections are not just feel-good extras; they feed into the culture Craig is building at Rydges Latimer. “Hospitality is a high-pressure industry. There is always pressure to perform. Doing something for the community gives you a release from that business pressure. If we can create the same passion for our CSR work that we do for revenue and service, it will only have a positive impact back in the business.” That philosophy ties neatly into his leadership style, which is built around empowering his team to make decisions and take ownership. “It could be access to a program or making sure their computer works properly. Mistakes





in hospitality they inevitably do. “Listening is key. Too often people jump straight to a refund, but the guest may feel dismissed. My win is getting that person back to experience us again. Offer something to make it right, then deliver the experience we know we can.” He looks for the same ability in his hires. “Confidence is huge. I can teach the rest. If you can go up to a table of ten and have some banter, you are already improving their night.” For leadership roles, he builds teams like a sports coach. “I do not need eleven strikers. I want different strengths. Someone who loves upselling, someone who loves checklists, someone who is creative. The mix is what makes it work.”

That team approach is what underpins Rydges Latimer’s personality. The aim is to make it a place where regular guests feel recognised and at ease. “We know their names, we know the room they like, we make sure they get it if we can. Small details add up. I want it to be a seamless experience.” The in-house restaurant, Bloody Mary’s, plays a central role in that. “In Asia, hotel dining is the special occasion. Here, people often default to standalone restaurants. We have built Bloody Mary’s into a destination

are fine as long as you do not make the same one twice. Back them when they get it wrong and guide them for next time.”

It is a mindset Craig honed in Fiji, where he as Food & Beverage Manager for a resort with 650 staff, including 270 in food and beverage. “You do have to compartmentalise. Otherwise you are mentally drained. I know I will be involved if I need to be, but I can leave knowing they will call if it is necessary.” That trust is built on visibility. He is not an office-bound GM. “When I walk in, I talk to the front desk, check the lobby, pick up any rubbish, make sure the music is at the right level. I walk through the restaurant, talk to the team, maybe clear a plate. I want to be approachable. I meet all new starters on day one. We do not have name badges, so I learn names and find something to connect on.”

Being present also means being ready to step in when things go wrong, and



with a loyal local following, especially for special occasions. It also lets us highlight local produce, which ties into our sustainability goals.”

Balancing the needs of corporate and leisure guests is another ongoing shift in focus. “The bed, the TV, the shower might be the same, but the expectations are different. A corporate guest might just want a comfortable bed and a coffee in the morning. A family might care more about breakfast variety, parking, or connecting rooms.” That flexibility has become more important as the industry has changed. “Hotels used to offer luxuries you did not have at home. Now people have big TVs, streaming, fast internet at home. We have to offer more.”

In food and beverage, that means creating dishes guests would not attempt themselves. “You are not going to confit a duck leg or make an intricate dessert at home. Those are the things we can charge a premium for because they are special. Mains need to be consistently good, because that is where complaints will come from if we get it wrong.” Social media has raised expectations even further. “People are trying high-level dishes at home. We need to be ahead of that curve.”

One way Rydges Latimer stays ahead is by creating experiences that are difficult to replicate elsewhere. “We



have the space to do whisky dinners or wine events in private dining rooms. We can serve a 1994 vintage whisky, one of only 635 bottles, worth just under \$1,600, alongside dessert. Most people would never buy it, but here they can taste it. That is memorable.” The Whisky Appreciation Club extends that exclusivity. “It lets guests store bottles on-site, join masterclasses with distillers, and attend special events. We have kept it low-profile, which makes it feel more exclusive.”

Looking ahead, Craig is excited about the city’s momentum, particularly with Te Kaha stadium opening. “It is a game changer. Having a world-class venue in the CBD brings events that benefit every hotel and restaurant in the city.” For him, it all comes back to one constant. “At the end of the day, it is about the people who stay with us and the people who work with us. If you get that right, everything else follows.”

FASHION





MY CHROMA

Blackpink's Lisa Manobal was in attendance at Bvlgari's latest event to reveal their Polychroma collection, which she was also sporting. The event took place on the beautiful Sicilian coast in the town of Taormina which is home to an ancient theatre built by the Romans in the third century BC.

What better place to show off almost 250 new creations of High Jewellery and High-End watches, including 5 milestone High Jewellery wonders and 60 millionaire pieces, the highest number ever presented.

Other guests in attendance included Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Viola Davis, Liu Yifei, and Florence Pugh.

With panoramic terrace views overlooking Mount Etna and the Ionian Sea I'm not sure whether this is a recommendation for travel or a recommendation to go broke buying high end jewellery. Why not a bit of both. An impressive total of 56 gemstones, both precious and colored, in a variety of shades and sources, come together in this collection. In addition,

Polychroma has also given birth to extraordinary ultra exclusive Jewelry Bags, Eyewear and Fragrances.

After enjoying the ancient theatre guests then moved to the San Domenico Palace, a 14th century convent now acting as a luxury hotel.

The luxurious refinement of the past houses the luxury of the future, literally. During this event Bvlgari showed off it's first ever Connected Jewellery. Fortunately this doesn't mean all your necklaces will be bluetooth enabled now, instead the diamonds have been etched with ultra-fine micro-engraving invisible to the naked eye which transforms





each piece into a gateway to its own unique story. A singular, unrepeatable code is etched directly onto the precious metal, providing instant access to detailed info about the jewels itself, such as materials, rarity, and craftsmanship. With a simple scan from a smartphone you can trace its origins, confirm its authenticity, and even get information about its warranty and aftercare.

The future of luxury is now... in a 3rd century BC amphitheatre.

OH HI HIGH JEWELLERY

High jewellery isn't just about sparkle it's about craftsmanship, storytelling, personality, and a good dose of fantasy. And this year's collections from the world's top maisons exactly the fantasy that the world needs right now.

Whether it's Van Cleef & Arpels capturing the carefree beauty of wildflowers, Cartier bringing myth and movement to life with emerald-studded serpents and prowling panthers, BVLGARI proving that bold design never goes out of style or Tiffany & Co. and Chanel are here to reminding us that impeccable details and sharp styling make all the difference these collections prove one thing: there is always a time and a place for beautiful jewelry.







BVLGARI

BVLGARI's Tubogas collection is proof that some things don't need fixing, just a little reinvention.

First introduced in 1948, the Tubogas technique involves wrapping gold or steel strips around a core with zero soldering, creating a smooth, flexible coil that's as impressive structurally as it is aesthetically. This year's refresh introduces 16 new designs, ranging from classic 18K yellow gold bracelets to bold three-tone variations and diamond-studded options. Because, let's be honest, subtlety isn't always the point.

For those who like a little drama, BVLGARI has taken its iconic Parentesi motif and given it the full diamond treatment. But the real showstopper is a gemstone necklace dripping in tanzanite, rubellite, and green tourmaline. The structure itself has also evolved, now featuring a triangular profile that adds an edgier, more architectural feel.



Tiffany & Co. Schlumberger® Flowers and Stars bracelet in 18k yellow gold and platinum with rubies and diamonds.



Necklace in platinum with aquamarines, blue zircons and diamonds.



Tiffany & Co. Schlumberger bracelet in 18k yellow gold and platinum with diamonds.



Tiffany & Co

Tiffany & Co.'s latest collection is all about celebrating precision, craftsmanship and gemstones

The Schlumberger bracelet, in 18K yellow gold and platinum, showcases the maison's signature sculptural goldwork. Interwoven metal forms that create depth and texture. Every diamond is meticulously bead-set to catch the light while keeping the design seamless and fluid.

The Schlumberger Flowers and Stars bracelet takes that intricate goldwork and elevates it with rubies and diamonds, arranged symmetrically to enhance contrast and brilliance. Meanwhile, the platinum necklace (studded with aquamarines, blue zircons, and diamonds) is a study in balance. The aquamarines, prized for their transparency and soft blue hues, sit alongside the deeper, richer blue of the zircons. Diamonds are strategically placed to amplify the overall glow.

Then there's the collection's showpiece: a pendant centered around a stunning 43-carat green tourmaline. Set in platinum and 18K yellow gold, the design frames the gemstone beautifully, allowing light to flow through its elongated form. Surrounding sapphires and diamonds create a deliberate contrast of color and texture, making sure the piece feels structured, even in its boldness.

Above: Pendant in platinum and 18k yellow gold with a green tourmaline, over 43 carats, sapphires and diamonds.

IMAGE BY TIFFANY & CO



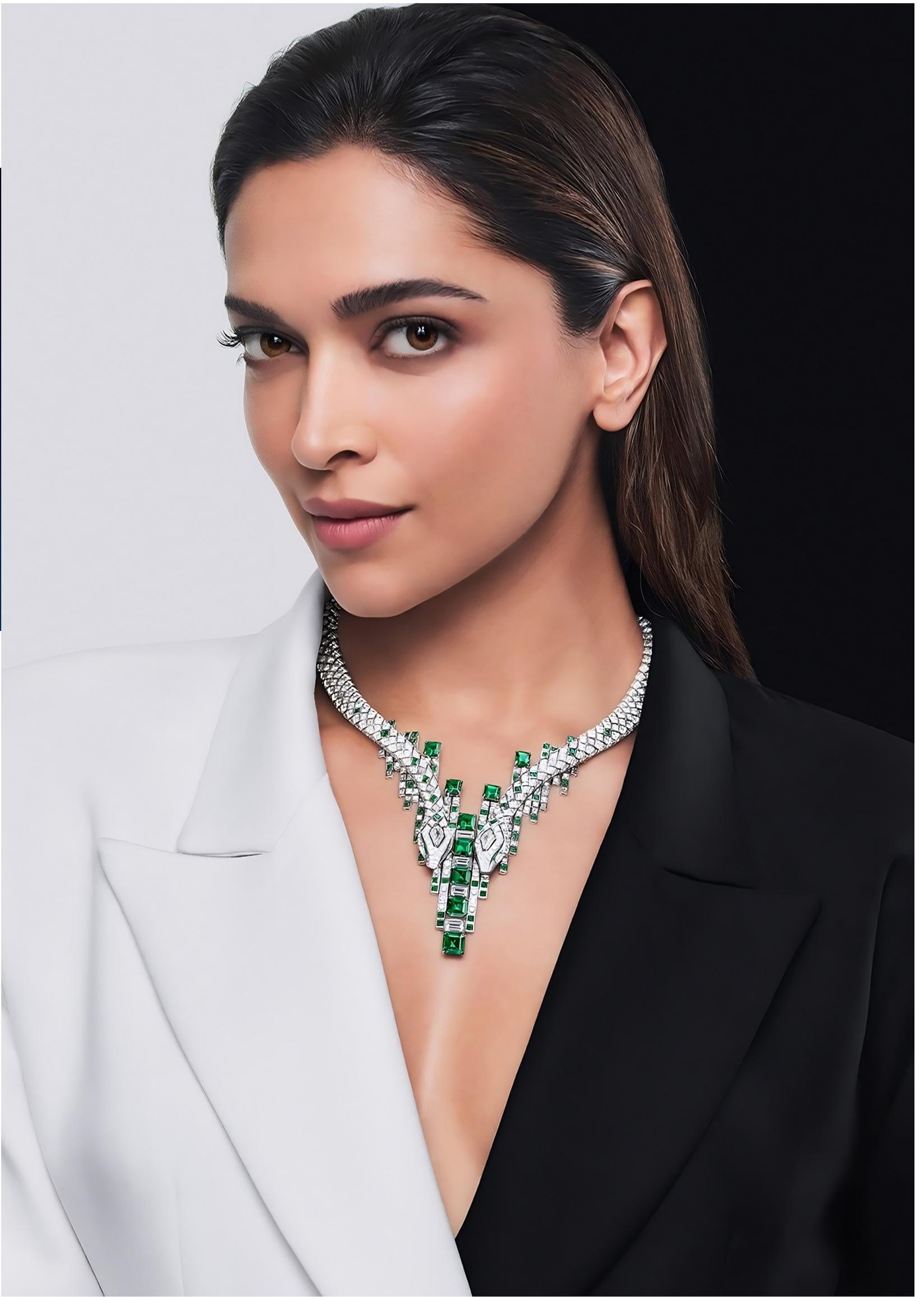
Cartier

Cartier's Nature Sauvage collection also takes inspiration from the natural world but refines it with Cartier's signature precision. The Celestun necklace, a tribute to the flamingo, plays with contrast and movement. Its sleek, stylised beak (crafted in black lacquer and rose gold) stands out against emeralds that resemble swaying reeds and aquamarines that mimic water. All of this leads to the star of the show: a breathtaking 38.50-carat aquamarine centerpiece.

Cartier's beloved panther motif gets a fresh twist in the Panthère Jaillissante, a ring-bracelet hybrid designed to feel alive. The panther's body, set with brilliant-cut diamonds and sapphire accents, curves around the wrist and hand, its emerald eyes locked onto an 8.63-carat Zambian emerald. Every detail, down to the articulation of the panther's form, ensures it moves with you rather than just sitting on your skin.

Then there's the Amphista necklace, inspired by the myth of the two-headed serpent. This striking piece features intertwined, diamond-encrusted forms that coil around nine octagonal Colombian emeralds, totaling 14.72 carats. Each serpent ends in a kite-shaped diamond, striking a perfect balance between geometry and natural fluidity. The articulation of the design means it sits effortlessly against the skin.

For the launch, Deepika Padukone graced the campaign, wearing key pieces from the collection. Cartier has always had a way of taking nature's raw beauty and distilling it into something structured yet wildly captivating.





Amelia GRAY HAMLIN, model, wears a COCO CRUSH necklace as well as a COCO necklace and hoop earrings, quilted motif, in 18K BEIGE GOLD, diamonds. CHANEL Fine Jewelry



Chanel

Chanel's latest COCO CRUSH collection is classic Chanel—effortlessly cool, subtly luxurious, and designed to be worn like a second skin.

Inspired by the quilted stitching of the maison's iconic handbags, these pieces crafted in 18K BEIGE GOLD, white gold, and diamonds, play with light and shadow through fine engravings, giving the jewelry real depth and texture.

Mona Tougaard wears COCO necklaces, bracelets, and earrings layered with that perfect “thrown-together” ease that somehow still looks polished. The COCO CRUSH rings, now available in mini and small versions, get a fresh update with rubies, adding a pop of color to their sleek, curved lines. Meanwhile, Amelia Gray Hamlin makes a strong case for hoop earrings, their sculpted quilted relief nodding to Chanel's heritage while keeping things distinctly modern.

There are no loud logos or over-the-top embellishments here—just sharp design, masterful craftsmanship, and that effortless confidence Chanel does so well.

Left: Mona TOUGAARD, model, wears COCO CRUSH earrings and bracelets as well as COCO necklaces, quilted motif, in 18K BEIGE GOLD and white gold, diamonds. **Right:** COCO CRUSH rings, mini and small versions, quilted motif, in 18K BEIGE GOLD and white gold, diamonds. COCO bracelets, quilted motif, in 18K BEIGE GOLD, rubies.



Van Cleef & Arpels

Van Cleef & Arpels' Folie des Prés collection pays homage to wildflowers. Free-spirited, a little unpredictable, and effortlessly beautiful.

Instead of rigid symmetry, the pieces embrace nature's randomness, letting diamonds and sapphires scatter like petals. The necklace, a garland of blossoms in 18K white gold, features 103 diamonds (6.89 carats) and 127 sapphires (23.64 carats), arranged in a way that looks almost accidental. The mix of round and pear-cut stones creates movement, while the contrast of diamonds and sapphires adds just the right balance of light and colour.

That same organic quality carries through to the earrings. Diamonds and sapphires layer together to mimic flowers in bloom, their asymmetry capturing the wild beauty of nature itself. With different cuts and settings, the earrings catch light from every angle, adding a gentle sparkle to their flowing form.

Then there's the ring, compact but no less stunning. It brings together 15 diamonds (1.3 carats) and 7 sapphires (2.71 carats) in a lush, clustered arrangement that feels like a miniature meadow on your finger. The juxtaposition of high-relief and polished settings gives it a sculptural quality, making the gemstones pop against the smooth metal. Instead of chasing perfection, Folie des Prés celebrates the beauty of imperfection, making each piece feel as natural as it is a work of art.



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Harmony & Steel

Silk & Steel has released its latest collection, Harmony, an ethically crafted modern, soulful celebration of connection, balance, and strength. A Hexagonal motif runs throughout and at its heart are two stones, rose quartz, the stone of love and healing, and black spinel, a symbol of strength and resilience.

From sculptural Solace pendants and Unity hoops to Trinity stacking rings and sleek Harmony pendants, every design is handcrafted by skilled artisans in sterling silver, with rhodium and 14k gold plating finishes.

“Harmony is more than a jewellery collection—it’s a wearable reflection of our emotional landscape. These talismans are designed to evoke a deeper sense of connection with ourselves and those around us,” says Sarah Cotterall, founder and creative director of Silk & Steel. The Harmony collection is the latest expression of Silk & Steel’s signature modern-vintage style, blending contemporary minimalism with meaningful storytelling.

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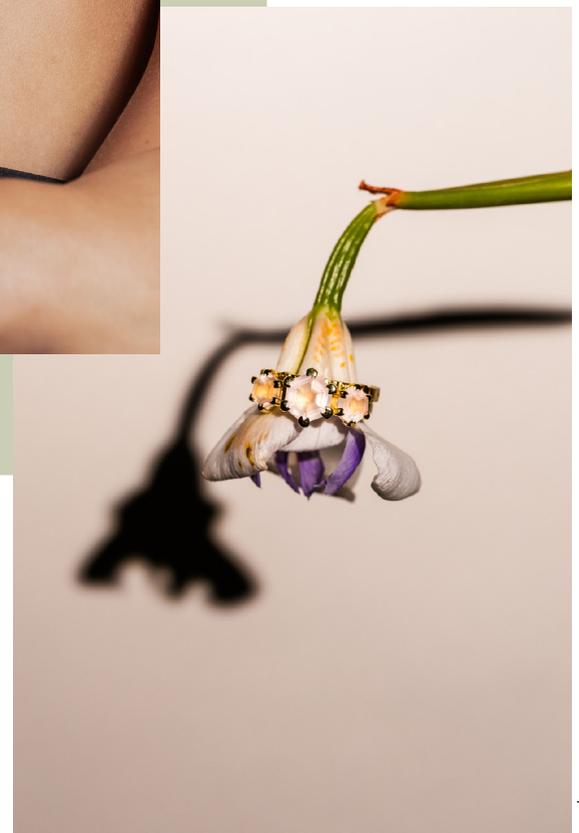


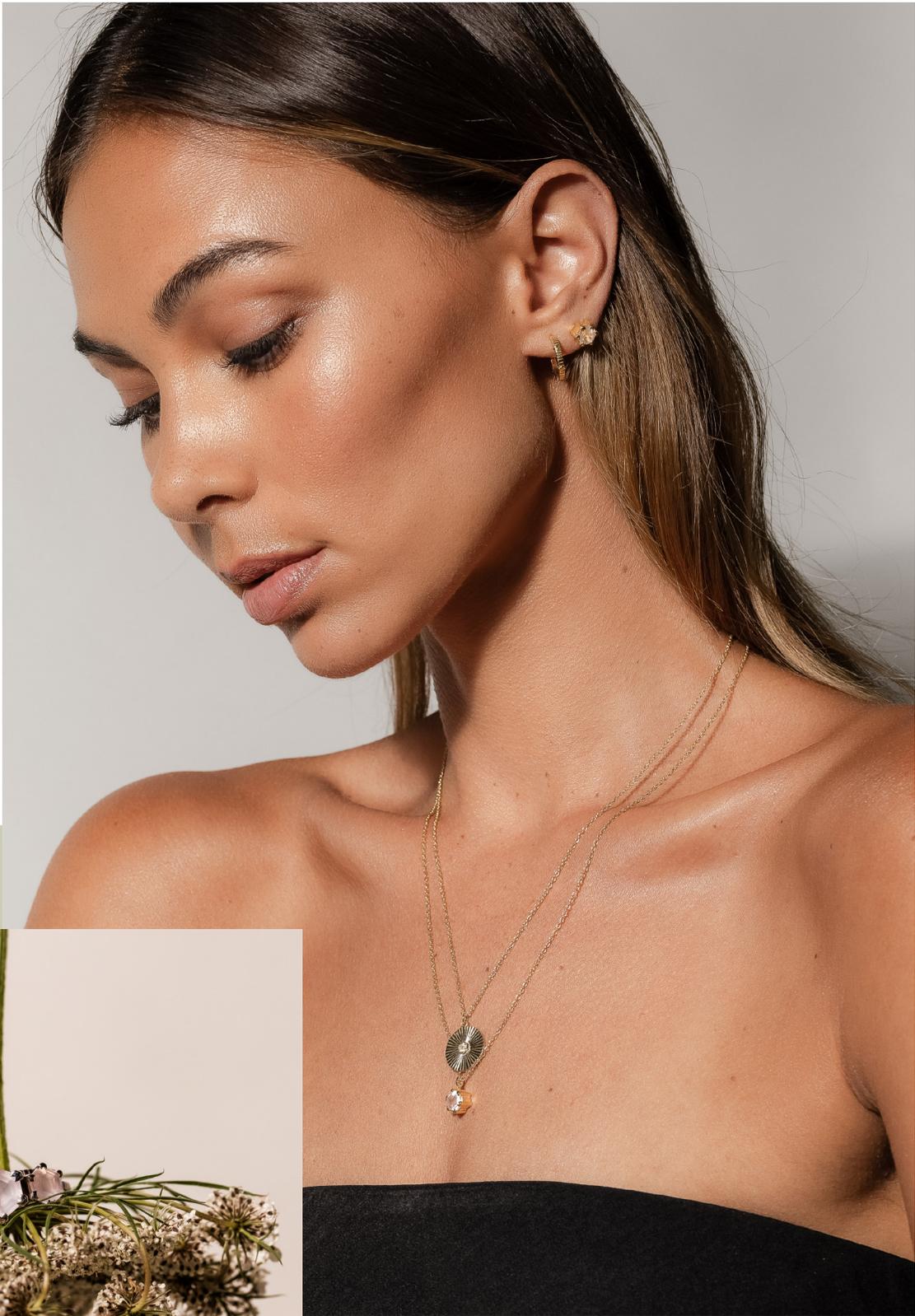
SLE83BSG,
HARMONY STUD
EARRINGS, Black
Spinel/Gold, SLE84G
UNITY HOOP
EARRINGS, Gold

Below: SLR63BSS TRINITY RING Black Spinel/Silver, SLR63RQG TRINITY RING Rose Quartz / Gold



Above: SLE83BSG HARMONY STUD EARRINGS Black Spinel/Gold, SLE84G UNITY HOOP EARRINGS Gold, SLN64BSG HARMONY NECKLACE Black Spinel/Gold, SLN65BSG SOLACE NECKLACE Black Spinel/Gold, SLR63BSG TRINITY RING Black Spinel / Gold, SLR64G UNITY STACKER Gold, SLR63RQG TRINITY RING Rose Quartz/Gold, SLR6 2BSG HARMONY RING Black Spinel / Gold, SLR62RQS HARMONY RING Rose Quartz / Silver,





Below: SLR63RQS
TRINITY RING Rose
Quartz / Silver



Above: SLR64G UNITY STACKER Gold,
SLE83RQG HARMONY STUD EARRINGS
Rose Quartz/Gold, SLN64RQG HARMONY
NECKLACE Rose Quartz/Gold, SLN65RQG
SOLACE NECKLACE Rose Quartz/Gold



Just



Like

Miu

On London's New Bond Street just across the way from regular Bond Street (the green one on the Monopoly Board) Miu Miu reopened their flagship store with their typical flair and star power including the likes of Daisy Ridley, Georgia May Jagger, Cailee Spaeny and Sydney Sweeney. The nights celebrations were led by British musician Little Simz.

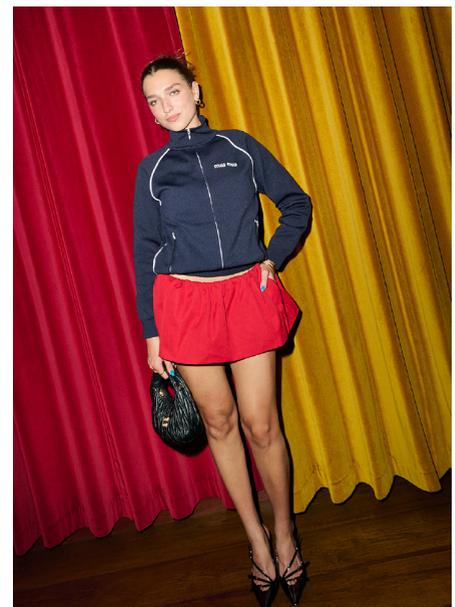


Guests and visitors afterwards got an preview of Miu Miu's new Upcycled collection created in collaboration with costume- production- and set-designer Catherine Martin.

The new space on the corner of New Bond Street and Bruton Street has expanded across 700 square meters of luxury collections including including ready-to-wear, bags, shoes, leather goods, eyewear and small accessories. The ground floor will principally house accessories, ready-to-wear will be displayed on the first floor.

A metal staircase leads up to the first floor where Miu Miu clients will experience a more intimate and homely atmosphere. Floors and ceilings are formed in modular wooden squares. A hanging rail travels along the walls accompanying customers through interconnecting lounges composed of groups of specially curated seating and carpets in varying shapes and shades.

If you ever find yourself on a Monopoly board make sure you land on New Oxford Street before passing go.





CREATIVE DIRECTOR: MIUCCIA PRADA PHOTOGRAPHY: LENGUA
STYLING: LOTTA VOLKOVA



Overt displays of sexuality are subverted to become more quietly suggestive. Soft textures, sensitive structure and a luxe athleticism evoke the modern woman in all her complexity, and marked by confidence, attitude and a free spirit.

While we're on the subject of Miu Miu, Kylie Jenner is taking the lead in the Miu Miu Fall/Winter 2025 campaign.

Straight-leg trousers, mid-length skirts and understated sweaters embody the essence of the feminine, redefined. Cloche hats frame faces, brooches and stoles elevate the everyday. Pointed-toe pumps, new season sneakers and shapely knee-high boots appear alongside the iconic Aventure and new seasonal bags.

A minimal starting point is enhanced by sophisticated detail and gesture that are at once timelessly elegant and subtly suggestive of other eras.





PUMA is turning heads once again with the return of its iconic Mostro silhouette, and this time it's fronted by none other than Amelia Gray, the model and tastemaker known for her unapologetic edge and trend-setting style. In a campaign shot after dark, Amelia channels the retro-futuristic spirit of the Mostro in its bold new "Pelé Yellow" colourway, a fearless fusion of 1960s track style and 1980s surf energy.

Mostro Please



Amelia Gray's fearless style and her ability to define trends embody the Mostro itself – disruptive and utterly original.

"I love that the Mostro is comfy, cool, and just really easy to wear. It looks great with everything and instantly pulls the whole look together. It has that perfect mix of retro and modern that makes any outfit feel more elevated," says Amelia Gray.

Following collaborations and special-edition releases, the unmistakable Mostro continues to make noise. First released in 1999 and given the name "Mostro," after the Italian word for monster, the silhouette takes its hybrid look from a 1960s track spike and a 1980s surfing shoe, culminating in a unique low-profile silhouette defined by its signature spiked sole and utilitarian strap closure. Now the PUMA Mostro shares the main stage with Gray.





Neo Noir

Have you ever wanted to dress like a potential victim in *The Shining* or *Twin Peaks*? Well now you can with Sylvester's newest capsule collection Neo Noir which takes all its cues from Stanley Kubrick and David Lynch, pioneers of the Neo Noir genre and seminal influences.

MODELS: AILEEN FROM SUPER, MIA FROM 62, NALEDI FROM SUPER

CAMPAIGN PHOTOGRAPHY: MATT HURLEY

ECOMMERCE PHOTOGRAPHY: IKE CONWAY

HAIR AND MAKEUP: RAE SACHA

⋮

The mountainous forest setting of both *The Shining* and *Twin Peaks* is represented by a charming zig zag knitwear story, the design bearing more than a passing resemblance to the carpet in *Twin Peak's* infamous red room.

As always, the pieces in this collection are designed for everyone, every day. Our Modern Lovers suiting can slouch through a weekend but is totally ready for business come Monday morning. The trousers, based on the legendary KS Morris shape, have adjustable tabs so you can style them high waisted or low rider and the Wild Rose skirt dress serves as a cute sun frock or midi skirt.

LEFT: Blooms midi dress



This Page: Modern lovers blazer, Audrey slip, skinny rib
Twin peaks jumper, Twin peaks dress



ABOVE: Wild rose dress, Skinny rib

RIGHT: Denim belted dress, Skinny rib.



LEFT: Modern lovers dress, Pintucked shirt

BELOW: Denim service jacket, Traveller shirt, Denim pleat skirt



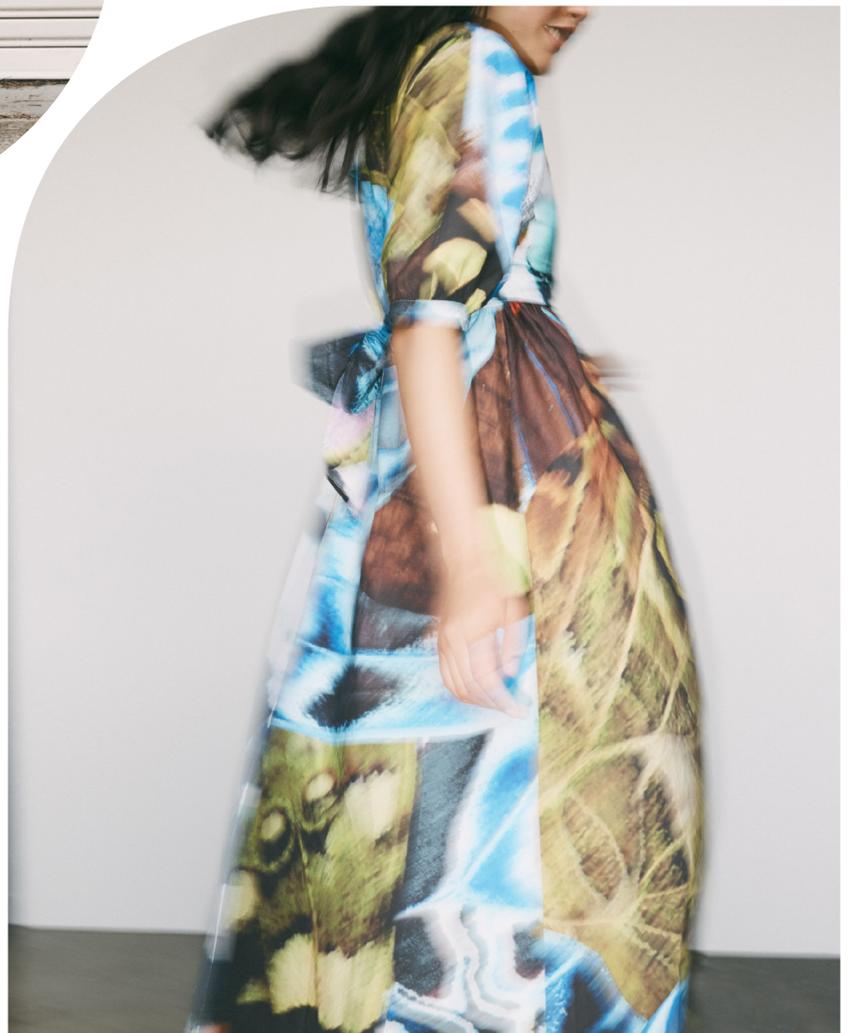


Super

Kowtow has released its SS25 collection which acts as a study in connection. not the loud kind, but the quiet, everyday kind. The type that lives between people, nature and the clothes we choose every day. In a world wired for the individual, Kowtow are drawn to the gentle power of doing things together. When consistent small choices add up to something bigger.

Inspired by the work of Wolfgang Tillmans, the collection leans into the beauty of the everyday: fluid, spontaneous and deeply human. Just as his images capture the unspoken poetry between people and their surroundings, each garment holds its own sense of presence.

Natural



Flex Appeal

There's something refreshingly unapologetic about a brand called Sweaty Betty. Equal parts cheeky and empowering, it says: "Yes I sweat. No, I don't apologise. And yes, I fully intend to look incredible while doing it." Now, that attitude has taken root in Christchurch, and Auckland's Ponsonby.

SWEATY BETTY CHRISTCHURCH
174 CASHEL STREET, CHRISTCHURCH CENTRAL CITY, CHRISTCHURCH 8011
SWEATY BETTY AUCKLAND - PONSONBY
169 PONSONBY ROAD, PONSONBY, AUCKLAND 1011





Founded in London in 1998 by Tamara Hill-Norton, athlete, entrepreneur, mother, Sweaty Betty was launched to disrupt bland, shapeless women's sportswear of the time. Its mission? Build gear that made women feel strong, stylish, and empowered.

Since then, Sweaty Betty has grown from a Notting Hill disruptor to a wellness wardrobe essential beloved across the UK, US, and now New Zealand.

The Christchurch store was the brand's New Zealand debut and its largest so far at 320 sqm, fittingly designed as a flagship retail anchor for a Carter Group development in the heart of the city. It signals Christchurch's importance to Sweaty Betty's growth strategy, a place where active urban life meets clean, considered retail with a hint of floral pizzazz in the form of a giant hanging centrepiece.

Then came Ponsonby: Auckland's version of the same vision. Located at 169 Ponsonby Road, it opened with an event energy that matched its community consciousness with group runs, pretty nibbles, music and exclusive discounts for early visitors.

In Christchurch and Ponsonby, Sweaty Betty is more than activewear. It's a uniform for the everyday athlete, whether you're running trails, hustling workdays, or owning the school pick-up. Stylish, smart, sweat-savvy clothes for lives worth moving well.

That both flagships are run by Nevada Sport Group makes perfect sense. This Christchurch-based retail heavyweight has been curating premium labels from Denham to Merrell to Sweaty Betty since 1978. Nevada isn't about stacking brands, they're about building legacies. They were early adopters of global labels like Denham, and their retail DNA is all about longevity, quality, and brands that understand their customer better than the algorithm ever could.

Bringing Sweaty Betty to New Zealand is a no-brainer. We're a nation of runners, riders, lifters, hikers, breathwork obsessives, HIIT junkies, barre devotees and everything in between. We sweat. We live in activewear, not just for the gym, but for the hours before and after it. And frankly, we deserve more than faded black tights and an oversized tee. Thanks Nevada Sport and Sweaty Betty.



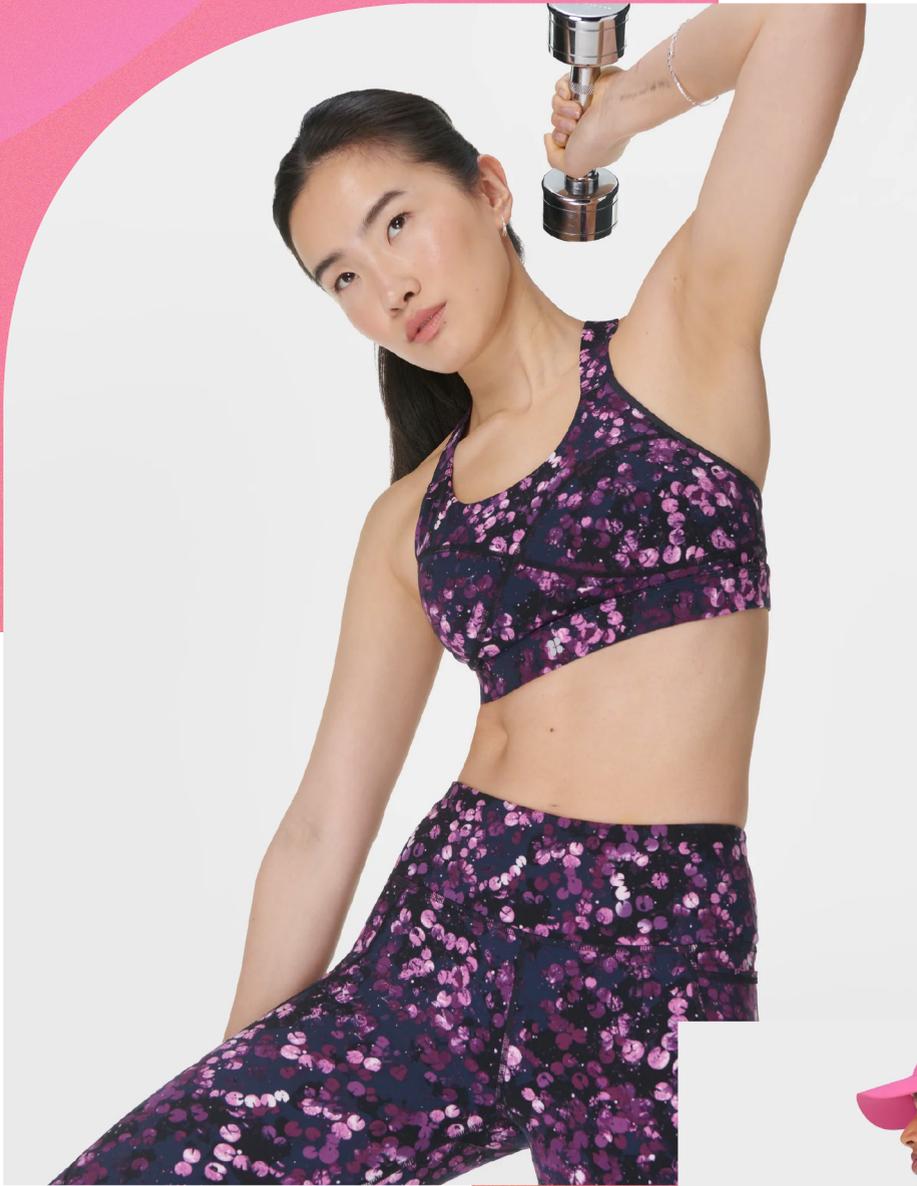
ABOVE: Explorer
Ribbed Racer
Dress, Colour:
Willow Green,
\$269.00





ABOVE: Power Workout Leggings, Colour: Trek Green, \$159.00

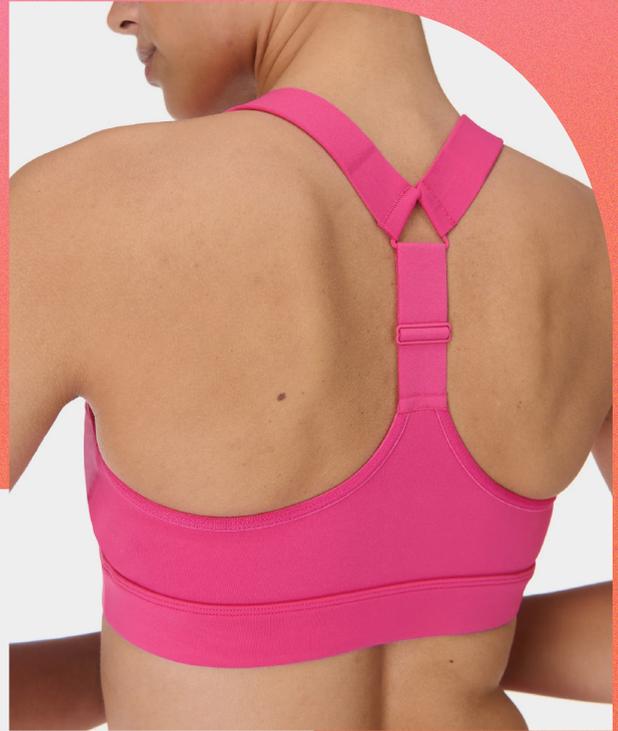




LEFT: Power Medium Support Sports Bra, Colour: Purple Lilypad Print
\$119.00



RIGHT: Wear The Damn Shorts T-Shirt, Colour: White
\$79.00



LEFT: Power
Medium Support
Sports Bra, Colour:
Fuchsia Pink
\$119.00



Time At The Lagoon

Passing through a busy Auckland street earlier today a sleet of rain was gusting through. A guy crossing the road literally had to wave goodbye to his beanie as it blew into one of our permanent live art installations, otherwise known as roadworks. You know how windy it needs to be to blow your beanie off? That's some Wellington business.

According to Tudor wearing one of their watches has the power to mentally transport you somewhere, in the case of the Black Bay 54 "Lagoon Blue" the place is somewhere balmy and warm. Shell-dotted white sandy beaches. Beanies inert on the sun loungers they were thrown onto as everyone runs down into the surf.

This wizardry is achieved by the bold bright sand-textured lagoon blue dial surrounded by a mirror polished 37mm case extending the feeling of freedom in all directions like an endless horizon. It's held by a satin-brushed 5-link steel bracelet.

On the inside it's powered by a Manufacture Calibre MT5400 with a 70-hour power

reserve and it wouldn't be a Tudor without its iconic "Snowflake" hands, a hallmark since 1969.

It's elegantly simple and goes with almost anything, and avoids any subdials to busy-up the face. This is the watch that perfectly captures those dreamy vibes of summertime, even when it's freezing here.

BEAUTY

SPRING
2025

Envelop yourself in sensorial indulgences and nourishing rituals to soothe the soul.

BEAUTY HOTLIST

Spring's freshest drops are centred on glow-giving rituals to heal, restore and reawaken the senses.

1

MATCH ME

A buildable formula with a barely there feel, **Jane Iredale** Skintuition SPF30 Radiance-Boosting Liquid Foundation, \$120, melts seamlessly to create a true skin-like finish.

2

TAN IN A FLASH

For those with no time to spare, **Bondi Sands** Ultra Express Self Tanning Foam, \$32.99, offers a first-of-its-kind formula that delivers full colour results in just one hour.

3

GOT MILK?

A skin refresher to revive dry skin and makeup, **MECCA MAX** MILK IT Soothing Moisturise Mist, \$33, uses the latest hero ingredient, Centella Asiatica, to support the barrier of compromised skin.

4

GLOW REVIVAL

A rinse-off exfoliating mask with BHA, PHA and a suite of vitamins, **Aesop** Lucent Facial Refiner, \$133, works to replenish dry and dull skin.

5

PICK-ME-UP

Peptides, ceramides and vitamin C are blended in **Mecca Cosmetica** Future Face Hydrogel Mask, \$15 each, to brighten and plump the skin in 15 minutes.

6

LASH EVOLUTION

The next gen reformulation of **Aleph Beauty** Mascara, \$68, includes mung bean and clover sprout extract to boost lash length and density over time.

7

CELLULAR AWAKENING

Tackling vascular aging, **Trinny London** Take Back Time Elixir, \$178, instantly transforms tired skin by boosting oxygen and nutrient delivery.

8

GLAZED LINES

Designed to be paired with a gloss for juicy definition, **MAC Cosmetics** Lipglazer, \$48, creates fuller looking lips with its soft and shiny lip liner formula.

9

CAFE CRUSH

Ultra nourishing with a natural tint, **Ashley & Co** have added 'Coffee Date' to the popular Lip Punch, \$15, lineup.

10

HORMONE HARMONY

For those suffering from hormonal acne, **Bc Pure** Skin Rescue, \$34.90, is formulated with Diindolylmethane (DIM) to effectively balance hormones and reduce inflammation.

11

ALPINE ESCAPE

Crisp, fresh and green, **Glasshouse** Breathtaking Banff is the latest limited edition fragrance with notes of green fig leaves, maple wood, vanilla and bergamot.

Soy Candle, \$64.95; Interior Fragrance & Paper Diffuser, \$54.95

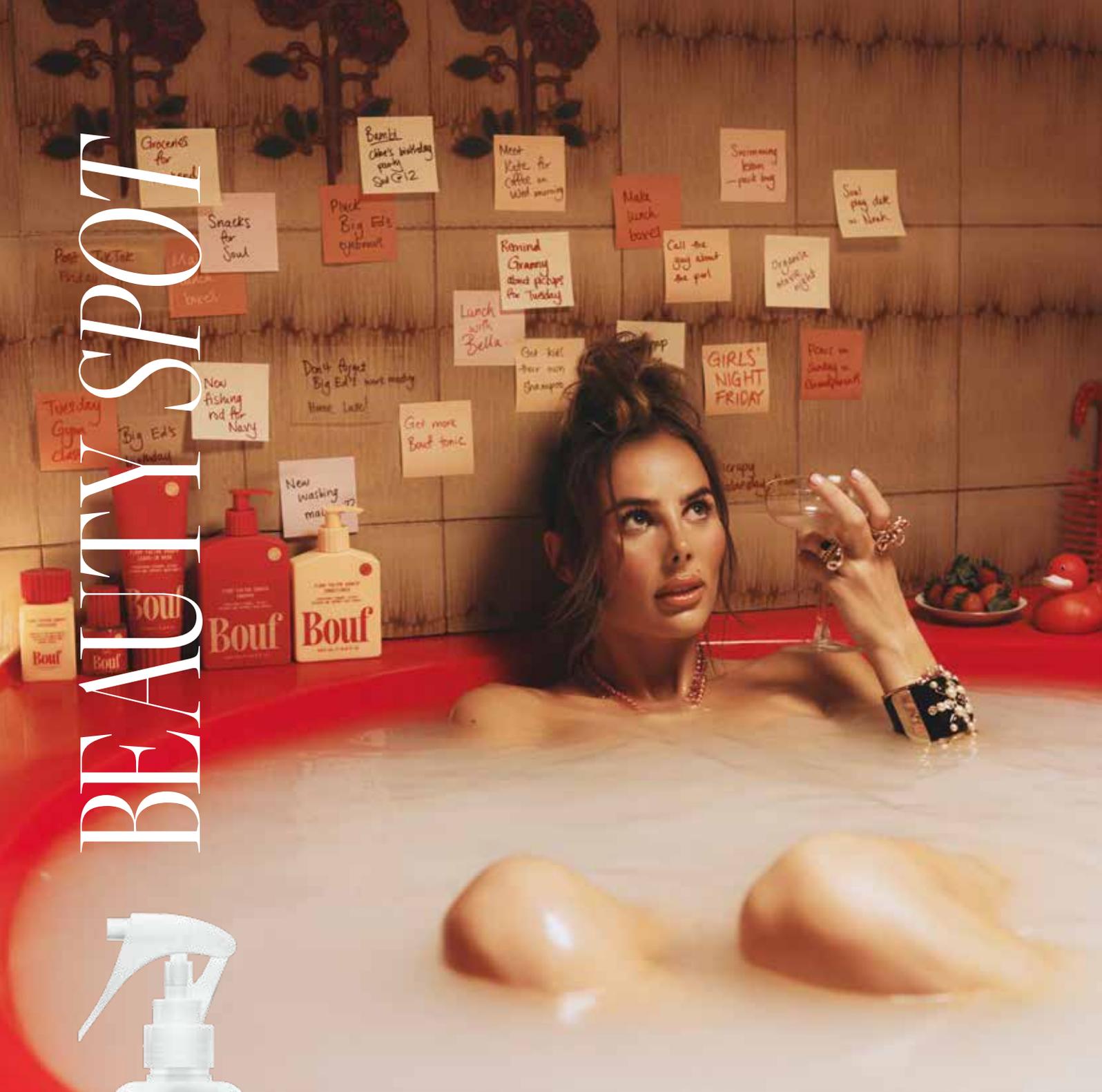
12

SILKEN RITUAL

Gentle yet effective, **La Prairie** Eye Makeup Remover, \$115, is a soothing biphasic formula with panthenol and cornflower extract that eliminates all traces of makeup effortlessly.



BEAUTY SPOT



ROOT REMEDY

A third of women over 30 experience hair thinning in one form or another, often triggered by stress, hormonal shifts, or postpartum recovery. In a viral campaign fronted by mum-of-three and TikTok sensation Indy Clinton, who candidly documented her five-month hair transformation, **Bouf** Flouf Factor Growth Tonic, \$39.95, struck a chord with women in Australia, flying off shelves at a rate of one bottle per minute. For a root-boosting styling solution, **Essano** Exper+ise Growth + Volume Volumising & Styling Spray, \$25.99, is powered by caffeine to stimulate the scalp while delivering flexible, volume, and definition.

BODY SCULPTOR

As we crawl out of hibernation mode and step into spring, it's time to give the body an internal reset. Lymphatic drainage massage encourages the flow of lymph fluid to expel toxins, reduce water retention and puffiness, and dramatically sculpt and lift the body. Nicky Watson of **My Beauty Room** is a leader in the field and celebrity go-to, known for her transformative results that will leave you feeling lighter, lifted, and renewed.



DAILY ELIXIR

Nourish the body from the inside out by integrating rituals that support both inner vitality and outer glow. An all-in-one complex with collagen, plant proteins, magnesium, vitamin C and D and hyaluronic acid, **The Beauty Chef** Body Collagen, \$85, fortifies joint, muscle, skin and nerve health in one fell swoop. Practice at-home lymphatic drainage and body sculpting massage to release tight fascia and stimulate lymphatic flow with **My Beauty Room** Sculpt + Detox Tool Kit, \$99, the massage cup is paired with a coffee bean extract inclusive oil blend to firm the skin and slow down the development of fat cells.

SOFT CHEMISTRY

Like blossoms in bloom and air after rain, these spring scents carry a quiet radiance laced with modern synthetic notes. Emulating a moment of softness like the impressions on cotton, **Narciso Rodriguez** Radiante, EDP, 50ml, \$197, is a fresh, luminous and green scent with notes of white aldehydes, clove blossom and orange flower, wrapped in clean musks, vetiver and cedar. For the chypre lover, **Hermès** Barénia Perfumed Hair Mist, \$126, drapes a delicate veil of butterfly lily, patchouli and oakwood over the wearer like a halo. An intense floral-aquatic fragrance inspired by the underwater world, **Issey Miyake** L'Eau d'Issey, EDP Intense, \$204, features the unique posidonia accord as an olfactive ode to the sea.





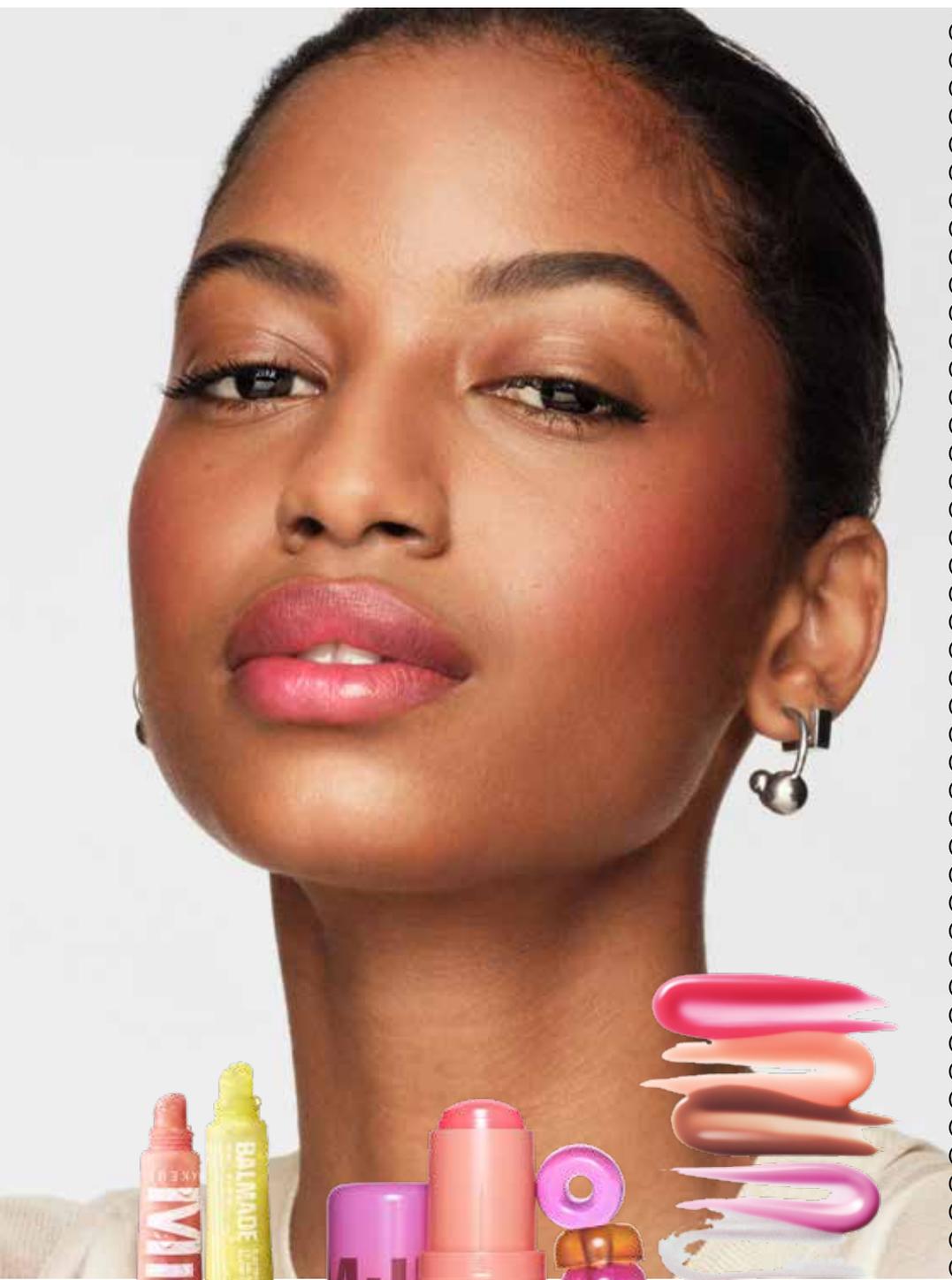
RESTORATIVE RETREAT

The ultimate head-to-toe indulgence, **East Day Spa x Augustinus Bader Methode Face and Body**, \$360, is a two-hour experience that combines advanced skincare technology with restorative body therapy. The session starts with a stimulating body brush and flowing massage, followed by a facial with fascia massage and LED therapy. Expect deep nourishment, visible renewal, and full-body rejuvenation.

SPRING REFRESH

Revive your glow and reveal a radiant complexion by adding protection against spring's strengthening rays. A lightweight, milky serum with lactic acid, vitamin C and hyaluronic acid, **Clinique Moisture Surge Active Glow Serum**, \$85, exfoliates dead skin cells to reveal smooth skin. Using a stable form of vitamin C, sodium ascorbyl phosphate, together with kakadu plum and niacinamide, **Milou Bright & Tight Brightening Vitamin C Serum**, \$69, plumps and brightens the skin and also prevents the growth of acne-causing bacteria to minimise the appearance of fine lines.





LIP DUO

The viral sensation that is **Milk Makeup** is known to never skip a beat. The new **Balmade Electrolyte Lip Balm**, \$37, is a long-lasting glossy balm with water retention capabilities to keep the lips hydrated, plump and juicy. Layer this over a wash of the **Cooling Water PH Jelly Tint**, \$52, for a custom pink lip combo that is unique to you and only you.



MODERN ESSENTIALS

Even though TikTok romanticises slow mornings and 11am starts, the reality for most modern women is still deeply rooted in hustle culture - rushing from A to B while juggling work, pets, kids, and everything in between. Where time is tight and demands are high, the luxuries of convenience have turned into an everyday essential. **The Beauty Chef** have answered the call with two of their best-sellers, **Glow and Collagen Boost**, available in Sachets, \$55, to supercharge your water with vitamin B and C, collagen, zinc and probiotics - all while on the go. Changing the energy game to provide clean energy, **Manuka Phuel Collagen Buzz**, \$2.79, clean, sustained energy with a blend of caffeine, guarana, ginseng, manuka honey, and collagen—all packed into one sleek can.



Living

Enter the Labyrinth

Burano Labyrinth Rosso Nero tiles bring striking contrast and structured form to pools and interiors using a bold glass mosaic pattern. Each tile is made from opaque glass, which resists moisture, staining, and regular wear. These features make the tile practical for high-moisture areas and high-use settings. Swimming pools, splashbacks, bathrooms, and wet zones, wherever you need a dramatic high-impact look. The pattern adds rhythm and direction, drawing the eye across the surface with a strong sense of movement. Pair with plain tiles to soften the look or use the full pattern for a stronger statement.

reedharris.co.uk

LIVING REFRESH

New season means new tableware. Ok it doesn't usually mean that, we aren't throwing away our spoons every time the weather changes, but if you're looking to refresh your home's look, starting with the things you use every day is a good start.

THE ROMAN CUP, NOW IN KŌKAKO 002

Acme's lighter, finer Roman Range was designed for the modern espresso drinker, and the Medium Roman Cup continues to be a favourite for black and milk coffees alike. It now comes in Kōkako 002, a soft blue shade inspired by a vintage Crown Lynn plate, adding a touch of nostalgia to your morning brew.



MIRROR FINISH CUTLERY

Acme's cutlery just got a glow-up. The Knife, Fork, Spoon and Teaspoon are now available in a mirror finish. Same solid stainless-steel construction, new reflective surface. They're built to last, dishwasher friendly, and great for everything from cupping to scraping the last of the peanut butter jar.



THE BLACK TASTER CUP

To mark 10 years of the now-iconic Taster Cup, Acme has released a limited-edition version in black. Still the same compact, stackable, multi-tasking design that's made its way into cafés, roasteries, and home kitchens around the world, just with a new, quietly bold look. It's been called the most versatile cup on the bench, and we're inclined to agree.

acmecups.nz

Build

Your

Own

Palm

Springs

Escape

We all live busy and fast paced lives, so home should be a place designed to help us relax and unwind. But what if you could take that a step further, and transport yourself into the tranquil Palm Springs desert lifestyle every time you walk through the door?

The tranquil and relaxing vibe of the desert can be felt from the moment you step into this home. The home's light washed exterior featuring plenty of palm trees automatically transports you to Palm Springs. Aptly called 'Desert Romance' this home was meticulously designed to bring the romantic and inviting feel of Palm Springs to Tauranga.

A curved wall leads you from the entrance into the home's main open plan living space. The breath-taking open plan living consists of the home's kitchen, dining and living. While large sliding doors open the space to the alfresco dining space, fit with an outdoor fireplace.

The home's kitchen truly is the heart of the home and has many standout features, from a stylish island bench, brass hardware, and a discrete walk-through scullery that provides easy access to the home's media lounge – making entertaining a breeze. The window splashback and large skylights open the space to the outdoors. Warm wood cabinetry fits the home's minimal





natural colour palette and provides plenty of storage.

Designed with entertaining in mind the home's kitchen provides easy access to both the indoor and outdoor dining spaces. Large sliding doors open to provide direct access to the kitchen, making outdoor summer dining a breeze. Whilst the indoor dining provides a cosy spot for cooler winter nights with its standout light fixture.

Relaxation is the ultimate feel in this home, this is especially seen in the home's living spaces. From the airy and spacious feel of the main living, to the tranquil relaxing green of the media room. The home was designed with comfort in mind. Built-in storage provides both style and practicality for both spaces, along with the statement lighting choices.

The home's green trend continues throughout the home providing a tranquil feel in the media lounge, master ensuite and laundry room. Meanwhile brighter colours feature in the home's 3 additional bedrooms



adding character to the home, especially in the colourful rainbow themed children's room designed as a playful yet tranquil space.

The home's master suite is the ultimate spot to relax and unwind. The bright and airy space features a standout built-in headboard matched to the kitchen island, and a curved built-in bed. The spacious ensuite features brass hardware and statement lighting continuing the home's luxe feel, whilst a private outdoor shower fits the Palm Springs vibe.

If you're looking to create your own Palm Springs inspired escape, make sure to visit GJ's beautiful Desert Romance showhome. Or talk to your local GJ's team today about building you a home that we can both be proud of.



GIVE

YOUR

HOME

FLOW

When God closes a door he opens a window, because he keeps wanting to let the bloody draft in. Just because your son was born in one doesn't mean every house has to be a barn you know. I'm not a big believer in ley lines and Feng Shui, but it has been at the top of my mind recently. Even with a cold calculated western analytic eye it's not hard to see there's something to the claim that the natural rolls and curves of the earth and the spaces we inhabit collect emotions in some form or another. Spend a couple seconds in a new house and you immediately get a feel for its mood.

Some houses are what I describe as depression nests. My next door neighbour has the same layout as us, but as the house was full of dudes who detested light stuff slowly piled up in front of the windows, it was immediately oppressive, and they complained about the moisture as if they weren't the masters of their own destiny. The same house, months later was occupied by a couple happy to have landed somewhere to hunker down days before another lockdown was about to go into effect. It was bright, sunny, airy even. They complained about the moisture because it turns out the bathroom didn't have an extractor fan.

While making decisions about furniture placement and hoard levels are a priority there could be even smaller, manageable things we can do to our homes to make sure they're a pleasure to live in. According to Kellie Richardson, founder of Kurved by Design something as simple as knowing whether to have an open or closed door can change the mood of the house.

"Doors are not just functional, they are symbolic," Richardson said.

"In Feng Shui they represent passage and protection in the home. Certain doors should remain open to invite opportunity, while others should be closed to preserve personal energy and harmony."

Starting with the bathroom Kellie recommends always keeping the door closed.

"If the door is left open, it is believed that prosperity may literally wash away. Closing bathroom and toilet doors helps



to symbolically retain abundance within the home," Richardson said.

"So, where possible, make sure you keep your bathroom and toilet doors closed. This is one reason why you see homes with glass insert doors. The doors stop the money from being washed away while still allowing light into the area."

Also on a more practical level all that tile makes the place freezing, and besides, the extractor fan isn't working.

"Laundry doors should also be kept shut as they are another space where energy tends to dissipate," Richardson said.

"This simple act can reduce feelings of overwhelm and maintain a sense of peace in your main living areas."

"In the bedroom, a closed door at night supports deeper rest, emotional safety and a stronger sense of personal retreat," Richardson said.



"Closing the door helps shield the space from noise, light and energy from the rest of the home making it easier to relax and restore."

Also it keeps the cat out.

For those working from home Richardson said a closed office door can create mental clarity and establish much needed boundaries between work and personal life.

"This visual and energetic separation makes it easier to concentrate and switch off at the end of the day," Richardson added.

That said not all doors are meant to stay shut. Richardson emphasised that front doors should be opened regularly to welcome fresh energy into the home.

"In Feng Shui the front door is known as the mouth of qi - the place where new opportunities enter your life," Richardson said.

"While it does not need to stay open all day it should be clean, inviting and free from obstruction."

"Feng Shui helps restore balance and peace. When we become more mindful of how our spaces work we begin to shift how we live within them."

DO NOT DISTURB

We spend a third of our lives in them, yet they're often the last space we give proper attention to. The bedroom isn't just a place to sleep, it's where the day begins and ends, where thoughts unwind, and sometimes, where laundry goes to hide. Whether you're after a sanctuary of calm, a statement of style, or just a room that makes getting out of bed slightly harder, design matters. This feature explores the bedrooms that get it right, from soft neutrals and natural materials to bold statements and quiet luxury. Whatever your sleep style, there's something here worth waking up for.



Colour match: Resene Cruising





Colour match: Resene Good As Gold



Desenio, Butter Yellow Bedroom, 8757555

MELLOW YELLOW

This butter-yellow bedroom, decorated with Desenio artwork, makes a strong case for tone-on-tone living. Soft, layered, and sun-warmed without being too sweet. The linen bedding keeps things casual and breathable, while the mustard cushions add just enough contrast to stop it all from blending into mashed banana.

The gallery wall is where the real styling happens, different styles and subjects, but everything sticks to a warm, cohesive palette. Matching frame tones is what keeps it feeling intentional, not like you panic-bought five prints the night before hosting.

Sheer curtains, minimal bedside styling, and natural textures help round things out. It's relaxed, polished, and a solid reminder that yellow doesn't have to be loud to make a statement.



Domkapa, Bedroom Domkapa, 8687674

BEIGE BRIGADE

Beige is back baby. Well maybe not quite but there is always a place for natural tones.

The Domkapa bed leads the scheme. Fully upholstered and low to the ground, it adds visual weight without making the room feel crowded. The curved headboard softens the geometry and helps the bed blend with the rest of the space.

Everything else follows the same formula. The linen bedding, dense rug, and light brick wall all sit within a similar palette. Variation comes from material contrast rather than colour. It is a useful strategy for designing a calm bedroom that still feels finished.

Artwork is kept abstract and unobtrusive. The timber bedside table introduces a different texture and a subtle curve, which stops the look from feeling overly repetitive.

For anyone designing with neutrals, this space shows that consistency is not the same as dull. A limited palette, handled with restraint, can still feel warm and intentional.



LUX XU, LUX XUs Thrilling Loft at New York Master Bedroom, 7387445

INDUSTRIAL SUPERPOWER

Industrial doesn't have to mean cold, and minimal doesn't have to mean bare. This bedroom shows how urban edge and high design can work together without losing comfort. Polished materials and sharp lines sit alongside plush textures and soft finishes, creating a space that feels intentional but not clinical.

The feature wall brings a LUX XU graphic, architectural feel that anchors the room without relying on colour. It adds scale, texture and a subtle sense of movement. The quilted bed balances this with height and softness, while the grey-on-white palette keeps everything cohesive.

Lighting and exposed ductwork are fully integrated into the design rather than concealed. The walk-in wardrobe is open, symmetrical and exact, with glossy drawers and lit display rails that lean closer to retail than residential. It's highly ordered but still liveable.

For anyone drawn to modern interiors with a sense of drama, this is a reminder that monochrome can be layered, and that clean doesn't have to mean quiet.



French Bedroom, French Bedroom Love Story Sérénité Rattan Bed Bed 1295, £1295, 8716619

NATURAL SELECTION

There's an old-school charm in leaning into natural materials. Cane, timber, wool and cotton all bring texture and warmth without relying on trends or high-gloss finishes. When combined with a muted palette, they create a space that feels both grounded and enduring.

The Love Story Srnit Rattan Bed from French Bedroom sits comfortably in this mindset. The woven cane panels and soft timber frame give it presence without bulk. Paired with terracotta and rust-toned textiles, the look is layered but not busy.

Pattern is kept minimal and softened through vintage-style rugs and tonal cushions. The key here is restraint. Letting materials and colour do the work keeps the space calm and tactile.

Furniture choices follow the same line. A simple wooden dresser and ceramic lamp stay within the natural palette, adding functionality without distraction. For anyone drawn to spaces that feel warm, timeless and a little more lived-in



Colour match: Resene Passport



French Bedroom, French Bedroom Hannah Rose Bed Linen Set in Blue40, £40, 8828778

FLOWER POWER

There's something quaintly optimistic about blue and white florals. The Hannah Rose Bed Linen Set from French Bedroom takes that idea and runs with it, delivering a print so densely patterned you may find yourself trying to spot a hidden dolphin if you grew up with Magic Eye posters. Spoiler: it's just flowers.

Tied bows at the base and on the pillows add softness, while the colourway keeps it fresh rather than fussy. The upholstered headboard in a muted sage-grey pulls the scheme together and stops the print from taking over entirely.

The timber floor, jute rug, and woven basket styling ground the look and keep it from feeling too sweet. If you like the idea of print but don't want to commit to wallpaper, patterned bedding like this is an easy, low-risk way to bring character into a bedroom.

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Q & A WITH AUGUST & CO DESIGN INTERIOR
DESIGNER HAYLEY DRYLAND.

Designing Luxury That Lasts:

For Hayley Dryland, timeless design isn't just a bit of marketing buzz, it's the foundation of every project she takes on at August & Co. She's not interested in ripping out a bathroom because a tile has fallen out of fashion and is a hue or two out of favour with the Pantone colour of the year, or designing a kitchen that feels disconnected from the rest of the house. Her process begins with understanding exactly how a client intends to live in their space, from whether they need storage for sports gear to if they want an outdoor shower for the dog. From there, she works through functionality first, ensuring every room flows logically and works as hard as it looks. Hayley shares how she balances a client's personal taste with her own expertise, the common renovation mistakes she avoids, and why she believes the smallest details, from power points hidden inside drawers to the right kind of uplighting, can make the biggest difference. For her, luxury isn't about chasing trends; it's about creating a home that feels considered, works seamlessly, and still looks like a good decision years down the track

When a client comes to you for a renovation, where do you begin?

When a client gets in touch about their interior renovation project, first we'll have a chat about the scope of the project, what the client wants to achieve, their budget and timeline. Once I have a good understanding, I'll put together a proposal for them that breaks the project into various stages. Then it's time to visit the house and find out everything I need to know about how the client intends to live and use the spaces. For example, they might need a lot of storage for sports equipment or a shower outside to wash their dog. We'll also talk about their personal style, and I'll look at any design inspiration they've collected. It's important that I have a really clear understanding of their goals for the project, lifestyle, and aesthetic preferences before creating design concepts for them.

What does 'timeless design' mean to you — and how do you achieve it in kitchens, bathrooms, and interiors?

To me, timeless design is something that is built from quality materials, it should be sympathetic to the architecture, and it shouldn't need updating

for at least 10 to 15 years. You should be able to come home every day and think, 'I made a really good decision there and I feel good in my home'. Of course, our tastes change over time, but I think it's better to take risks with elements of the design that aren't built in. There's no harm in being brave with a paint colour because we can easily repaint it later. I don't believe in spending money to rip out a bathroom in five years time because you're sick of a tile — I'd rather put in a tile that has longevity.

How do you balance the client's personal taste with your design expertise to create something lasting?

Everything I do is very collaborative — I like to discuss ideas with clients, and I don't just offer a single design solution. It's about helping them make clear decisions by refining concepts, so I will do the research to figure out what could work best spatially then I'll give them the pros and cons, and ultimately they make the decision that's right for them.

I'm often working with a couple on a project, and two people may have quite different ideas. My job is to get an overall sense of project goals, functional needs and style from each of them.

Great, timeless interior design is about supporting clients to create a home that supports how they want to live — my job is to pull out their ideas and design a beautiful and functional space.

What are some design mistakes you often see in kitchen or bathroom renovations — and how do you avoid them?

A common mistake in interiors is the design takes away from the architecture or is a mismatch with the quality and tone of the home or surrounding spaces. When approaching an interior renovation, even if it's just a single room, you need to consider how that design is going to sit within the rest of the house and how it relates to the architecture. It's about the fact that when you walk into a house, it feels that each space was considered.

How do you select materials that are both luxurious and durable over time?

If we want something that is unique and has its own personality, the likelihood is we'll select materials that are natural, whether it's a natural timber, a natural marble, or natural linens. If I show clients a material, I'll let them know how that material is going to age over time, and the pros and cons of selecting that product. Materials

are picked based on the requirement in a space for the specific clients, so, for example, if they need something that's super durable, I'll investigate all of the options available.

Can you walk us through one of your recent renovation projects and the design story behind it?

The Birkenhead Point Project was a heritage-listed bungalow that had been renovated 20 years prior to the clients purchasing the home. They are a family with tween kids and they'd lived in it for a while, so they had a good understanding of how they wanted to use the spaces. It was modernised with a solid timber kitchen, but the spaces were very small, and the master didn't have an en suite. The project involved building up to create a master suite, creating larger bedrooms for their children, and opening up the kitchen and living area, which involved adding a small extension to give the kitchen a much more generous space. Everything that we did within it was all in keeping with the bungalow style, so that when you walk in you feel that the kitchen could have always been there. It is still modern in terms of its functionality, but it feels welcoming, relaxed, yet still beautifully considered.

What role does functionality play in your approach to luxury design?

Whenever I present concepts, I always start with functionality. With the client, we talk about the spatial design within the space, and how spaces flow from one to



the next, exploring various options. Then we look at the general layout, and from there we go into the specifics of where things are and how we could manoeuvre spaces to create a more logical flow. After the spatial layout is considered, we go into the look and feel of it because the function of it should be our starting point for any good design.

How do you make sure a renovation adds long-term value to a home — not just in looks, but in investment?

If a client isn't sure how long they will keep a house, we'll consider how the design choices will impact the saleability and value of the home. We also need to ensure the interior design sits at the right level for the area, so that when someone wants to buy it they'll feel that the spaces have been well considered, the flow works well, and the quality of the fixtures and fittings are at the right level.

We can still create a design that is personal to the client in the meantime, particularly with things like paint and wallpaper that can be easily updated with more neutral choices when it comes to selling.





What are some of the small, often-overlooked details that elevate a space from 'nice' to truly exceptional?

I think lighting is one of the most commonly overlooked details that can transform the feeling of a space. It completely changes the way you feel in a room and can take a design to the next level. This can be as simple as installing dimmers, a stunning feature light or highlighting a painting with a spotlight. Use uplights instead of downlights, and shine a light on architectural details you want to highlight.

Storage is also often overlooked, and a simple solution like a drawer with power points for charging your devices is an easy way to keep clutter off benches.

What's your view on trends — and how do you keep your designs feeling current without dating them?

The Pantone colour of the year last year was Peach Fuzz – and it's clearly not for everyone! I always suggest to clients that if they want to play with a trend, just have a bit of fun with it. For example, you could do an accent cushion in yellow rather than paint your kitchen in it. When it comes to fixed elements, it's better to stay away from the latest trends.

What should clients look for when choosing an interior designer for a high-end renovation?

It's important to choose a designer who can show you examples of the projects they've worked on, so you can understand their design ability and the calibre of projects they've worked on. I would recommend interviewing the designer to get a feel for whether you would like to work with them. Doing a renovation is a huge amount of money, it's a huge commitment and a long process, and you need to know that the designer's got your back, that you feel heard, that your ideas are validated, and that they'll take on board what you're saying and what you want.

What do you love most about helping people transform their homes?

An interior renovation is something some people only do once in their lives, they often have to live off site, it can be stressful and feel incredibly daunting. I'm here to help my clients facilitate their dream interior, and it's such an amazing feeling when a project is completed to know that I've done a really good job and the clients feel that all the challenges were worth it.





PUMPING THE MARKET

In the days after giving birth, Alicia Segal was sore, exhausted, and trying to figure out how to feed her baby. Support was minimal, emotions were high, and when the nurse wheeled in a bulky electric breast pump, she was faced with the challenge of figuring out how it worked.

WORDS BY LILLIE ROHAN

At just four days postpartum, the first-time mum was crawling behind the hospital bed, trying to plug in the pumping device before realising that nothing she did was going to work, because it was broken beyond repair.

“I just remember thinking, this cannot be it. This cannot be how new mums are expected to do this,” Alicia tells M2 Woman. “It was a device that hadn’t been updated since the 1950s, how is that accepted as the norm?”

That moment is bittersweet to reflect on for Alicia and her partner Ari Segal. While incredibly raw and difficult at the time, it was also the spark for

Bubka, the now-cult-status wearable breast pump brand run entirely by the Sydney-based couple.

Built in the cracks between nap times, swift career changes, and 3 a.m. feeds, the pair have used every spare second to not only make a huge part of motherhood accessible and simple for new mums, but also proved that you can turn postpartum frustration into something powerful and with a new range set to be released in September, they’re not slowing down anytime soon.

The First 'Let's Do This' Conversation

The idea for Bubka didn’t come out of nowhere. In the lead-up to having their first baby, Ari and Alicia were already deep in research mode, trying to wrap their heads around feeding options and breast pumps. What they found was disheartening: the few wearable pumps available at the time were priced at over \$700 AUD.

“We were just like... surely not,” Ari says. “That’s a huge cost, especially for something you might not even know will work for you.”

Ari, the risktaker of the pair, already had experience in sourcing wearable devices from a side hustle he'd been running and after some research, confirmed what the pair already knew.

"We were walking down Newcastle Street, Ari turns to me and says, 'There's this massive gap in the breast pump market, we should really commit.' I was eight months pregnant, overwhelmed and I just said, 'I cannot deal with this right now,'" Alicia recalls.

The idea was put in the back pocket, but once Alicia experienced first-hand just how dire the pumping situation was in the hospital and how isolating it was pumping at home, it was full steam ahead even despite the cost.

"Had I known what Ari spent to get those samples, I would've absolutely shut it down," Alicia laughs. "But seeing them, holding one in my hand and then using it? That changed everything."

She realised quickly this wasn't just a clever product, it was a necessary one. Something mums actually needed and in the minimal free time the couple had, they began building Bubka.

The Push From Side Hustle to Full-Time Business

In the first few months of Bubka, Ari was working his 40-hour-a-week job and another 10-15 hours a week on Bubka: "I was leaving the house before 7am even though I started at 9am, just to give myself two guaranteed hours a day to work on the business."

It was a bit of a passion project, an exciting side hustle until Ari's job was impacted by a company restructure and they were faced with the now or never decision.

"No one wants to go through that," Alicia says. "But it gave us a nudge. The kind we didn't ask for, but maybe needed."

They went all in. Ari took the lead on operations. Alicia, fresh into motherhood, became Bubka's first tester and biggest truth-teller: "We were building this for me, but also for every mum who felt stuck, tethered, and overwhelmed."

Bubka grew, one product and one real mum story at a time, it was a comfortable pace for the pair and a few months later, when Olympian Jana Pittman posted about Bubka online, orders exploded overnight. Ari was sending out up to 100 products a day, until they completely sold out, the five star reviews were rolling in and the couple knew they were on the right track.

Pumping, But Make It Portable

At the heart of Bubka's mission is a simple belief: Mums deserve freedom. Freedom to move, to work, to leave the house and live life, and nourish their babies on their own terms.

Their signature product, a wearable, cordless breast pump, was just the beginning. Now, Alicia and Ari are on the cusp of launching an innovative new range, designed to make pumping and breastfeeding feel less like a logistical nightmare and more like a seamless part of real life.

"It's not just about pumping while doing laundry," Alicia says. "It's about pumping while at dinner, in

the middle of the night, while at work, while living. There is this stigma that you're a working mum and you need to pump during the day, you have to slip away to the toilet cubicle. You don't have to do that with Bubka."

The new range, set to land online near the end of September, includes compact storage, cleaning kits, and pump bags that look more like chic handbags than baby gear, there is also a new pump based product that is a first of its kind. It's exciting but it's also been a challenge and Ari admits that educating himself in the market has been tough, especially around accessories and support tools that don't yet exist in the mainstream.

"There's no blueprint," he says. "We're creating products and categories that haven't been seen before and in order to get it right, we've leaned heavily into collaboration with IBCLCs (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant's), midwives, and the birth worker community to ensure everything we make is not only practical but supportive and safe."

Two Kids, One Start-Up, Zero Spare Time

Outside of Bubka, Alicia and Ari are co-parenting two young boys (aged one and three), and they admit there's no such thing as balance.

"We're really tired," Alicia half heartedly jokes. "It's sort of funny like we could go from talking about who is picking up the kids from daycare and in the same sentence ask 'did you answer that email we got from our manufacturer?' The lines are very blurred. We're in a very hands-on season of our lives right now."

What that means is while date nights may have taken a backseat, they still prioritise each other and take a break when they need it. "We're not perfect," Ari says. "But we're aligned. And we're all in for our kids, our community, our business and each other."

A Legacy Bigger Than Product

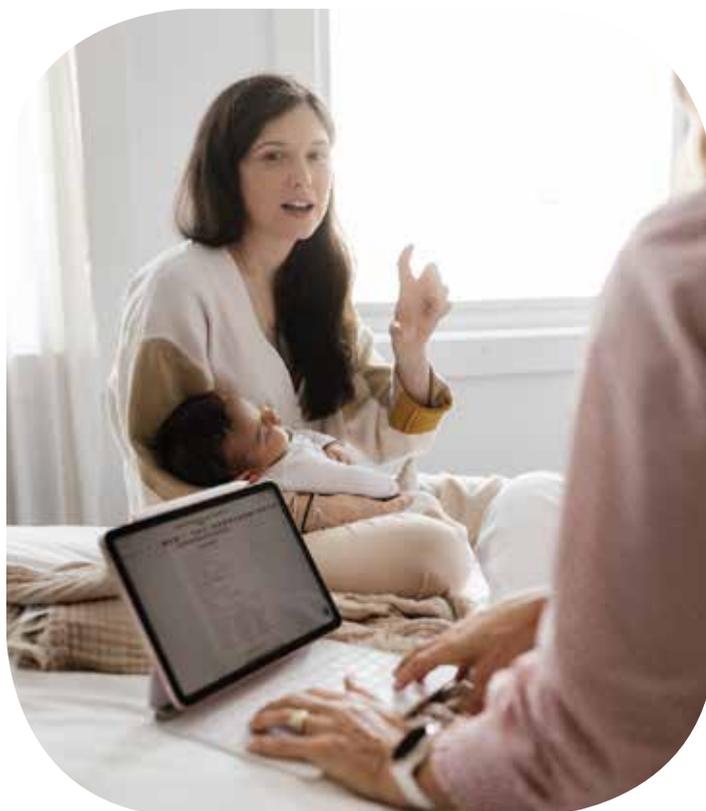
At the core of it all, Ari and Alicia are just two people trying to do something meaningful. They've seen first-hand how overwhelming early parenthood can be and they've turned that insight into action.

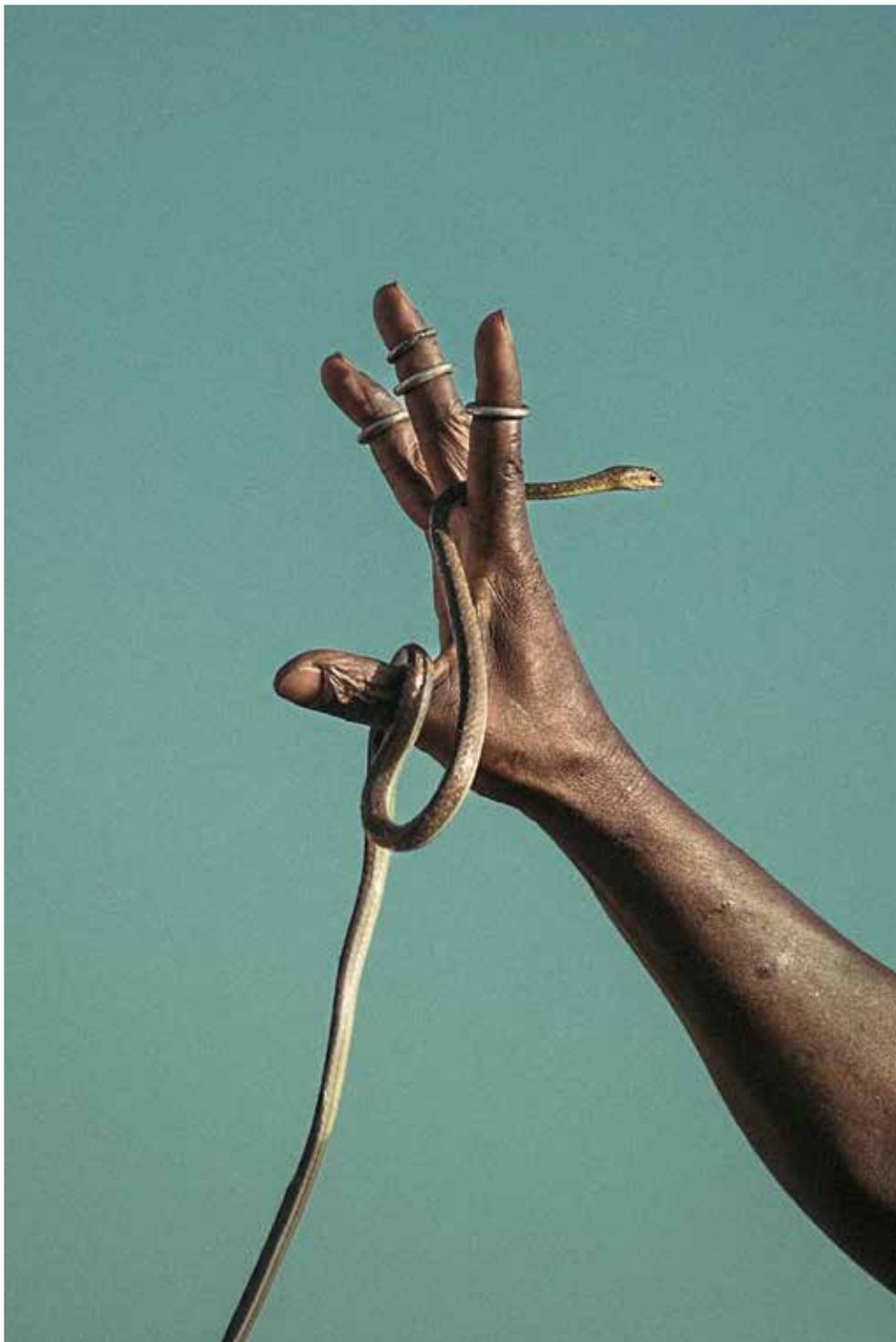
What keeps them going isn't sales or scale, it's the stories, the messages of real-life moments when a mum tells them Bubka helped her pump on a work trip, or more recently, seeing people using Bubka in public.

"That's the stuff that gets us," Alicia says. "Those moments remind us why we're doing this. We're not here to be a perfect brand, we're just here to be a useful one."

They're building something they hope will outlast the baby years. Not just a pump, not even just a brand but a support system and a movement that reminds parents they're not alone, that it's okay to cry in the car, that pumping doesn't have to be a full-blown production.

"We'll go out again one day," Ari laughs. "But for now, we're building something that matters and that's more than enough."





LORRAINE TURCI, UNTITLED

'We knew nothing about his disappearance. Rumours within the army said he had fled to Dakar. My brother-in-law was the family's breadwinner thanks to his soldier's salary. He fully funded my husband's education, which he could not complete as a result. We only learned the truth about his murder years later, after the change of government. At the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, a witness revealed that he had participated in his murder.'

Under Gambia's former dictatorship, countless victims endured severe human rights abuses, including executions, disappearances, torture and sexual violence. Women, in particular, faced direct abuse, societal stigma and the pain of losing loved ones, all within a patriarchal society lacking institutional support. In the absence of immediate justice, they found ways to survive, rebuild and advocate for change, often confronting silence and fear. By sharing their experiences and fostering mutual aid, these women heal from physical and psychological wounds while actively pursuing justice and prevention. They reclaim control over their lives, affirming their dignity and shaping their own narratives. Their image, their story and their future are now truly their own.

© Lorraine Turci, France, Shortlist, Professional competition, Perspectives, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards

THE BEST OF 2024

PICTURE THIS

The Sony World Photography Awards are always a great chance to get a peek into what the world's top photographers are doing, where their interests carry them, as well as the techniques employed to capture them. This year comprises 30 finalists whittled down from over 419,000 images hailing from over 200 countries in the world. It's a truly global effort.

“It is always a real challenge to select the shortlists and finalists, and as a jury we found the wider entries no less vital and inspiring.” said Monica Allende on behalf of the jury. “Across their projects, these photographers show great originality and clarity of vision, bringing prescient stories to the fore. From narratives of community-building, to explorations of collective memory, to empowering stories of people challenging conventions, these works offer a diversity of perspectives on our moment in history.”

This year also marked the first edition of the Japan Professional Award, which recognises a winner and shortlist of striking series by Japanese photographers from the Professional competition. This is due to the recognition now being drawn to the creativity and dynamism of Japan's contemporary photography scene.

Here are some of our picks from the competition, but look out for the photo awards coming live to a city near you soon.



LALO DE ALMEIDA, UNTITLED

Image Description: A large firebreak advances over the Pantanal in the Miranda region. The Pantanal is the largest tropical wetland on the planet, but it has been facing a historic drought due to human actions and climate change.

Series Description: Brazil saw its hottest year in 2024. Although the high temperatures affected all regions of the country, three biomes were especially impacted, with drought, fire and deforestation transforming the landscape into apocalyptic scenes. In the Amazon, extreme drought turned some of the planet's most powerful rivers into sand deserts. This also fuelled forest fires, with 134,979 fires recorded in the region in the first 11 months of the year – the highest since 2007. The Pantanal, the largest tropical wetland on the planet, also faced a historic drought due to human activity and climate change, while the Cerrado – considered the most biodiverse savanna in the world and the birthplace of most of the country's river basins – experienced increasingly high deforestation rates driven by agribusiness.

© Lalo de Almeida, Brazil, Finalist, Professional competition, Landscape, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



LEA GREUB, UNTITLED

A tank near the village of Louroujina slowly decays in the UN Buffer Zone. The civil war from 50 years ago still shapes daily life on the island, particularly in the Turkish-occupied part.

The island of Cyprus has been divided since a civil war started between Greek and Turkish Cypriots in 1974. The northern part of the island – the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus – comprises about 40 per cent of the island, but is not internationally recognised, while the south belongs to the Republic of Cyprus. To prevent further escalation, UN peacekeepers monitor the 'Green Line' between the two sides, which runs through the capital, Nicosia, 'making it the world's only divided capital.' In the city, the buffer zone is only metres wide, but it can be measured in kilometres in rural areas. This allows it to contain entire villages, which has a deep impact on their inhabitants' lives. In *Burning Sun on Frozen Conflicts*, Lea Greub tells the stories of people whose lives are shaped by the conflict, giving a face to this highly political situation and the people affected, who have been largely forgotten.

© Lea Greub, Germany, Shortlist, Professional competition, Perspectives, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards

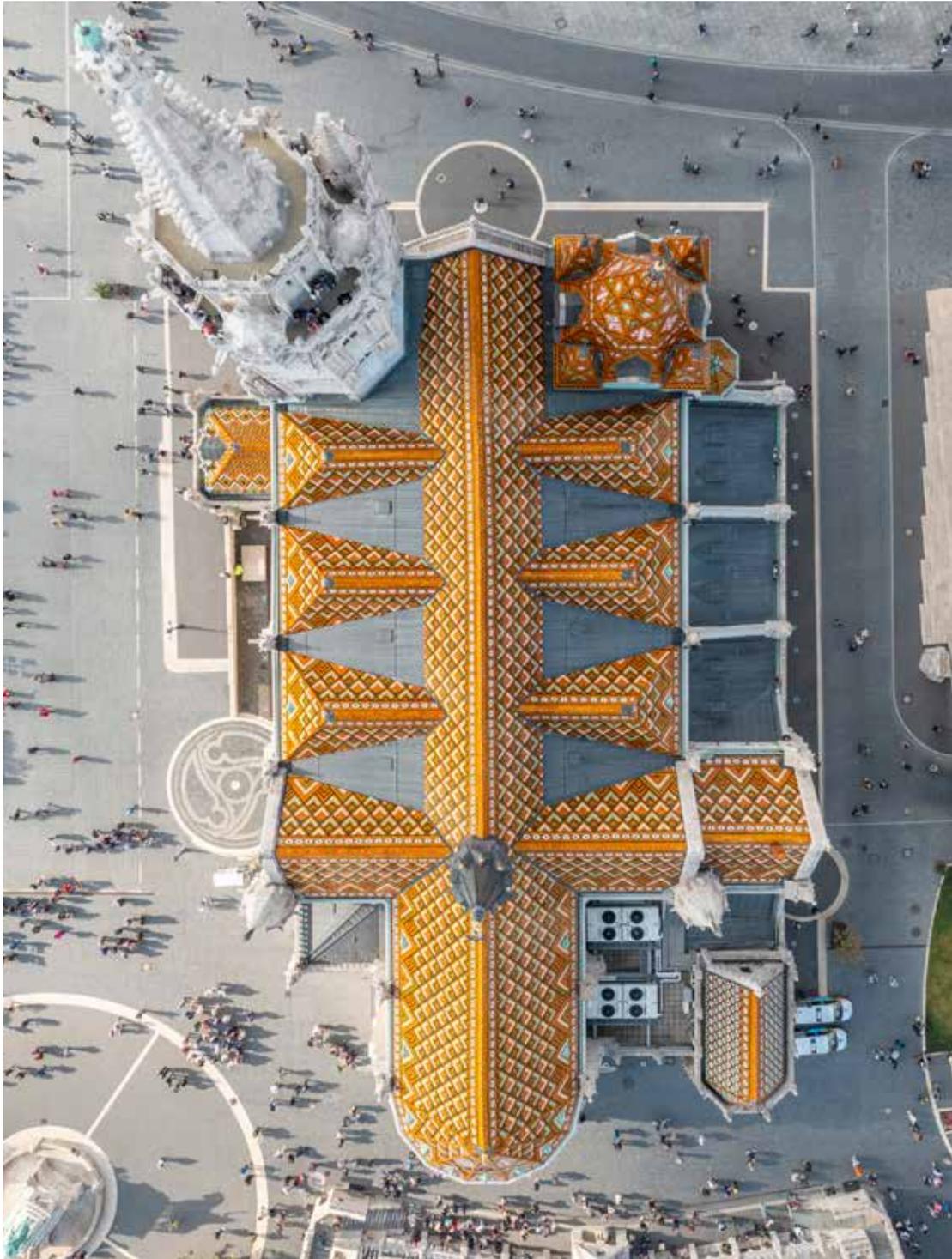


RHIANNON ADAM, PREFLIGHT, BAIKONUR COSMODROME

Image Description: Soyuz MS-20 on the pad at Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, 7 December 2021. This image was taken the night before Yusaku Maezawa, dearMoon's leader and funder, was sent to the International Space Station to spend 12 days there alongside Roscosmos cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin and his assistant Yozo Hirano. The dearMoon crew had been notified of their inclusion in the project one month earlier, with the public announcement occurring on the first anniversary of the MS-20 flight.

Series Description: Throughout history, 117 billion humans have gazed at the same moon, yet only 24 people – all American men – have seen its surface up close. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the artist discovered an application for the ultimate art residency: dearMoon. In 2018, Japanese billionaire and art collector Yusaku Maezawa announced a global search for eight artists to join him on a week-long lunar mission aboard SpaceX's Starship – the first civilian mission to deep space. The mission's flight path would echo that of Apollo 8's 1968 journey, which famously led astronaut Bill Anders to suggest NASA 'should have sent poets' to capture the sense of wonder he experienced. In 2021, Rhiannon Adam was chosen as the only female crew member from one million applicants, with the chance to achieve the seemingly impossible. For three years she immersed herself in the space industry, until, in June 2024, Maezawa abruptly cancelled the mission, leaving the crew to pick up the pieces of their disrupted lives.

© Rhiannon Adam, United Kingdom, Finalist, Professional competition, Creative, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



MÁRTON MOGYORÓSY, MATTHIAS CHURCH

This series presents an aerial exploration of Budapest's iconic buildings decorated with Zsolnay architectural ceramics. Zsolnay ceramics hold a vital place in Hungarian cultural heritage, symbolising a harmonious blend of craftsmanship and innovation. These decorative elements not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the buildings but also embody the essence of Art Nouveau, which emphasises organic forms and complex detailing. Through this series, the viewer is invited to appreciate the beauty and significance of these iconic structures, highlighting how Zsolnay ceramics contribute to Budapest's unique architectural narrative.

© Márton Mogyorósy, Hungary, Shortlist, Professional competition, Architecture & Design, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



TOBY BINDER, DIVIDED YOUTH

Series Description: 'If I had been born at the top of my street, behind the corrugated-iron border, I would have been British. Incredible to think. My whole idea of myself, the attachments made to a culture, heritage, religion, nationalism and politics are all an accident of birth. I was one street away from being born my "enemy."' Paul McVeigh, Belfast-born novelist. Binder notes 'there is hardly any other country in Europe where a past conflict is still as present in daily life as it is in Northern Ireland.' It is not only the physical barriers – the walls and fences – but also the psychological divisions in society. For many years, Toby Binder has been documenting what it means for young people, all of whom were born after the peace agreement was signed, to grow up under this intergenerational tension in both Protestant and Catholic neighbourhoods.

© Toby Binder, Germany, Finalist, Professional competition, Documentary Projects, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



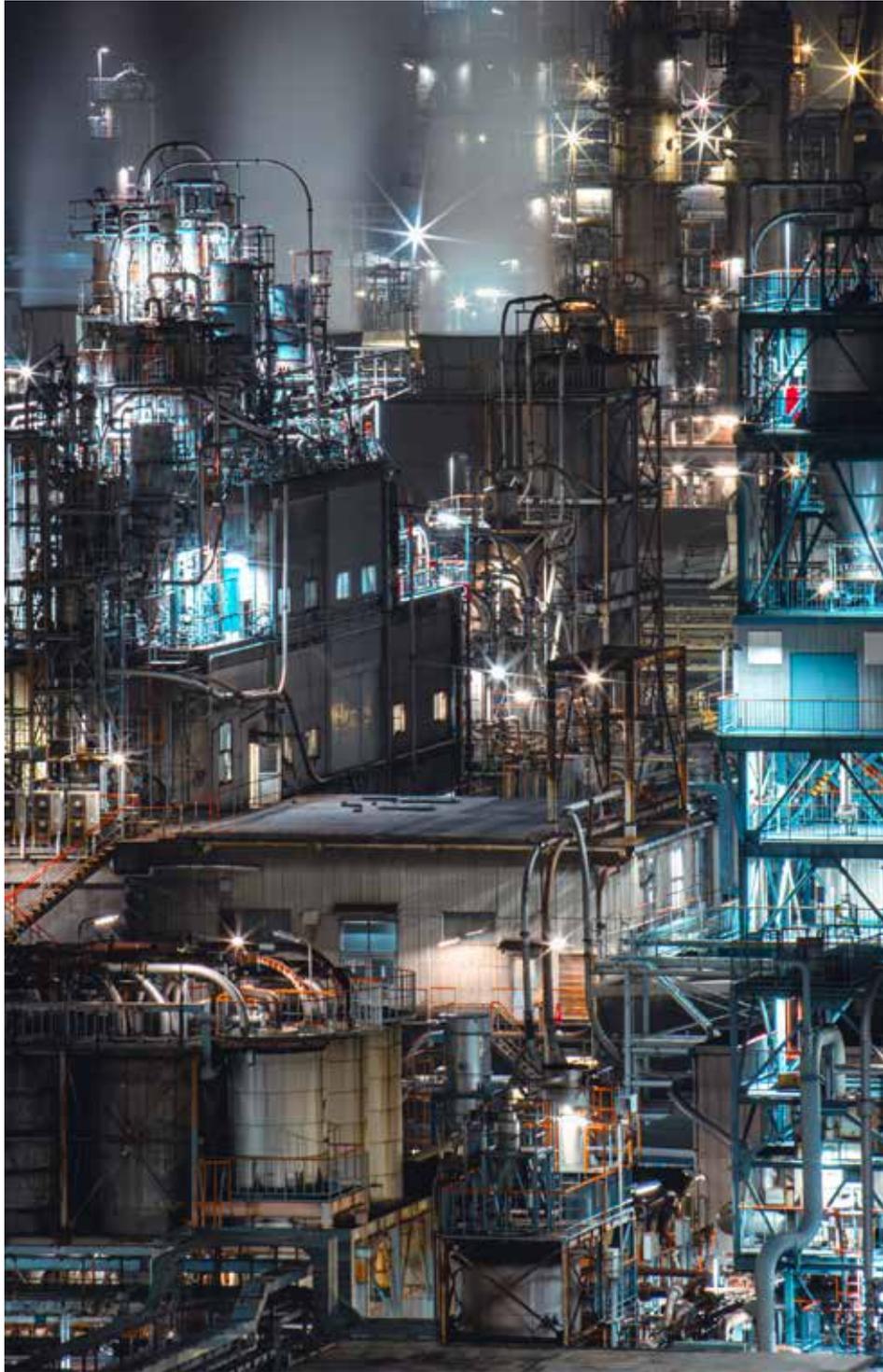
SHUNTA KIMURA, THE CHRONICLE OF US

A boy watches a film on a hammock at Nubiangan in Manila, the Philippines. Nubiangan is one of the areas most affected by rising sea levels in the Philippines and is predicted to sink into the sea in the near future.

The Chronicle of Us is an ongoing project that captures the people living with various problems and changes associated with the impact of climate change. Issues relating to migration and climate change are becoming more important than ever due to people being forced to flee their hometowns. The photographer notes 'we need to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening to these people: how the climate crisis is changing their lives, and how they are struggling and adapting to various changes before and after migration in both urban and rural areas.'

These photos show people living in Southeast Asia with the impact of climate change.

© Shunta Kimura, Japan, Shortlist, Professional competition, Environment, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



MIKU YOKOYAMA, MIDNIGHT FACTORY LIGHT PARADE

To Miku Yokoyama, the 'sparkling beauty' of Japan's industrial landscapes look like parades of light, when observed through a telephoto lens. The photographs in this series were taken over approximately three years, from June 2020 to March 2023, at factories in various prefectures including Osaka, Wakayama, Mie, Okayama, Hiroshima and Kanagawa. In 2020, the plant in Takaishi City, the starting point of the project, ceased operations, and as of 2024, has been dismantled and no longer exists. The three photographs of factory nightscapes of this plant in the series are, the photographer says, 'Precious images that can never be captured again.' The photographs in the series were taken using a tripod and long exposure and digitally edited for colour adjustments.

© Miku Yokoyama, Japan, Shortlist, Professional competition, Architecture & Design, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



THOMAS NICOLON, BIG SEIZURE

A park ranger watches over several dwarf crocodiles that have been confiscated from poachers at Lake Télé Community Reserve.

The Congo dwarf crocodile is a protected species, but traditional hunting is still allowed for local consumption at Lake Télé Community Reserve in the Republic of Congo. As hunters catch them in huge numbers, park rangers try to monitor the population and release as many as they can back into the wild. These images were taken while on assignment for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

© Thomas Nicolon, France, Shortlist, Professional competition, Wildlife & Nature, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



ROBIN TUTENGES, DNIPRO

Éric (23) and Élia (22) ride their skateboards in front of a building in the town of Dnipro, which was bombed by the Russians in January 2023, killing 44 people. 'It's hard to keep skating when you're passing that kind of place,' Éric sighs. 'But it's necessary. Life shouldn't stop. On the contrary, we have to make the most of every moment to live all the more intensely. It's also a way of honouring those who have fallen so that we can live.'

Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, skateboarding in Ukraine has taken on a unique dimension: an escape. From a sport once practiced surrounded by friends, skateboarding has become a window to freedom amidst chaos and anxiety. However, it is difficult not to be brought back to reality, as the war asserts itself at every turn. 'Near vast brutalist squares lie buildings torn apart by Russian shells, and even the composition of the roads they skate on reminds them of the situation: the rough pavement that hinders them is firmly oriented towards the East and its Soviet past. Today, Ukrainian skaters who have not gone to fight are waging an entirely different battle – to reclaim the streets and the spaces marked by war and to allow themselves to live again.'

© Robin Tutenges, France, Shortlist, Professional competition, Sport, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



YU TING LEI, IMMOVABLE BUILDINGS

During China's rapid urbanisation, the buildings left behind after the demolition of rural areas held the memories of countless people. Now, only one or two remain, standing in solitude and no longer carrying much nostalgia.

© Yu Ting Lei, China Mainland, Shortlist, Professional competition, Architecture & Design, 2025 Sony World Photography Awards



8 Top Tips for Bringing Out Your Inner Warrior

Every woman has a warrior within – whether she’s balancing motherhood, leading a business, or stepping into her own confidence as a young woman. Strength isn’t just about physical power; it’s about resilience, discipline, and the courage to face life’s challenges head-on. Through my journey as a competitor, teacher, and co-founder of the Female Empowerment Course, I’ve seen firsthand how martial arts and mindset training can transform lives. No matter where you are in your journey, these eight tips will help you unlock your inner warrior and step into your power.

1. Trust Your Strength – It’s Already Within You

Strength isn’t about how much you can lift or how fast you can run – it’s about how you rise every time life knocks you down. Whether you’re a mother juggling a million responsibilities, a businesswoman making tough decisions, or a young woman stepping into independence, know this: you are stronger than you think.

2. Control Your Breath, Control Your Life

Your breath is the key to mastering both your body and mind. Physiologically, controlled breathing regulates your nervous system, reducing stress, enhancing focus, and improving emotional resilience. A deep, intentional breath can shift your body from a state of tension to calmness, allowing you to think clearly and respond rather than react.

Whether you’re facing the pressures of a demanding career, the emotional weight of motherhood, or the unpredictability of life’s challenges, mastering your breath gives you control over your inner state. When you regulate your breathing, you regulate your emotions – empowering you to handle stress with grace, build confidence, and push through discomfort with clarity and strength.

Harness the power of your breath, and you’ll find that control over your life starts from within.

3. Know How to Protect Yourself

It's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it. Self-defence isn't just about throwing punches – it's about confidence, presence, and the ability to stand your ground, no matter your age, size, or strength. It's about walking through life knowing you can protect yourself, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally.

Whether you're alone at night, in an uncomfortable situation, or simply setting boundaries, self-defence gives you the power to say NO with certainty and authority. It's about owning your space, trusting your instincts, and never feeling helpless.

Strength isn't just in the body – it's in the mindset. When you know how to defend yourself, you carry yourself differently. You walk taller, speak louder, and move through the world with the unshakable confidence that you are in control. Because your safety, your power, and your voice should never be left to chance.

4. Apply Warrior Mindset to Everyday Life

Martial arts teach discipline, resilience, and adaptability – qualities that are just as valuable in the office as they are on the mats. The way you handle stress, make decisions, and respond to setbacks all reflect your inner warrior. Train yourself to stay calm under pressure and tackle challenges with confidence.

5. Reprogramme Your Mindset for Success

Your thoughts shape your reality. The way you talk to yourself matters – self-belief is the foundation of success. Instead of saying, I can't handle this, try I will find a way through this. Practicing positive affirmations, visualisation, and mental resilience can help you stay focused and push through obstacles. Whether you're managing a business, raising a family, or building your future, a warrior's mindset will carry you forward.



6. Surround Yourself with Strong Women

Every warrior needs a tribe. Find a community that lifts you up, challenges you, and supports you. Whether it's a Jiu-Jitsu class, a network of businesswomen, or a sisterhood of mothers, being surrounded by other strong women makes you stronger.

7. Use Fear as Fuel

Fear isn't the enemy – inaction is. Whether it's speaking up in a meeting, taking a new career path, or stepping onto the mats for the first time, fear is often a sign that you're about to grow. Instead of running from it, use fear as motivation to push forward.

8. Keep Learning & Keep Growing

A true warrior never stops evolving. Whether it's learning new skills, improving your mindset, or exploring ways to enhance your well-being, growth is key to strength. Stay curious, stay open, and keep pushing yourself to new heights.

Finally, remember this: Bringing out your inner warrior is a personal journey, unique to you. There will be ups and downs, triumphs and setbacks. Through it all, be kind to yourself and celebrate progress, not perfection. I'm speaking from my heart when I say I believe in you. Every tip I've shared here comes from my own experiences – things that have empowered me and many women I've trained.

Our female empowerment course is about so much more than just self-defence moves—it's about helping you believe in yourself, building your confidence, and embracing your inner strength. I truly believe every woman has a powerful core of strength and potential, and I'm excited to help you discover that. Our classes are warm and supportive, and we'll celebrate every step you take towards feeling more confident and strong. I'm happy to be on this journey with you, and I can't wait to see you in the next course. Come join us and let's embrace your inner strength together!



PATRICIA RODRIGUES DE SOUZA

Jiu-Jitsu World Champion | Mindset & Empowerment Coach

Patricia is a 4x Jiu-Jitsu World Champion and 5x Oceania Champion, with over 8 years of experience on the mats.

Together with her husband, Sensei Douglas Santos, who has over 30 years of Jiu-Jitsu experience, we run DS Team Jiu-Jitsu School—a place where people don't just learn techniques, they discover what they're truly capable of. Their approach goes beyond the physical, helping students overcome fear, develop discipline, and unlock their full potential—not just in training, but in everyday life.

For women looking to experience the power of this incredible martial art—without the pressure of putting on a gi—they created the Female Empowerment Course. It's a supportive space where women can build confidence, learn self-defence, and tap into their inner strength. Because Jiu-Jitsu isn't just about fighting—it's about becoming the strongest version of yourself.



Six Kiwi Startups Ready For Global Impact

New Zealand's startup scene has always been a bit of an underdog story. We might not have the size or the capital of Silicon Valley, but we do have a knack for punching above our weight. Our innovators work close to the problems they are solving, build lean, and think globally from day one. The result is a steady stream of companies that quietly build tech with world-changing potential.

In this collection, we meet six Kiwi ventures tackling some of the biggest challenges of our time. From removing carbon from the air to predicting life-threatening illnesses before they strike, from rethinking how we grow our protein to finding new ways to keep the world cool without burning more energy. Each is a mix of scientific rigour, technical genius and the kind of stubborn determination that tends to come from building a business at the bottom of the world.

Captivate

Carbon dioxide is a problem we cannot ignore. It is invisible, stubborn, and has been warming our planet for generations. The world has been chasing solutions for decades, but most carbon capture technology has been expensive, energy-hungry, and environmentally unfriendly. Captivate is proving it does not have to be that way.

The company's core technology, MUF-16, was born in the lab of Professor Shane Telfer at Massey University. MOFs or "metal organic frameworks", are a class of materials built to trap specific molecules. In this case, MUF-16 is like a sponge with a singular obsession: CO₂. It ignores other gases, capturing only carbon dioxide, which can then be simply released under vacuum and reused without the material losing effectiveness.

Telfer's background is in materials chemistry, not industrial engineering. But he knew the potential was huge. To take MUF-16 from academic curiosity to commercial product, he brought on business development lead Nigel Campbell. Together, they started Captivate with the goal of making carbon capture affordable, scalable, and practical for in the real world.

Traditional carbon capture systems often rely on amines. They work, but they corrode equipment, require high regeneration temperatures, and are costly to run. MUF-16 needs far less energy, is resistant to contamination from water vapour and other impurities in the gas stream, and produces CO₂ clean enough to be sold to other industries. That turns a costly waste stream into a potential revenue source.

Captivate's approach is modular. Units can be built to suit a geothermal plant, a cement factory, or a biogas facility without reengineering the entire site. This adaptability is a major selling point.

The company's early trials are showing strong results, and their focus is now on scaling production and proving the technology in different industrial environments.

For Telfer and Campbell, the mission is about global impact and they are well on track already.



IASO

In the ICU, minutes can mean the difference between recovery and tragedy. Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) is one of the most dangerous conditions critical care teams face, often developing quickly and with high mortality rates. Auckland-based IASO is using AI to give doctors more time to act.

IASO's founders, a mix of clinicians, engineers, and data scientists, saw that existing monitoring systems often spot ARDS only after it has taken hold. Their platform uses machine learning to analyse streams of patient data in real time, identifying subtle patterns that indicate trouble ahead.

By predicting ARDS hours or even days before traditional methods, IASO gives doctors a crucial head start. That extra time can be used to adjust ventilation, manage fluids, and begin therapies that reduce the severity of the syndrome or prevent it altogether.

The system is designed to integrate with existing hospital equipment and electronic health records, minimising disruption. Alerts are concise and actionable, helping clinicians focus on what matters most.

Early trials have been promising, and the company is now preparing for larger-scale validation and regulatory approval. They are also exploring how their predictive framework could be adapted for other critical conditions, such as sepsis and cardiac arrest.

Funding has come from healthtech investors, innovation grants, and hospital research partnerships. The goal is a Series A raise to support commercial rollout, with interest already coming from international healthcare providers.

For ICU teams, more time can mean more lives saved. IASO is building a tool that could change the way critical care is delivered, starting in New Zealand, but with the potential to make an impact anywhere patients need urgent, proactive treatment.

PhaseFoam

Keeping goods cold is deceptively hard. Cherries headed for export, vaccines bound for remote clinics, temperature-sensitive electronics, all rely on cold-chain systems that burn a lot of energy and create a lot of waste. Refrigerated trucks and single-use polystyrene boxes have been the default for decades, but they are expensive, resource-heavy, and far from sustainable. PhaseFoam has set out to reimagine the whole approach.

Born in 2022 as a spin-out from the University of Auckland, with Mohammed Mehdi Farid serving as CTO and founding director, and his son, Sam Farid, stepping in as CEO and co-founder, PhaseFoam's tech is clever yet deceptively simple: reusable foam panels infused with phase-change materials (PCMs) that absorb and release heat slowly over time, like a temperature-regulating thermal blanket. It keeps chill-dependent products safe without constant power.

For fresh dairy distributors, PhaseFoam enables precise temperature control during delivery without the need for diesel-powered, polluting refrigeration systems. For pharmaceutical distributors, it offers a way to get vaccines into rural areas without risking temperature breaches. Even the building industry sees potential for PCM panels in regulating indoor temperatures, reducing heating and cooling costs.

Commercial interest has been strong. With support from WNT Ventures and Auckland UniServices, PhaseFoam has moved from prototypes to pilot programs with partners in horticulture, logistics, and healthcare. The focus now is on scaling production and refining the design for different use cases. By reducing reliance on powered cooling, PhaseFoam can cut energy costs and emissions, while also slashing the waste generated by the cold chain. It is not trying to replace refrigeration entirely, but to make the whole system more efficient. If the company can scale successfully, its panels could become a standard part of sustainable logistics worldwide.

GoodAir

Breathing is automatic, until it is not. For millions of people, blocked nasal passages are a daily battle. Medications can help, but sprays can cause rebound congestion, and antihistamines often come with unwanted side effects. GoodAir is offering a completely different path to relief: a small, drug-free device called Goodair Nosebuds.

The idea comes from Dr David White, Associate Professor at Auckland University of Technology and co-director of the Biodesign Research Hub. After 25 years of research into nasal breathing and its links to overall health, White developed a tiny wearable device that uses micro-rotors to gently stimulate the nasal passages. This encourages the body to clear congestion naturally and increases nitric oxide production.

Nitric oxide plays a surprisingly big role in human health. It widens blood vessels, improves oxygen uptake, and even has antimicrobial properties. Boosting it through better nasal breathing can improve sleep, athletic performance, mood, and immune response.

Goodair's device is designed to be worn for just 10–20 minutes a day. It is comfortable, reusable, and avoids the side effects of medication. In clinical trials, Nosebuds have been shown to improve airflow and help users develop better breathing habits over time.

Goodair has raised over \$1.6 million from WNT Ventures, Callaghan Innovation, and KiwiNet to fund development and testing. The company is preparing for market launch, with early interest from allergy sufferers, frequent travellers, and athletes looking for non-drug performance aids.

The global respiratory devices market is worth billions, and there is a growing demand for drug-free solutions. Goodair is aiming to position Nosebuds as both a medical device and a wellness product, opening the door to multiple sales channels.

If successful, the impact could be broad. For individuals, it means easier breathing and better quality of life. For health systems, it could reduce reliance on medication and associated costs. And for Goodair, it could put a little piece of New Zealand innovation into noses around the world.





Opo Bio

In ten years, the meat on your plate and collagen in your cosmetics might not come from a farm at all. It could be grown from cells in a lab, without a paddock, a herd, or the environmental cost of traditional livestock farming and Auckland-based Opo Bio is working to make that future a reality.

Founded in 2022 by CEO Olivia Ogilvie and Chief Scientific Officer Dr Laura Domigan, Opo Bio does not produce consumer products like meat or makeup. Instead, it supplies what every biomanufacturing company needs: high-quality, traceable cell lines and cell-derived ingredients sourced from New Zealand livestock.

Domigan's lab at the University of Auckland had been researching cell biology for years when they saw a gap in the biomanufacturing industry. Many companies were struggling with inconsistent or poorly characterised starter cells, making it difficult to scale production of products like meat and collagen. Opo Bio set out to fix that problem leveraging New Zealand's global reputation for premium livestock products.

Their flagship product, Opo-Moo, is a bovine satellite muscle cell line optimised for taste, texture, nutritional value, and scalability. They also offer Opo-Oink for pork and are expanding into other species. We are not sure what noise a deer makes so can't help with a name suggestion there.

Later this year, they'll be launching Opo-Col, a high-purity type 1 bovine collagen suitable for use in medical and cosmetic applications.

Biomanufacturing promises to drastically reduce the land, water demand, and methane emissions associated with livestock farming. But without dependable cell lines and high-quality ingredients scaling production is risky. Opo Bio's serum-free, bioreactor-ready cells remove much of that uncertainty.

Ogilvie's commercial expertise complements Domigan's scientific leadership, and together they have built a growing team of scientists and business specialists. In 2024-2025, Opo Bio secured funding from WNT Ventures, Booster NZ, and others, providing the capital to accelerate development and expand its product catalogue into collagen and other cell-derived ingredients.

The company's role in the biomanufacturing ecosystem is akin to that of seed producers in agriculture: supplying the raw biological material so others can focus on product design, flavour, and market growth

For Opo Bio, the mission isn't about replacing New Zealand farmers but about creating another option for producing high-quality protein in a resource-constrained world. If successful, the same care and quality that define New

Xplora

Every winter, power demand spikes as homes and businesses turn on heaters. Every summer, there is surplus warmth going unused. Wellington-based Xplora wants to fix that mismatch by storing heat from the warm months and releasing it when temperatures drop.

Founded by renewable energy expert Dr Nan Yang, Xplora focuses on seasonal thermal energy storage. The concept is simple but powerful: collect excess heat using solar thermal collectors or other renewable sources, store it in insulated underground tanks or advanced phase-change systems, and then release it months later to heat buildings.

This approach reduces reliance on fossil fuels for heating, smooths out peaks in electricity demand, and makes better use of renewable energy. It can be applied to individual homes, commercial buildings, or even community-wide district heating networks.

The technology is modular, making it adaptable for different scales and climates. By storing heat as heat, rather than converting it into electricity, Xplora avoids the efficiency losses that come with energy conversions.

The potential is significant. Seasonal thermal storage could cut heating bills, reduce emissions, and make buildings more resilient to energy price fluctuations. For property developers, it offers a sustainability feature that can differentiate new builds. For existing homes, it could be retrofitted to work alongside existing heating systems.

Yang's vision is about more than just technology. It is about aligning energy use with natural seasonal cycles, creating a more balanced and less wasteful system. If Xplora can prove the model here, the same approach could work in cities around the world.



The Family Supercar

Handsome looking inside and out, you can tell this M3 Touring Competition means business, yet it's hard to tell just how good it is until you drive it. The interior is very similar to the M4, featuring tons of carbon and leather and low-reflective surfaces.

WORDS BY TIM WARREN

Both the driver and passenger seats offer heating and ventilation, plus lumbar control, and a lovely little lit M3 badge to remind you what you're driving, should you forget. The steering wheel is quite something, with the familiar M1 and M2 buttons reminding you about the high performance available. Carbon inserts and a well-thought-out layout make for an easy-to-use design.

This Touring edition, BMW's word for wagon, is a particularly functional, practical, and useful car. The back seats are as comfortable as the front, and like the front, offer plenty of headroom. The back seats fold down with a single click, presenting a well-sized load space complete with fastenings scattered around to make life easy.

Outside it looks too grumpy to be called beautiful; it's more of a handsome piece of sculpture, including stunning 20/21 rims only available on the Competition version. The bonnet is long to accommodate the three-liter straight-six, and this flows into the oversized grille, which makes sense when you see the car, it's menacing.

The paint on this car was unique; in many conditions, it looks grey, but as you get closer, it looks dark charcoal grey, almost black. You then see it's metallic, and if the sun comes out, the paint radiates with an almost golden glow.

If there's one engine that BMW makes better than anyone else, it's a straight-six, and this sports the same configuration as the M4. This means it's got a searing 390 kilowatts, with 650 Newton meters torque that will take you from 0 to 100 in the supercar time of 3.6 seconds. On comfortable normal mode you tweak settings individually, or the programmable engine mode buttons that enable adjustment of every aspect of performance. Like it's 2 door sibling, this is a four-wheel drive with excellent traction and stability control. It's also special in that you can put it in two-wheel drive mode if you want to send all the power to the rear wheels alone; that's a wild amount of fun, but for most drivers, probably not as quick as using all four Michelin paws.

Normal mode is great for getting places with a high level of compliance, and it murmurs along nicely. But once you get to the hill sections, punch one of the red fun-buttons for eye-opening fun. The suspension is firm on all settings, but it all makes sense once you get to the B-roads. It hunkers down as it rips through any corner at any speed. In most cars I can find the limit of traction, but not this, it's eye-wateringly sticky thanks to great rubber and natural mechanical grip. Short of going to a track, I don't know what the limit could possibly be.

I want a car for multiple duties. Something that's good for packing the kids and luggage for a summer holiday, plus one that delivers entertainment when you're alone and let loose on the back roads. This is it. This is a practical family supercar wagon. And it's not just me that appreciates it. Everyone liked it. My dad's pupils dilated - he knew its potential. My mom announced it looked like a 'good family car', and it was probably her favourite. It's a car without compromise, one of the best I've ever driven.



A New Version Of A Classic

A convertible Mini is a piece of joy. It's how a small car should be. It's a fun bit of entertainment that you don't want to let go of. I had the open top Cooper S for a week, and although the weather was hell bent on limiting my ability to drop the top, I prevailed and had a whale of a time. The base car itself is already very good, and you've probably read about it in our recent article, but throw on a folding soft top, and it's even more joyous.

WORDS BY TIM WARREN

There's a very clever folding mechanism here. On first click, the sunroof opens to give you air and sky. Click again at up to 30 kilometers an hour and the frame folds back out of the way, tucking itself neatly at the back of the vehicle, protecting the rear window and exposing the black on black and Union Jack. The mechanism is fast and high quality. I'm scared about some soft tops, but not this one, it's solid. Once you've got the top down, crank the Harman Kardon hifi way up, sit back in the beautiful vegan leather seats and enjoy the wind in your hair.

I love the attention to detail, from the speakers to the coloured cloth segments, upholstery trim and other little adornments. It's a constant positive surprise. The power plant is pretty good too, it's 2.0L 4-cyl turbo puts out 150Kw / 300Nm for a 6.9 second sprint to 100, and while that doesn't set records, you just don't care!

In a world of 'bigger', 'faster', 'more powerful', I admire that Mini has chosen adjectives such as 'cute', 'cool', and 'classic'. I admire that. Minis may have grown over time since the 1970's orange number that I was ferried around in

as a kid, but they retain their four on the floor rallyesque driving feel, and that's underlined with the firm suspension setting and amplified when the lid is down. So easy and convenient it is that I was looking for opportunities to use it. A road trip wasn't possible due to the worrying weather reports, but I know it would be ideal for tourist jaunting around the countryside, and I'm about to find out, because I'm taking a Mini around England soon, and you can read about that trip right here - and see updates at @follow.tim.warren on the gram.



EDDIE IZZARD –THE REMIX TOUR LIVE

The legend Eddie Izzard has been doing comedy for 35 years now, unlike musicians you can't just release a greatest hits album, but you can collate 35 years worth of the funniest things you've ever experienced and tour the world with them. That's exactly what Izzard is doing. "In the first 35 years of my stand-up career I came up with many weird and crazy comedy stories. The ones I like the best will be in my 2025 live Remix Tour."

No two nights will be the same but make sure you see at least one of them.

Wellington 24 Nov, Auckland 26 Nov 2025

[ticketmaster.co.nz](https://www.ticketmaster.co.nz)

PARIS BUTTER

Last year Paris Butter won the World Culinary Award for New Zealand followed by the likes of Ahi, Kazuya and INCA Ponsonby. Based in Hernes Bay Paris Butter offers a refined modern dining experience hosted by Chefs Nick Honeyman and the 2023/2024 Cuisine Chef of the Year Zennon Wijlens. Sourcing the best produce in New Zealand to give you the most delicious balanced evolution menu over six or eight courses with a strong emphasis on seasons, textures and flavours. Top that off with a seasonal house cocktail and you've got the makings of a fine night with fine food.

[parisbutter.co.nz](https://www.parisbutter.co.nz)



LIFE ON A LOOP

Ellie Smith returns home this November with her uplifting and poignant new one-woman show, Life on a Loop, a heartfelt exploration of dementia, love and care.

With cracking humour, this show is a deeply moving and refreshingly honest look at the toll of caregiving, and the unexpected beauty found in life on repeat.

Smith brings this world to life with seven central characters and a chorus of vivid personalities, each painted with detail and care.

**11 Nov – 16 Nov 2025
Q Theatre, Rangatira**

[qtheatre.co.nz/shows/life-on-a-loop](https://www.qtheatre.co.nz/shows/life-on-a-loop)

H.R. THE MUSICAL #2

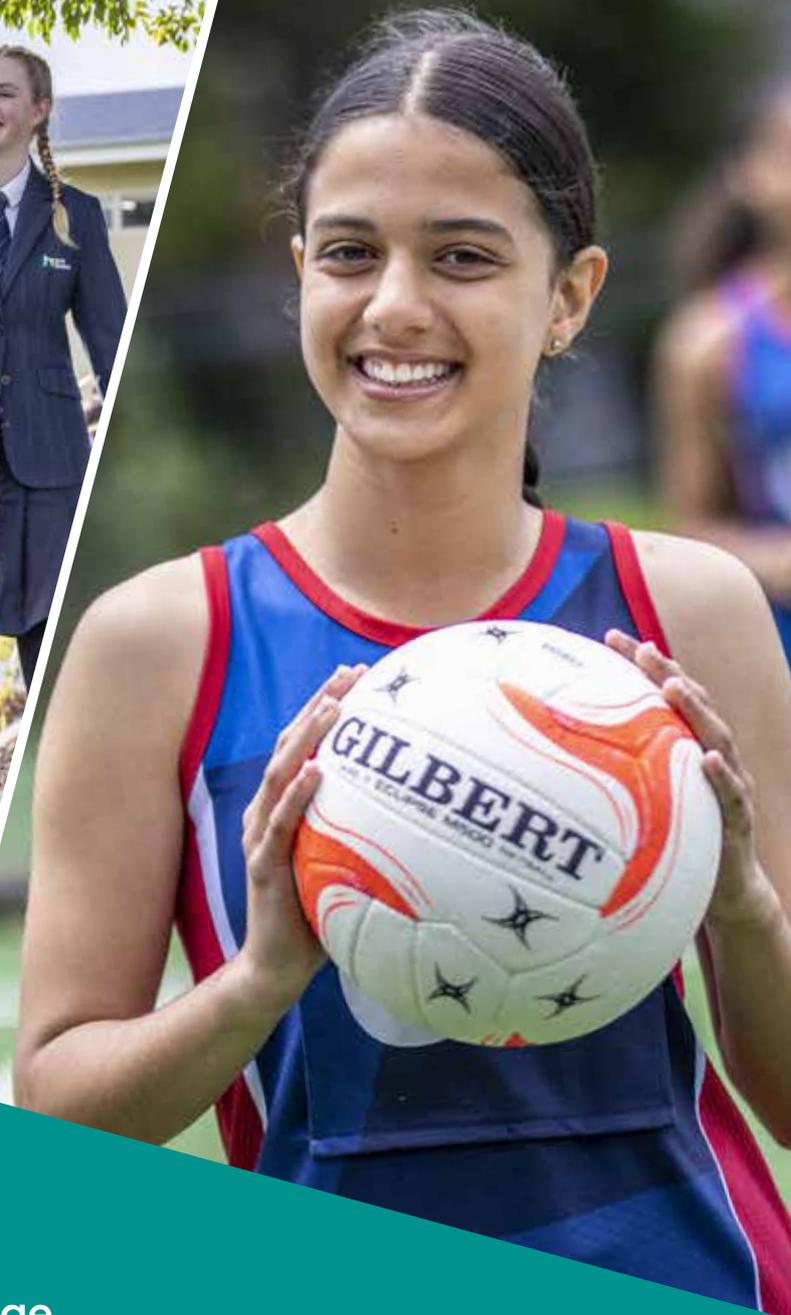
When deciding whether you should laugh or cry at the job you have, maybe a better option is laughing until you cry. In 2024 we were treated to the musical sketch Comedy H.R. The Musical. Now it's time for part two covering a range of genres but hung on the anecdotes of real events, because in the office the truth is somehow always stranger than fiction.

**25 Nov – 6 Dec 2025
Q Theatre, Rangatira**

[qtheatre.co.nz/shows/hr-musical](https://www.qtheatre.co.nz/shows/hr-musical)



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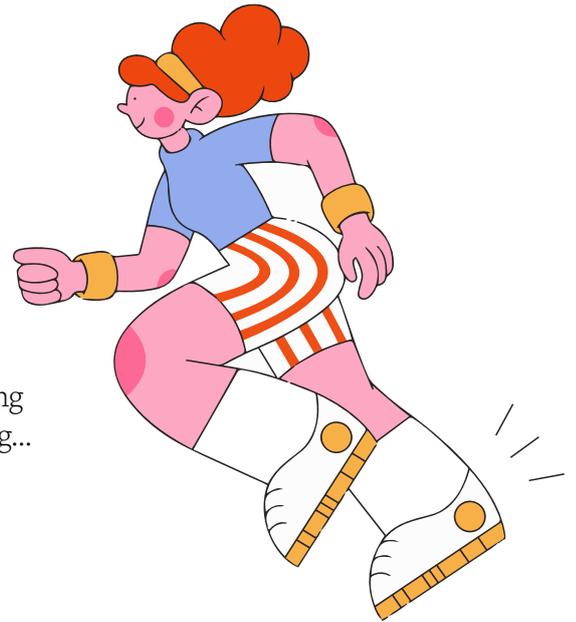
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Why Do I Run?



I mean, it's a good question. This weekend, I ran a marathon. Long runs are always very intense experiences and they leave me feeling... well, a lot of stuff.

WORDS BY PHILLIPPA HIBBS

While I do want to write about the experience of running a marathon (I go 42.2km so you don't have to), I didn't want to put all of those messy emotions on you guys until I'd got at least a week's distance to work out how I really feel, and have something more eloquent to say than: ouch.

But running is obviously on my mind right now. I've done a lot of thinking this week about why I run, and I thought I'd share some of the headlines with you.

So, in no particular order, here are some of the reasons I run.

TO LOSE WEIGHT

I know. I'm sorry. Please don't judge me but, if I'm being really honest, this was why I started running. I was an overweight teenage girl growing up at a time when heroin chic was *The Look*, everyone was on a diet, and famous women's 'flaws' were circled with red pen in the pages of the national press. Inhabiting a female body meant being forever engaged in a process of trying to make it better, and this mostly meant trying to make it smaller*. My first run was with one of my best friends, who I think joined me because I was running along the river bank in our town and she likes being outdoors. After that first run, we ended up back at her place, eating massive wedges of chocolate cake. In a nutshell, that tells you how successful running is as a weight loss strategy for me. In recent years, weight loss has become less of a motivation for me to run: partly because my relationship with my body has improved slightly; partly because I know trying to lose weight by running is entirely futile for me. It's always there in the back of my mind, though, because you can take the girl out of the 90s, but you can't take the 90s out of the girl.

OUT OF SPITE

At school, I was shit at PE. Actually, that's not quite true. I was an excellent netball player, a formidable shot putter, and a pretty decent footballer. But I was also overweight, so my PE teachers assumed I was useless and either underestimated or outright humiliated me.

When I started properly running, I was quite surprised that I could even do it. When I ran my first marathon, one of the thoughts that gave me fire was the fact I was doing something that Miss [I've Genuinely Forgotten Her Name] convinced me I could never do.

TO F*CK ABOUT AND FIND OUT

It started with 'can I run to that bridge?'. Then it progressed to 'what happens if I try to run 5km?'. Then a few years later it was 'what happens if I try to run 10km?'. Then it was 'can I run a marathon without dying?'. There's also been 'how fast can I run up that hill?', 'what happens if I try and run on sand,' and 'can I beat my boyfriend in a running race.' You f*ck about and find out. You see what your body can do. Most of the time, it can do a lot more than you think it can. Although mine can't win in a race against my gazelle of a partner. Recently, my coach has been trying to convince me to sign up for ultra marathons, which is the process of asking the question 'what happens if I run for 20 hours?'. I don't think I'm quite that curious yet.

FOR THE RUNNER'S HIGH

Exercise gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy. That is, I understand, the theory behind runner's high.** I wish it were that reliable, and every run I went on left me feeling elated, but runner's high is more elusive than that for me. Most of the time, running makes me feel a bit better than I did before. On rare occasions, it can make me feel worse. But there's a handful of times, maybe 10-15% of all the runs I do, that are magical. Truly spiritual experiences. I can't plan when they'll happen, I don't know exactly what flavour of euphoria I'll be treated to, or even how long it'll last. When I experience proper runner's high, it's intense and near-religious. I've sobbed with happiness; I've come to peace with traumatic events; I've felt a deep sense of belonging and...just....rightness. I've startled many passersby. It's a kind of clarity and emotion that I don't get through any other method***, and while it's never guaranteed, it's worth dragging myself through the occasional 'ow f*ck this is shit' run for the chance of that hit.

TO EXPLORE, AND TO BELONG

There is no better way to get to know a city or neighbourhood than to run through it, and there's a few reasons for this. Firstly, it's quicker. Sure, you can walk around a place, but that's going to take you ages. Running allows you to discover so much more, so much faster. Secondly, when I run places, I don't just step out the door and go where the wind takes me****. I plot routes. I get onto Strava, look at a map, and start to get a feel for the shape of the roads, the placing of the green spaces, the little cut-throughs and the cycle lanes. I start to feel like I know it. Finally, as previously mentioned, running is often an intense (and sometimes kinda spiritual) experience, and having those experiences on the pavements and in the parks of a new place helps me to build strong connections and bonds with those places. When I moved to New Zealand seven years ago, running in Auckland helped me feel like I belonged there. When I moved house earlier this year, running helped me get to know my new neighbourhood and feel more settled. I also love running in the places I travel to. It feels like having a deep and intense conversation, like the geographical equivalent of swapping souls with the drunk stranger in the women's toilets. This is probably the main reason why I run: it helps me find my people and my places. When I'm lost, running is the best way I know to how find my bearings.

*The past tense in this sentence feels redundant, y'know?

** As well as the basis for a flawless legal defence

***Possibly shrooms would do it, but I haven't tried

****To be clear, there is nothing wrong with this method, but I am an anxious planner, and the idea of not having a planned route to follow makes my mouth dry

Read more at: ladyshambles.substack.com

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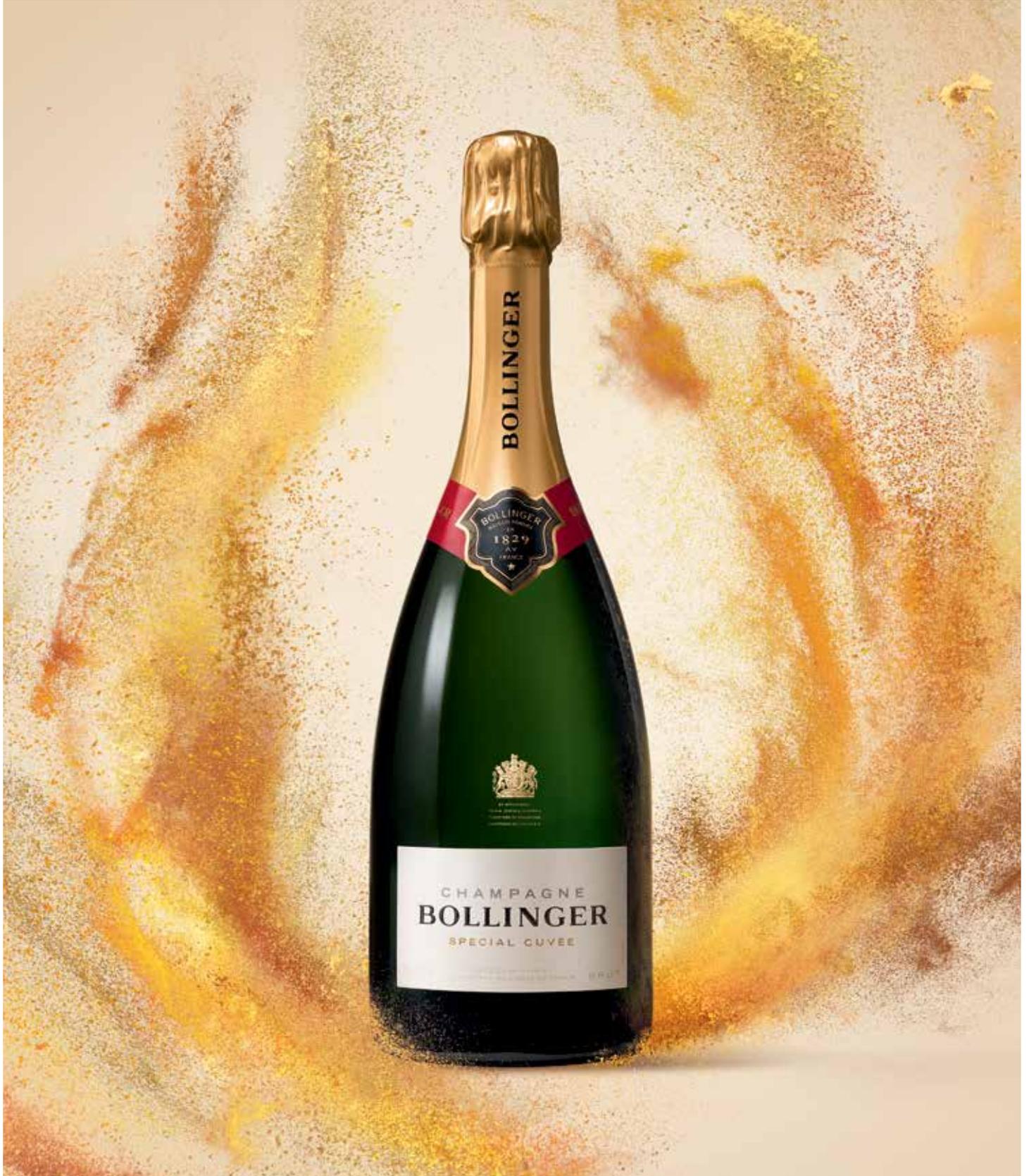




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