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Summer 2026

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THE SEVEN SPIRITS

Of Jude Kelly & Making It In Music

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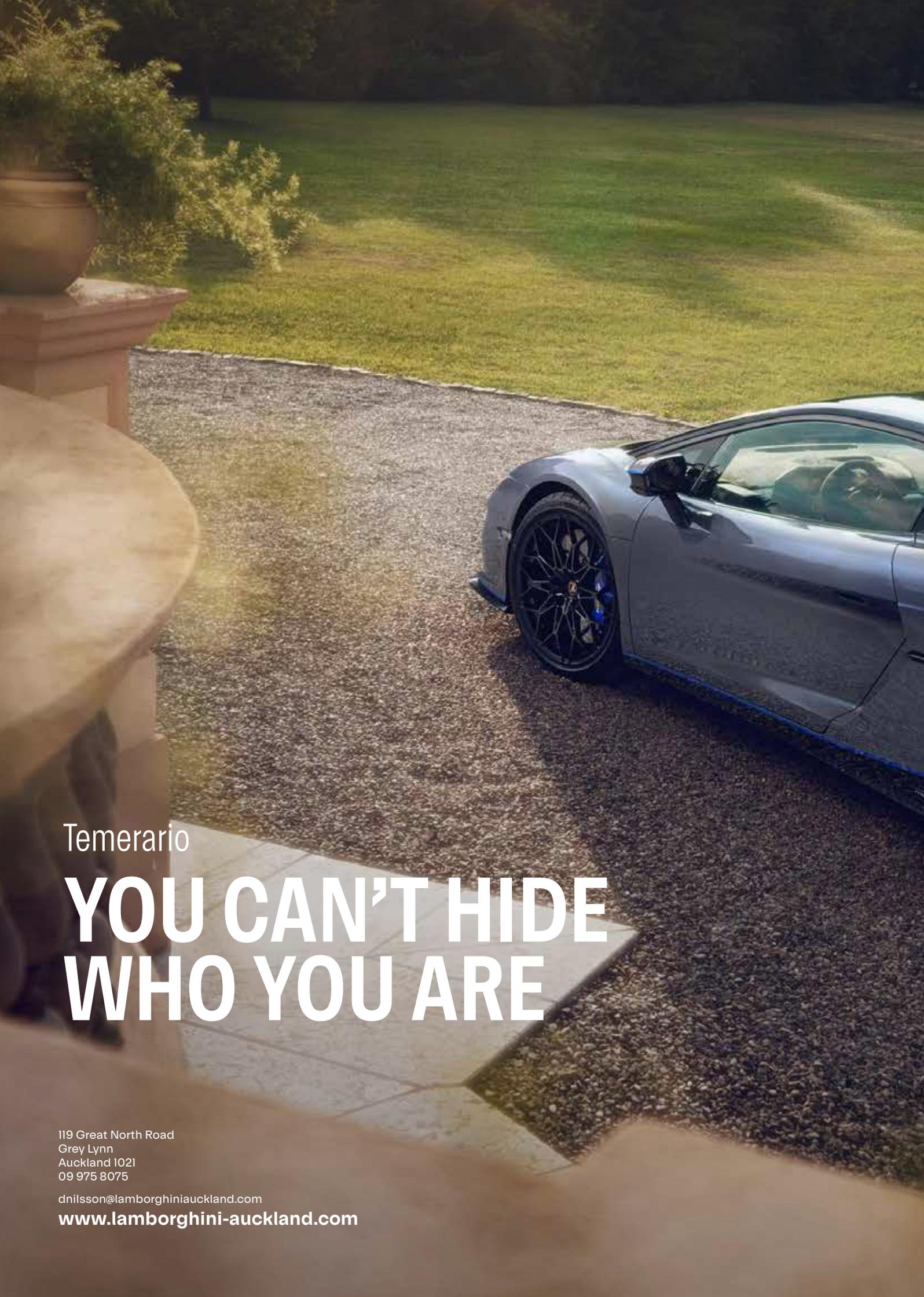


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M2WOMAN

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EDITOR'S *letter*

Leadership has never looked like one thing. It does not follow a single path or arrive in a neat straight line. As we pulled this issue together and listened to the voices on stage at Journey to Excellence in Christchurch, we were reminded just how differently success can look in a life. The journeys can be random, messy, uncertain and widely different. Yet underneath all of these stories, I think there are some consistent themes, particularly purpose, grit and care.

Tracey Ryan's story begins in the paddocks of rural Ireland, holding a survey staff for her father long before she was leading Aurecon's work on some of New Zealand's most complex infrastructure projects. Her version of leadership is not about having all the answers, but about being brave enough to ask the right questions.

Kristy Brown grew up in a world shaped by instability and scarcity, watching her mother create small islands of order inside chaos. Today, she leads Fusion5's New Zealand business across technology, AI and automation, doing exactly that at scale. Her leadership shows how a childhood of "making do" can become an adult superpower for creating structure, safety and performance for others.

For Hannah Walton at Metlifecare, leadership sits at the intersection of strategy and humanity. She carries one of the broadest portfolios in aged care, but keeps returning to simple questions: how older New Zealanders feel in their homes, and how her teams feel at work. Curiosity, listening and context are not "soft skills" in her world. They are the operating system.

Dawn Engelbrecht built scale with heart. She grew a six-child after-school programme into

a network that cares for thousands of children a day, then brought that experience to Kitchen Studio. She thinks in terms of shared success, whether it is franchisees buying their first homes or owners weathering tough quarters together. Her leadership reminds us that growth can be fast without being extractive.

Lisa Oakley's journey has the energy of a comeback. She left corporate life with no client list, went through IVF, divorce and a start-up launched in lockdown, and still built People Associates into one of New Zealand's most successful people, culture and workplace consultancies. Her story is a reminder that careers don't have to be linear to be powerful.

Then there is Turet Knuefermann, who over two decades has grown a fashion label that has become a kind of uniform for women who know themselves. Her success has been built less through noise and more through trust, intuition and consistency.

Those same threads ran through our recent Journey to Excellence event in Christchurch.

Growing up in Northern Ireland during the "Troubles" taught James Laughlin how dangerous simple stories can be, and how powerful it is to really see the person across the table.

Michelle Batchelor has lived in two demanding arenas. In the ring, she fought as Michelle "Pressure" Preston, winning world titles. In business, she leads Life Plus and Preston & Blythe. Her leadership is built on repetition, clarity and the ability to keep moving in ninth-round moments when fatigue hits and there is nowhere to hide.

Peri Drysdale's leadership has been forged over decades of building brands that combine design, quality and a deep commitment to

New Zealand and to the planet. Her story shows how a long-term view, uncompromising quality and care for people and place can sit at the centre of a global brand.

On the technology front, Danu Abeysuriya shared his journey from a garage to leading one of the country's most innovative AI and product studios. He has built Rush around a simple idea: technology should better serve people. He leads with experimentation, humility and a focus on practical outcomes.

Together, the speakers and the women profiled in these pages map out very different routes. Rural paddocks, fast food counters, school halls, care villages, boxing gyms, garages, ateliers and boardrooms. Different industries. Different obstacles. Different accelerators.

Success, as these women and men remind us, is not a single destination. It is the accumulation of small, often unseen decisions taken over years. It is the courage to keep evolving, even when no one is watching, and the permission we give ourselves to lead in a way that feels true, whether that is in a boardroom, a clinic, a classroom, a studio or an atelier.

Here's to the many forms leadership can take. And to the courage it takes to own your version of it.

Héloïse Garrity, Editor

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STEAMY AUSTEN SUMMER

Season 4 of *Bridgerton* is hard on our heels with this season focusing on Benedict Bridgerton (Luke Thompson) and Sophie Baek (Yerin Ha) falling for each other.

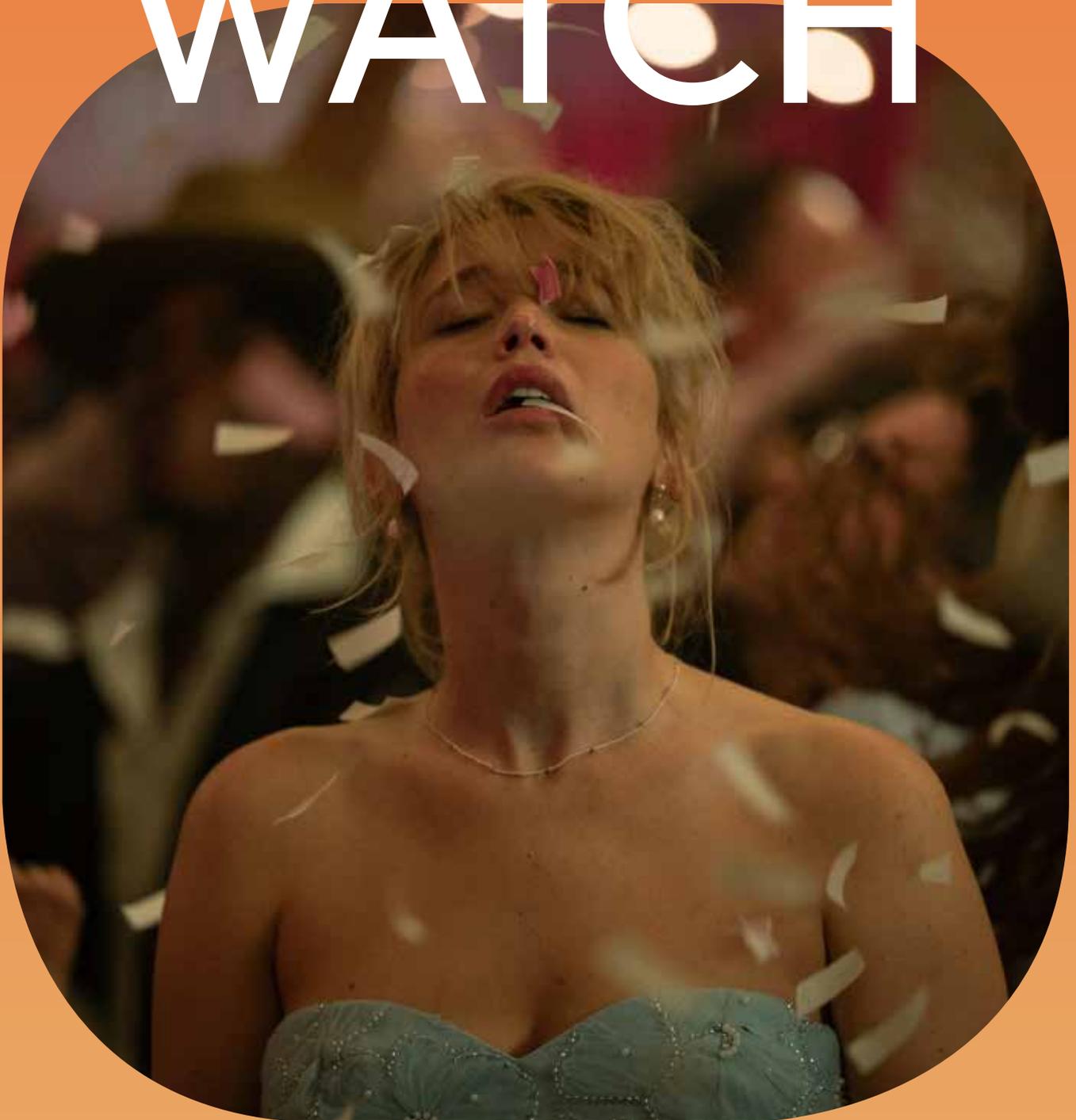
Bridgerton Season 4 will debut in two parts. Part 1 will premiere on 29 Jan, 2026, and Part 2 will premiere on 26 Feb. This season will have a total of eight episodes.

“The storyline is a bit of a twist on *Cinderella*. You remember being told those stories as a child — the magic and the romance of them,” says Luke Thompson. “It’s really exciting to have that weaved into the world that we know of *Bridgerton* ... It’s such a great story, but it’s also, I hope, really relatable.”

It’s now a given that if your Victorian period romance doesn’t have at least one white wet shirt contest for the leading man then it may as well not even exist. I haven’t seen any evidence of Luke getting drenched yet but we do have visual confirmation in the other Austen-inspired film coming out starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi. *Wuthering Heights* drops in cinemas on the 12th of February, and it promises to be viscerally steamy.

Colin Firth has a lot to answer for.

WATCH



DIE MY LOVE

From renowned filmmaker Lynne Ramsay, *Die My Love* is a visceral and uncompromising portrait of a woman engulfed by love and madness. Anchored by a ferocious, tour de force performance from Jennifer Lawrence, and co-starring Robert Pattinson.

The film follows Grace (Lawrence) and her partner Jackson (Pattinson), who have recently moved into an old house deep in the country. With ambitions to write *The Great American Novel*, Grace settles into her new environment, and the couple welcome a baby soon after. However, with Jackson frequently – and suspiciously – absent, and the pressures of domestic life starting to weigh on her, Grace begins to unravel, leaving a path of destruction in her wake. Based on Ariana Harwicz's celebrated novel and co-starring Sissy Spacek, LaKeith Stanfield and Nick Nolte, Ramsay marks her eagerly awaited return with this fearless new cinematic vision that charts the complexity of love and how it can change and transform over time.

Streaming 22 December

MARTY SUPREME

Is it too much to say Timothée Chalamet is a once-in-a-generation actor? His latest film with A24 co-stars Gwyneth Paltrow, Odessa A'zion, and Tyler the Creator. Chalamet plays Marty Mauser in this sports comedy-drama loosely based on the larger than life table tennis champion Marty Reisman. This guy led a wild life and this movie takes every leap to try and tell a story more outrageous than the real deal. To prepare for this role Chalamet began practicing ping-pong back in 2018, he did this throughout all his other projects, Dune 2, Wonka, and The French Dispatch. Ping pong is serious business.

The film was penned by Josh Safdie with longtime collaborator Ronald Bronstein. Consider this our most anticipated film for 2026 so far.

In Cinemas 22 January



ATROPIA

Did you know that the US Army set up fake towns designed by Hollywood prop workers and populated them with actors so soldiers could have a fully immersive role-play experience before shipping off to Iraq, etc. This movie is set in one of those weird un-realities and follows an actress (Alia Shawkat) as she wrestles with unsimulated emotions she grows for one of the soldiers (Callum Turner) cast as an insurgent. The movie is as funny and oddball as it gets, and has trouble keeping itself together. But this is the debut film for director Hailey Gates so I'm willing to cut it some slack for having the balls to pick such a fascinating setting for this comedy-drama.

In Cinemas 12 December

HAMNET

Hamnet follows the life of Agnes, played by Jessie Buckley, the wife of Shakespeare, and pivots on the time he's working on Hamlet and they're getting over the loss of their son. While Shakespeare may be a mythic figure at this point, love and loss make us all the same. It's a tear jerker so be ready. This is the sort of film that makes you want to rush out and hug everyone you love afterwards. Shakespeare is played by fellow Oscar-nominee Paul Mescal and the film was written and directed by Academy Award winning writer/director Chloé Zhao.

In Cinemas 15 January





Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery. (L-R) Mila Kunis, Daryl McCormack, Jeremy Renner, Kerry Washington, Josh O'Connor, Daniel Craig, Josh Brolin, Glenn Close, Andrew Scott and Cailee Spaeny of Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery. Cr. Frank Ockenfels/Netflix © 2025



ONE OF THESE PEOPLE IS THE KILLER

Daniel Craig's turn as a murder mystery sleuth by channelling KFC's Colonel Sanders is far from over. His third outing as the larger-than-life protagonist is kicking off again in "Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery". This time he's sporting long hair, because why not.

The last location, a tech bro's paradise has been swapped out for an aesthetic that is far more in line with the genre's roots, even gothic in nature. A priest walks into a completely enclosed room during church, and in front of everybody promptly dies. Who among the crowd orchestrated the deed? The film has a tough act to follow after the first film that kicked it all off, but it doesn't try to replicate that success; it's comfortable being its own thing. I wasn't over the moon for *Glass Onion*, and fortunately this movie supersedes it in every way. It's moodier yet still retains its humour.

Director Rian Johnson has been the steady hand on the tiller for the entire run so far, and his vision of what an Agatha Christie murder mystery looks like constantly shifts with the times.

"What Rian's movies do best," Craig says, "is subvert the genre. You start off thinking you're watching an old-fashioned sort of Agatha Christie-type mystery — but then it shifts, and you realize you're watching something entirely different."

The secret sauce to the movies, Johnson believes, is ensuring Craig's character is not the central focus. "The secret to each one of these movies is that Benoit Blanc is not the main character of these films. There's always a protagonist who has some real stakes and skin in the game," says Johnson. "Josh O'Connor's character Jud is that character in this movie."

As far as murder mysteries go there's nothing quite like it to compare it to. Except the *Hercule Poirot* movies I guess.

THE GIN CORNER

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

KAKAPO

KAWAKAWA AND PINK PEPPERCORN

Kakapo Kawakawa and Pink peppercorn is an interesting spirit that looks very pretty and pours finely in a classic London Dry style. On the nose, it has breadth with highlights. When you drink it, there's a generous body while those peppercorns emerge with pride.

A mixer brings out a whole new flavour profile, revealing a strong yet not overloaded juniper presence. It's not trying to be too complicated; this is a gin with a point, yet it's flexible. You could enjoy this gin every day (and I did) yet my preference would be to keep it as a bit of a special one. It's great as a gin and soda, cuts through any tonic, and it works perfectly in almost any cocktail. It's simply a "damn good drop" - no wonder it keeps winning awards.

kakapodistillery.co.nz





JUNO

EXTRA FINE

Juno Extra fine gin's gorgeous bottle indicates what's to come. It's got quite a round nose on it with little hints of citrus through a broad profile. A fine pour leads to a first taste, where juniper muscles forward and that citrus brightens things up for a sophisticated balance with the other botanicals. Soda brings forward an underlying spice yet the blend is such that nothing takes over.

It's a beautiful drop, a big, broad, wide gin. They say extra fine, and I think that's right. It's a quality delicious, well-balanced flavour profile that invites pairing, and this would make a great martini. Either way if you are a gin lover, you will adore this.

junogin.com





HUMDINGER

CITRUS GIN

This gin highlights citrus while maintaining a strong juniper backbone. The nose is bright and fresh, with a classic light pineyness. The citrus notes are complex; a wider citrus bouquet delivers a unique character. While the juniper is pronounced enough to satisfy any gin lover, the citrus element makes it feel like a special occasion gin. The balance is excellent, ensuring the citrus doesn't overwhelm the other flavors. This gin would stand up well in a variety of cocktails, from a simple gin and tonic to a citrus-forward martini, as its more front-loaded profile prevents it from getting lost in a mixer.

HUMDINGER

DRY GIN

On the nose, it's bright and fresh, with a clear, clean pour. The flavor is led by well-integrated juniper supported by a collection of other botanicals that merge so well. A subtle hint of citrus and other traditional gin notes, and the overall impression is one of balance. The careful selection of botanicals in this small-batch gin is evident, resulting in a high-quality sip. This gin is well-suited as all round gin for all uses; a simple G&T or a more complex cocktail. It's an excellent go-to option for any gin lover.

HUMDINGER

SLOE GIN

Humdinger's Sloe Gin is a delightful departure from their other offerings. A classic sloe gin, known for its thicker pour and lower alcohol content (around 26%). On the nose, the pronounced berry flavors are apparent. Drinking it reveals an almost buttery, dessert-like quality, it's on the sweeter side yet it maintains the same sense of balance as the other Humdinger gins. It's so smooth and drinkable that it can be enjoyed straight as a liqueur; with ice and soda, the sloe berry flavor remains strong but allows other nuanced notes to emerge, creating a dangerously delicious drink, and as a surprise addition to a Negroni it was rather special.

humdinger.nz



CARBONSIX

TAKAPUNA BLACK GIN

This is something a little different. A generous pour reveals a fine dark spirit with a complex botanical smell. The black colour in gin often comes from sloe berries, but here it's a secret recipe with many irregular botanicals.

It's fine and strong on the palate and the aroma is amplified. Soda brings out new essences like dusky banana and stone fruit, turning it a stylish grey. It's a very complex gin with medium juniper and an almost fortifying sense. It's sweet without being sweet, perhaps from a little licorice.

This well-blended sip has a huge flavour. It's challenging in a good way and is for the real gin drinker to sip over a long time. Unlike other black gins where colour is just a feature, this shade imparts genuine flavour.

carbonsix.co.nz



THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF JUDE KELLY

Not meaning to come across too poetically pretentious, but I have always felt that music (in all its forms) is a mirror and road map with two contrasting faces: chaos and calm, shadow and light. Good music, if we let it, can cradle a broken heart; be rooted yet restless, be reflective yet fearless with each note carrying a dichotomy of peaceful silence and rugged sound.

WORDS AND INTERVIEW BY JAMIE TROWER

The duality of good, emotive music stays with us. Dunedin-born, Auckland-based Jude Kelly is an essential New Zealand musical talent that can really tap into that duality. Her music—refined, well-crafted and so damn good—successfully maps her own evolution as an artist and human being.

After a string of singles and shows around the country, her dreamy debut fused-pop-folk EP, *The Seven Spirits of Her*, produced by Josh Fountain and Devin Abrams, debuted earlier this year, to much acclaim. From the track ‘Monster Truck’ to the anthem-esque ‘Bonnet Bunny’ to the brilliant single ‘Clarence’, the album spans her journey from feeling constrained to embracing her own emotional, unique creative voice and story. The song ‘Siren Song’ off the EP was heralded by Rolling Stone as being an ‘intoxicating and brooding reflection on the magnetic pull of chaos.’

Continuing her music success (with a rumoured new album on the way), Kelly has also recently been announced as one of the support acts for Lewis Capaldi’s New Zealand tour in early December, playing both in Auckland and Christchurch. *M2Woman* got to sit down with Jude and talk to her about her creativity, her music, her duality, her recent EP and Lewis Capaldi.

Firstly, how did you first find music?

I grew up in a really musical family. Music was a day-to-day thing. My dad gave me my first guitar, and taught me how to play. For me, I learnt the art of singing off artists that I loved, like Adele or Alicia Keys, and other great vocalists. As a teenager I wrote a lot of songs too. It wasn’t really something that I ever thought about doing as a career, but I pursued the dream, and decided at the end of my degree at university to follow that path. I was studying oceanography. I think looking at and looking after the ocean and focusing on renewable energy is a really important thing. I talked to my lecturer because I was like: ‘help, I don’t know what to do. Do I do postgrad or do I try this music thing?’ And he was supportive—‘uni will always be here’, he said. ‘So go and try music and see how you go.’

I then started playing a lot of live shows and, through word of mouth, started doing more around Christchurch. I’m from Dunedin so started the South Island circuit. It’s the importance of creative pursuit, right? Having the realization that there is no time limitation on anything, really.

Who would you say inspires your creativity the most?

I would say I’m very self-inspired. I’ve taken in a lot from a lot of different artists and a lot of different people. And something that inspires me is often people’s ways of life, or style of living, if that makes sense. I see that a lot in what I read. I’m in a pop world, but I’ve also got a folk background, which means that it can be interesting and challenging working with some people because of my different style of writing.

Florence Welch is a huge inspo for me. Same with St Vincent. She is currently living in my brain and I am really inspired by her creativity.

Patti Smith, for example, is always someone I fall back on. I’ve just finished *Just Kids* and *M Train*. She is such an amazing writer. After reading or listening to anything she has made will then result in me going away and writing several pages of my own stuff. Even a few pages of hers will get me going, just because I’m so inspired.

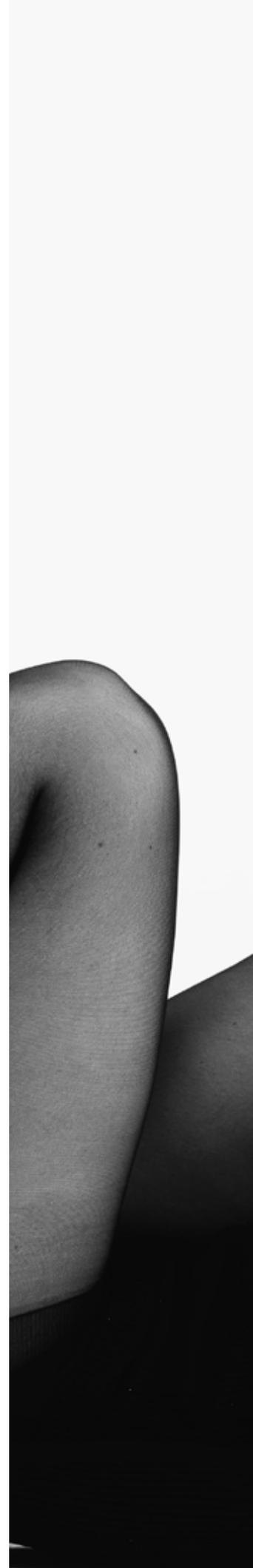
How would you describe your own sound?

It’s probably unique, founded on soul and pop. Very vocally driven, theatrical, dramatic and emotional. It’s flourished with the folk lyricism and then the Western sonic world that we’re sitting in. In my opinion, that’s what really builds it, and makes the voice carry.

Your debut EP, ‘The Seven Spirits of Her’, came out earlier this year. Loved it. I could really feel the emotive energy pulsing through it. The song ‘Clarence’ is beautiful, by the way, and you got some great feedback by Chris Martin from Coldplay on it!

Yeah, that was very cool. I got the chance to play him the song and we talked about it creatively. He gave some interesting notes and takes, but ultimately was just like: this is great.

The name of the song was actually going to change. My management thought the name didn’t make sense. I played it for Chris and his team, who loved the title. So it stayed. The music community is so connected and everyone is so supportive that you end up working with these people you may have known from four years ago. By the time that you end up working with them you’ve got some rapport and friendship and it’s really beautiful. Anytime I go into the studio,







there's always a level of fandom of who I'm working with.

I started writing The Seven Spirits of Her three and a half years ago with producer Devin Abrams. He's great. We onboarded Josh Fountain too, who has produced BENE's stuff. The feeling of it was born through a lot of improvisation.

We'd start with a little track, and I just sang and whatever happened happened and I would make a song from that. That's how 'Clarence' was written. 'Clarence' was one of the first songs that started the EP.

The EP then became something within the first six months. I didn't really know what it was about at that time. I was a bit confused of how to make it all work.

I come from a Christian background. I grew up in the church. I think I realised that what was being projected through my songs was a lot of questions and conflicts that I had growing up. It was a really organic, self-reflective process. In the Book of Revelations, there's the Seven Spirits of God, with the number seven symbolising this completeness and perfection in biblical tradition.

So in the studio I joked about calling the EP The Seven Spirits of Her, to reclaim that power a little bit. Each song then was built and created to represent a part of us that makes us who we are as women. Whether you want to be soft and sweet, or dynamic, powerful and strong, like Clarence, who gives a don't f**k with me kind of attitude.

Or you may want to be fun, hot, flirty, going out with your friends, and be silly. That's like in the song 'Bonnet Bunny.'

I wanted The Seven Spirits of Her to give the message that we are all these things and it's beautiful that we are all these things. The message applies to both women and men. A man can be masculine and feminine. There should be no definition of what someone should be. We as a humanity can encompass all these things. I guess, with this EP, I just wanted people to take away and see a little bit of themselves in some of it.

If it speaks to them, that's awesome.

It was so exciting to see what a collaboration of creatives can do. Whether it was me and Devin, or Josh coming onboard, or Chris Martin...The Coldplay thing was wild. A highlight. The Lewis [Capaldi] thing might

change that, though...

Yes, it jolly-well might! You're playing support at his Auckland show in December! How'd that come about for you?

When international artists come there's an opportunity to put yourself forward, in a way. I've known of Lewis for so long. I remember watching his YouTube videos from ages ago. When I asked to play support, it took ages for them to reply. I kind of assumed that I hadn't got it because I hadn't heard anything. Finally, I got the call (braced myself for the worst), but they said they wanted me, and it was pretty freaking awesome.

What is your definition of creative success?

Creative success is when you're proud of your output and that's the fundamental driver of what you're doing. A real key pillar of creative success, I feel, is lifestyle. It is really important to me to know and rely on who my friends and my family are.

Being able to live off your creative work, as a career, is a creative success as well. Being able to support yourself.

Obviously you've got the Lewis Capaldi show (which is gonna be great). What next for you in the future?

I think I'll probably get in another few more shows in the next few months, and another song in the works for summer. Over the last few months, I've been writing a second album-EP-body of work that I've written most of the words for.

We're in the process of getting the right sonic world for it. Hopefully that will be a mid-year project for next year, but we'll see. Other than that, I'm trying to go overseas and do some shows and do some writing overseas as well. It's all currently oiling the engine, to start to move some things.

What's the best piece of advice you've been given?

I've always wondered what I would answer this with...It's probably just like a really general one. I think you just have to trust yourself and not put yourself beneath people. Know your worth in those environments. I think that that is what carries through when you're really confident in your work.

BOOK REVIEW

The Molecule We Can't Live With, and Can't Live Without

Carbon dioxide is both a planetary threat and a driving force behind life on Earth, according to author Peter Brannen. Carbon dioxide has a terrible reputation. It's much maligned because of its role as a biosphere-threatening pollutant, but in fact the atmospheric compound has been a critical driving force behind the creation of life on Earth, shaping human history and the waves of evolution preceding it.

WORDS BY RAMIN SKIBBA

Peter Brannen's new book, "The Story of CO₂ is the Story of Everything: How Carbon Dioxide Made Our World," is just what the title promises, drawing on geology, thermodynamics, chemistry, biology, and eventually, economics and sociology to make his case. "Four billion years ago, CO₂ came alive," he writes. "It remains the ultimate source of carbon for all life, the primary knob of Earth's temperature, and our species' signature product."

The pivotal part of the tale begins hundreds of millions of years ago when photosynthetic energy in the form of early plant life, algae, and bacteria became buried within the Earth's crust, eventually forming fossil fuels. Those deposits were uncorked eons later by England's industrial capitalism, and more than a century after that, by multinational fossil-fuel corporations, creating a thickening blanket of atmospheric CO₂ and detonating today's perilous carbon bomb.

One might argue that the history of life revolves around O₂ (oxygen) and H₂O (water) as much as CO₂. But though the buildup of oxygen in the atmosphere enabled complex life, Brannen shows that the gas wasn't primarily created by photosynthesis but by longtime geologic processes, which naturally involve CO₂. And to Brannen, water is merely an assistant, helping to transform carbon dioxide from the air into the stuff of life. So carbon dioxide, he convincingly shows, is the real star of the show.

Brannen, the author of "The Ends of the World," a 2017 account of Earth's five mass extinction events, is also a contributing writer at *The Atlantic*, where he has taken on scientifically contentious issues, like whether we're living in the Anthropocene or not, or refuting the idea that the Amazon is the Earth's lungs. In his latest book, he wades into other provocative debates, such as whether or not Earth is really facing a sixth major mass extinction, but he fully acknowledges that humanity's carbon dioxide emissions are propelling us toward such a catastrophe.

Before assessing how the planet became so imperiled, though, he examines the probable origins of life. Brannen explores two leading hypotheses: that it began with "metabolism first" — with chemical reactions at deep-sea hydrothermal vents that didn't require photosynthesis — or with "information first," in which a soup of RNA-like molecules began replicating and eventually produced proto-cells. The jury is still out on this debate, though Brannen leans toward the metabolism idea, making the provocative suggestion that "perhaps the first life wasn't a miracle, but a necessity" to resolve chemical instabilities at those marine vents.

In chronicling how Earth reached today's climatic tipping point, Brannen takes a lively tour of past eras, when the planet wildly swung between snowball Earth and greenhouse Earth. The former resulted from a dearth of carbon dioxide and a layer of ice encasing the planet, while the latter came from an overabundance

of atmospheric carbon, dramatically raising temperatures. (Venus, where a runaway greenhouse effect made that world uninhabitable around a billion years ago, serves as a warning, he writes.)

It's always been a tenuous balance, Brannen writes: "In recent geologic history, for instance, when CO₂ has varied between 0.1 percent and 0.018 percent of the atmosphere, it has been the difference between alligators in the Arctic Circle on the one hand, and an Antarctica's worth of ice burying North America on the other." (It's about 0.04 percent today.)

Brannen also argues that, despite a devastating asteroid impact being responsible for the last mass extinction some 65 million years ago, most environmental catastrophes have been caused by climatic changes, such as a gigantic series of volcanic eruptions disrupting the carbon cycle at the end of the Permian period about 252 million years ago.

The Earth and the biosphere have proven resilient until now, but Brannen points out that humanity is now dangerously transferring carbon dioxide from the crust to the atmosphere more efficiently than volcanoes ever could. He traces the early expansion of fossil-fuel powered capitalism throughout the British Empire, along with the colonial ambitions of the Dutch, Spanish, and later, Americans. He also documents the role of fossil fuels in more recent geopolitical conflicts and coups in places like Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.

Brannen is generally more comfortable writing about geological history than economic and sociological forces, and his depictions of geochemical and chemical processes over the eons are particularly vivid. For example, when depicting the otherworldly Archaean Earth, which spanned from around 2.5 to 4 billion years ago, he writes: "Suffocating oceans tinted an uncanny green — not with seaweed and blooms of plankton, but with iron — sprayed pink skies with methane-drenched surf. Islands of rock now breached this surf and hosted empty rivers coursing over dead land." With such eloquent descriptions, he manages to bring the nearly lifeless planet to life.

Brannen is wary of what he calls the "bugaboo of environmental determinism" when evaluating the trajectory of human societies and civilizations, and he makes the critical point that "the answers to climate change are not to be found in the realm of atmospheric physics or geochemistry. They are political and economic."

At the same time, however, he asserts that "understanding the sensitivity of the planet to carbon dioxide in its geologic past is key to understanding our climate future."

Every climate change book eventually must ask: What comes next? For the most part, Brannen leaves it to the reader to determine whether the future could deliver a "buzzer-beating technological miracle, a startling transformation of the political economy of the developed world, a ruinously tardy and incremental market-led

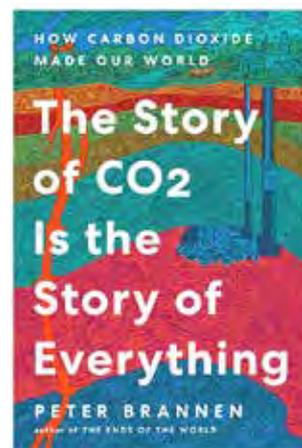
energy transition, or failing all that, corrective planetary catastrophe."

Nevertheless, he has thoughts on the matter. Brannen argues that carbon removal technologies, like expensive machines that suck carbon out of the air, are insufficient to the titanic task, and that banking on solar geoengineering approaches like large-scale rock weathering is a risky endeavor.

He also points out that despite "endless corporate cheerleading about the clean energy transition," fossil fuel production since 2000 has merely dropped from 86 percent to 82 percent of global energy in 2023. Fossil fuels need to be left in the Earth, he argues, but capitalism impels corporations to avoid abandoning trillions of dollars of buried profits. And with abundant fracking and tar sands, "peak oil" might not have arrived yet.

Brannen's book arrives amid a flurry of climate-related titles this year, including Malcolm Harris' "What's Left," a future-looking take on the prospects for collective action addressing the climate crisis, and Thea Riofrancos' "Extraction," an analysis of the environmental and social costs of the current clean-energy transition, which also offers an alternative vision. But his account is more closely related to Michael E. Mann's 2023 book "Our Fragile Moment," which includes a more detailed account of climatic history over the past few million years, intended to combat persistent climate denialism.

This is an ambitious and urgent addition to this growing collection, evocatively demonstrating how humanity's history and precarious future has been continually connected with Earth's much longer geochemical history. Despite the troubling climate trends evident today, he ultimately seeks some reasons for hope, arriving at a Carl Sagan-like farsighted, sanguine view of humanity's future. "Humans can be warlike, shortsighted, provincial, and stupid," he writes, "but our species is also uniquely capable of collaboration, learning, ingenuity, and adaptation."

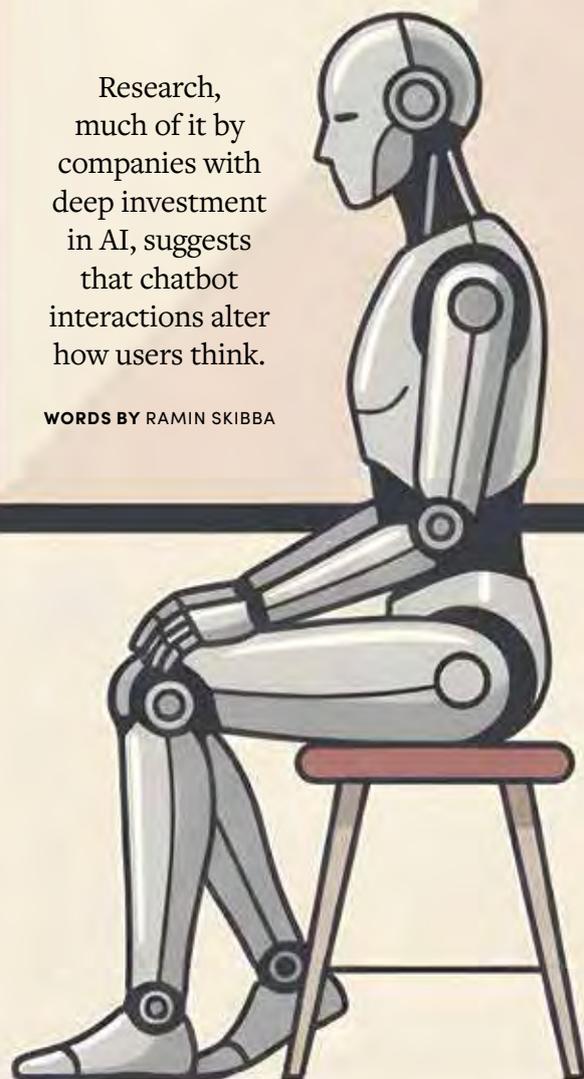


Are We Offloading Critical Thinking to Chatbots?



Research, much of it by companies with deep investment in AI, suggests that chatbot interactions alter how users think.

WORDS BY RAMIN SKIBBA



In January, researchers at Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University posted a study online on how artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT affect critical thinking. They wanted to know how knowledge workers — people who rely on their intellectual skills for their jobs — were interacting with the tools. And through detailed surveys, their findings suggest that the higher the confidence those workers felt in generative AI, the less they themselves relied on critical thinking.

As one of the test subjects noted in the study, “I use AI to save time and don’t have much room to ponder over the result.”

The Microsoft paper is part of a nascent but growing body of research: Over the past two years, as more people have experimented with generative AI tools like ChatGPT at work and at school, cognitive scientists and computer scientists — many of them employed by the very companies that make these AI tools, as well as independent academics — have tried to tease out the effects of these products on how humans think.

Research from major tech companies on their own products often involves promoting them in some way. And indeed, some of the new studies emphasize new opportunities and use cases for generative AI tools. But the research also points to significant potential drawbacks, including hindering developing skills and a general overreliance on the tools. Researchers also suggest that users are putting too much trust in AI chatbots, which often provide inaccurate information. With such findings coming from the tech industry itself, some experts say, it may signal that major Silicon Valley companies are seriously considering potential adverse effects of their own AI on human cognition, at a time when there’s little government regulation.

“I think across all the papers we’ve been looking at, it does show that there’s less effortful cognitive processes,” said Briana Vecchione, a technical researcher at Data & Society, a nonprofit research organization in New York. Vecchione has been studying people’s interactions with the chatbots like ChatGPT and Claude, the latter made by the company Anthropic, and has observed a range of concerns among her study’s participants, including dependence and overreliance. Vecchione notes that some people take

chatbot output at face value, without critically considering the text the algorithms produce. In some fields, the error risks could have significant consequences, experts say — for instance if those chatbots are used in medicine or health contexts.

Every technological development naturally comes with both benefits and risks, from word processors to rocket launchers to the internet. But experts like Vecchione and Viktor Kewenig, a cognitive neuroscientist at Microsoft Research Cambridge in the United Kingdom, say that the advent of the technology that girds today’s AI products — large language models, or LLMs — could become something different. Unlike other modern computer-based inventions, such as automation and robotics inside factories, internet search engines, and GPS-powered maps on devices in our pockets, AI chatbots often sound like a thinking person, even if they’re not.

As such, the tools could present new, unforeseen challenges. Compared to older technologies, AI chatbots “are different in that they are a thinking partner to a certain extent, where you’re not just offloading some memory, like memory about dates, to Google,” said Kewenig, who’s not involved in the Microsoft study but collaborates with some of its co-authors. “You are in fact offloading many other critical faculties as well, such as critical thinking.”

Large language models are powerful, or appear powerful, because of the vast information on which they’re based. Such models are trained on colossal amounts of digital data — which may have involved violating copyrights — and in response to a user’s prompt, they’re able to generate new material, unlike older AI products like Siri or Alexa, which simply regurgitate what’s already published online.

As a result, some people may be more likely to trust the chatbot’s output, Kewenig said: “Anthropomorphizing might sometimes be tricky, or dangerous even. You might think the model has a certain thinking process that it actually doesn’t.”

AI chatbots have been observed to occasionally produce flawed outputs, such as recommending to eat rocks and put glue on pizza. Such inaccurate and absurd AI outputs have become widely known as hallucinations, and they arise

because the LLMs powering the chatbots are trained on a broad array of websites and digital content. Because of the models’ complexity and the reams of data fed into them, they have significant hallucination rates: 33 percent in the case of OpenAI’s o3 model and higher in its successor, according to a technical report the company released in April.

In the Microsoft study, which was published in proceedings of the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems in April, the authors characterized critical thinking with a widely used framework known as Bloom’s taxonomy, which distinguishes types of cognitive activities from simpler to more complex ones, including knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In general, for these workers, the researchers found that using chatbots tends to change the nature of the effort people invest in critical thinking. It shifts from information gathering to information verification, from problem-solving to incorporating the AI’s output, and it shifts other types of higher-level thinking to merely stewarding the AI, steering the chatbot with their prompts and assessing whether the response is sufficient for their work.

The researchers surveyed 319 knowledge workers in the U.K., U.S., Canada, and other countries in a range of occupations, from computer scientists and mathematicians to jobs related to design and business. The participants were first introduced to concepts and examples of critical thinking in the context of AI use, such as “checking the tone of generated emails, verifying the accuracy of code snippets, and assessing potential biases in data insights.” Then, the participants responded to a list of multiple-choice and free-response questions, providing 936 examples of work-related AI usage, mostly involving generating ideas and finding information, while assessing their own critical thinking.

According to the paper, the connections to critical thinking were nuanced. The paper noted, for instance, that higher confidence in generative AI is associated with less critical thinking, but that among respondents with more self-confidence in their own abilities, there was an increase in critical thinking.



The Ones Who Need Little Sleep

Short sleepers cruise by on four to six hours a night and don't seem to suffer ill effects. Turns out they're genetically built to require less sleep than the rest of us.

WORDS BY MARLA BROADFOOT

Everyone has heard that it's vital to get seven to nine hours of sleep a night, a recommendation repeated so often it has become gospel. Get anything less, and you are more likely to suffer from poor health in the short and long term — memory problems, metabolic issues, depression, dementia, heart disease, a weakened immune system.

But in recent years, scientists have discovered a rare breed who consistently get little shut-eye and are no worse for wear.

Natural short sleepers, as they are called, are genetically wired to need only four to six hours of sleep a night. These outliers suggest that quality, not quantity, is what matters. If scientists could figure out what these people do differently it might, they hope, provide insight into sleep's very nature.

"The bottom line is, we don't understand what sleep is, let alone what it's for. That's pretty incredible, given that the average person sleeps a third of their lives," says Louis Ptáček, a neurologist at the University of California San Francisco.

Scientists once thought sleep was little more than a period of rest, like powering down a computer in preparation for the next day's work. Thomas Edison called sleep a waste of time — "a heritage from our cave days" — and claimed to never sleep more than four hours a night. His invention of the incandescent lightbulb encouraged shorter sleep times in others. Today, a historically high number of US adults are sleeping less than five hours a night.

But modern sleep research has shown that sleep is an active, complicated process we don't necessarily want to cut short. During sleep, scientists suspect that our bodies and brains are replenishing energy stores, flushing waste and toxins, pruning synapses and consolidating memories. As a result, chronic sleep deprivation can have serious health consequences.



Most of what we know about sleep and sleep deprivation stems from a model proposed in the 1970s by a Hungarian-Swiss researcher named Alexander Borbély. His two-process model of sleep describes how separate systems — circadian rhythm and sleep homeostasis — interact to govern when and how long we sleep. The circadian clock dictates the 24-hour cycle of sleep and wakefulness, guided by external cues like light and darkness. Sleep homeostasis, on the other hand, is driven by internal pressure that builds while you're awake and decreases while you're asleep, ebbing and flowing like hunger.

There's variation in these patterns. "We've always known that there are morning larks and night owls, but most people fall in between. We've always known there are short sleepers and long sleepers, but most people fall in between," says Ptáček. "They've been out there, but the reason that they haven't been recognized is that these people generally don't go to doctors."

That changed when Ptáček and his colleague Ying-Hui Fu, a



human geneticist and neuroscientist at UC San Francisco, were introduced to a woman who felt that her early sleep schedule was a curse. The woman naturally woke up in the wee hours of the morning, when it was “cold, dark, and lonely.” Her granddaughters inherited her same sleep habits. The researchers pinpointed the genetic mutation for this rare type of morning lark, and after they published their findings, thousands of extreme early risers came out of the woodwork.

But Fu recalls being intrigued by one family that didn’t fit the pattern. These family members woke up early but didn’t go to bed early, and felt refreshed after only about six hours of sleep. They were the first people identified with familial natural short sleep, a condition that runs in families like other

genetic traits. Fu and Ptáček traced their abbreviated slumber to a mutation in a gene called *DEC2*.

The researchers went on to genetically engineer the *DEC2* mutation into mice, showing that the animals need less sleep than their littermates. And they found that one of the gene’s jobs is to help control levels of a brain hormone called orexin, which promotes wakefulness. Interestingly, orexin deficiency is a leading cause of narcolepsy, a sleep disorder marked by episodes of excessive daytime sleepiness. In people with short sleep, however, orexin production appears to be increased.

Over time, the team has identified seven genes associated with natural short sleep. In one family with three generations of short sleepers, the researchers found a mutation in

a gene called *ADRB1*, which is highly active in a region of the brain stem, the dorsal pons, that’s involved in regulating sleep. When the scientists used a technique to stimulate that brain region in mice, rousing them from their sleep, mice with the *ADRB1* mutation woke more easily and stayed awake longer.

In a father-son pair of short sleepers, the researchers identified a mutation in another gene, *NPSR1*, which is involved in regulating the sleep/wake cycle. When they created mice with the same mutation, they found that the animals spent less time sleeping and, in behavioral tests, lacked the memory problems that typically follow a short night’s sleep.

The team also found two distinct mutations in a gene called *GRM1*, in two unrelated families with shortened sleep cycles. Again, mice



engineered with those mutations slept less, with no obvious health consequences.

Like mice, people who are naturally short sleepers seem to be immune to the ill effects of sleep deprivation. If anything, they do extraordinarily well. Research suggests that such people are ambitious, energetic and optimistic, with remarkable resilience against stress and higher thresholds for pain. They might even live longer.

Based on the findings in short sleepers, some researchers think it may be time to update the old two-process model of sleep, which is how Ptáček developed the idea of a third influence. The updated model might unfold like this: In

the morning, the circadian clock indicates it is time to start your day, and sleep homeostasis signals you've gotten enough sleep to get out of bed. Then a third factor — behavioral drive — compels you to go out and do your job, or find a mate, or gather sustenance. At night, the process goes in reverse, to calm the body down for sleep.

Perhaps short sleepers are so driven that they are able to overcome the innate processes that keep others in bed. But it may also be that, somehow, the brains of short sleepers are built to sleep so efficiently that they are able to do more with less.

EFFICIENT SLUMBER

“It’s not like there’s something magical about your seven to eight hours,” says Phyllis Zee, director of the Center for Circadian and Sleep Medicine at Northwestern University, near Chicago. Zee can imagine countless ways that short sleepers’ brains could be more efficient. Do they have more slow-wave sleep, the most restorative sleep stage? Do they generate higher amounts of cerebrospinal fluid, the liquid that bathes the brain and spinal cord, enabling them to get rid of more waste products? Is their metabolic rate different, helping them cycle in and out of sleep more quickly?



“It’s all about efficiency, sleep efficiency — that’s how I feel,” says Fu. “Whatever their body needs to do with sleep, they can get it done in a short time.”

Recent studies from Fu and Ptáček suggest that naturally short sleepers may be more efficient at removing toxic brain aggregates that contribute to neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer’s disease. The researchers bred mice that had short sleep genes with mice that carried genes predisposing them to Alzheimer’s. The Alzheimer’s mice developed a buildup of abnormal proteins — amyloid plaques and tau tangles — that, in humans, are hallmarks of dementia. But the brains of the hybrid mice developed fewer of these tangles and plaques, as if the sleep mutations were protecting the animals.

Fu believes that if she conducted similar studies in models of heart disease, diabetes or other illnesses associated with sleep deprivation, she would get similar results.

DEEPER SECRETS OF SLEEP

It isn’t yet clear how the short sleeper genes identified thus far shield people from the ill effects of poor sleep, or how the mutations in these genes make sleep more efficient. To get at the answer, Fu and Ptáček started bringing short sleepers to their joint laboratory to measure their brain waves while they slept. Their sleep study was derailed by the pandemic, but they are eager to get it back on track.

The researchers are also interested in understanding other sleep outliers. Sleep duration, like most behaviors, follows a bell curve. Short sleepers sit on one end of the curve, long sleepers on the other. Fu has found one genetic mutation associated with long sleep, but long sleepers are challenging to study because their schedules don’t align with the norms and demands of society. Long sleepers are often forced to get up early to go to school or work, which can result in sleep deprivation and may contribute to depression and other illnesses.

But though sleep has a strong genetic component, it can also be shaped by the environment. Knowing that better sleep is possible, and understanding the basis, could point the way to interventions to optimize sleep, enabling more people to live longer, healthier lives.

Zee’s lab, for example, has tinkered with using acoustic stimulation to boost the slow waves of deep sleep that enhance memory processing and may be one of the secrets to short sleepers’ success. In a study, they played pink noise — a softer, more natural sound than white noise, more akin to rain or the ocean — while study participants slept. The next day those participants remembered more in a test of learning and recalling word pairs. “We can enhance memory, but we’re not making them sleep longer or necessarily shorter,” says Zee. “I think there’s a lot more to learn.”

For now, researchers recommend that people focus on getting the amount of sleep they need, recognizing it will be different for different people. Ptáček still bristles when he hears someone preach that everybody has to sleep eight hours a night. “That’s like saying everybody in the population has to be 5 foot 10,” he says. “That’s not how genetics works.”

RETURN

Keira Knightley is back on a boat, but this time there are no pirates, wacky mutant sea villains or Johnny Depp channelling his best inner Keith Richards. Two decades after she first strode across a Disney soundstage in a corset and tricorne hat as Elizabeth Swann, the British actress who helped turn *Pirates of the Caribbean* into a global phenomenon has sailed into another storm. In Netflix's new thriller *The Woman in Cabin 10*, Knightley plays Laura "Lo" Blacklock, a travel journalist on a luxury superyacht who is sure she sees a woman being thrown overboard. The crew insist nothing happened. The passenger list is complete. The more she pushes, the more everyone around her suggests she is drunk, traumatised, or simply imagining things.

VOYAGE



It is a grippingly frustrating story about gaslighting and danger on open water, adapted from Ruth Ware's bestselling novel and filmed in part on the real 83-metre superyacht Savannah off the south coast of England. Keira clearly had fun with the genre. Talking about her recent run of twisty dramas, she has said she loves the feel of "proper genre thrillers" and that with *Cabin 10*, she was thinking of those cool, paranoid 1970s films, saying, "It reminded me of those '70s thrillers," and this was her chance to step into that space herself.

Lo herself is very much a grown-up heroine. Keira was drawn to her not because she is likeable but because she is unshakable. "I liked her certainty," she says. "It's very rare to play characters who are that certain. She made me feel quite powerful, even though she's having a horrible time throughout the entire film." She describes Lo as "a dog with a bone" who simply will not let the mystery go, no matter how many men in perfect knitwear tell her she is wrong.

For a certain generation of women, Keira's career plays like a personal timeline. First there was *Bend It Like Beckham*, the west London football pitch, the makeshift training kit and a friendship that felt more real than any teen-movie crush. Knightley's character Jules was the tomboy strike partner that teenage girls had been waiting for, funny and driven and uninterested in playing cute to make anyone more comfortable. The film was meant to be a small British comedy. It ended up being the little movie that travelled around the world, becoming a touchstone for women who finally saw a version of themselves chasing a ball and a dream.

Keira still feels that when women stop her in the street. "A lot of women do speak to me about it," she told *Vogue* recently. "The fact that it's had this life, and means so much to so many people, is amazing." Her eldest daughter has even joined that club. She plays football herself, and Keira has told the story of watching the Lionesses win the Euros with her, then hearing her little girl say the next morning, "I dreamt that I scored the winning goal at the Euros." For Keira, who never had that dream growing up, it was a moment that made her cry with happiness.

Within a year of Beckham, Keira was the girl in the wedding video scene in *Love Actually*, all luminous eyes and impossibly perfect knitwear, and then almost overnight she was the face on posters in every cinema on the planet. *Pirates of the Caribbean* needed a romantic heroine to stand next to Johnny Depp's chaos and Orlando Bloom's earnestness. What it got in Elizabeth Swann was something sharper. Knightley's Elizabeth started as the governor's daughter in a corset and ended as a pirate king with a sword in her hand. The trilogy grossed billions. Keira, still barely out of her teens, became one of the most recognisable actors in the world.

A different performer might have ridden that wave forever. Knightley swerved into something riskier. At 20, she took on Elizabeth Bennet in Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*, giving Austen's heroine a modern wit and defiance that earned her an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress and made her one of the youngest nominees in that category. Two years later she starred in *Atonement*,

wearing that now mythic green silk dress, delivering a performance that was all brittle glamour and repressed feeling while the world fell apart around her. Later came *The Imitation Game*, which brought a second Oscar nomination, this time for Best Supporting Actress

as codebreaker Joan Clarke. By her mid-twenties, she had become that rare thing, a bankable box office name who was also taken seriously in the awards race.

From the outside it looked like a dream career on fast forward. Inside, it was costing her. Knightley has since spoken with striking honesty about the toll that level of fame took on her mental health. In her early twenties, she was followed daily by packs of photographers, sometimes 20 or more at a time, shouted at and baited so that any moment of distress could be captured and sold. "I did have a mental breakdown at 22," she has said. "I took a year off and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder because of all that stuff." She has described feeling "worthless" and learning that "it was big money to get pictures of women falling apart", part of an era that fed on tearing young female stars to pieces.

"I've chosen to have children, I want to bring them up, so I've had to take a major step back,"





Parisa Toghizadeh/Netflix © 2025



Parisa Toghizadeh/Netflix © 2025

The way she tells it, there was a point when the paparazzi simply moved in. “I remember waking up one day and there were 10 men outside my front door, and they didn’t leave for about five years,” she recalled recently. They rented flats opposite her house, shouted abuse to provoke reactions, and turned her daily walk into a gauntlet. In another interview, she summed up the effect in one blunt line: “I did go mad. Believe me. I went mad. I just managed to hide it.”

The next phase of her career was deliberate. Instead of chasing another massive franchise, she turned towards smaller and more political projects. In *Colette*, she played the French writer whose husband published her work under his own name, then fought her for ownership when she began to claim it back. In *Misbehaviour*, she joined an ensemble bringing to life the women who stormed the 1970 Miss World stage in protest at the

beauty industry and its double standards. In *Official Secrets*, she portrayed whistleblower Katharine Gun, who leaked a memo exposing attempts to drum up support for the Iraq war. These were not just interesting characters; they were women pushing back against systems built to silence them.

Off-screen, Knightley also began using her platform to talk about how women are portrayed and how we talk about mental health. She has criticised the casual use of sexual violence as a lazy plot device, and she has spoken about the damage done by phrases like “man up”, saying they have contributed to a “mental health crisis” by teaching people to shut down instead of speak out. She is equally direct about motherhood. “I don’t think we give women enough credit for the physical and emotional marathon they go through when becoming a mother,” she has said, pointing out that the endless nights and the invisible labour are “quite extraordinary”.

Alongside all of that, life shifted in quieter ways. Knightley married musician James Righton in 2013. They now have two daughters, and by her own account, that changed everything. She stepped back from the relentless pace of Hollywood and based herself firmly in London, becoming more selective about what was worth the time away from home. “I’ve chosen to have children, I want to bring them up, so I’ve had to take a major step back,” she said last year, explaining that she can no longer bounce from job to job overseas and has no desire to anyway.

What she built instead was a different kind of creative life. There was television, with the stylish spy series *Black Doves*, which reminded audiences how good she is as a grown-up lead with secrets to keep. There were smaller films like *Boston Strangler*, where she played a reporter piecing together a serial killer case while fighting innuendo and institutional sexism. And there was drawing.

Knightley has dyslexia, something she has spoken about often, and she has developed a very particular way of learning lines. “I draw when I learn my lines,” she told *The Guardian*. “They’re normally old men’s faces with very detailed lines. I think it’s because I’m dyslexic, I have to get the words off the page as quickly as possible.” She records the whole script as audio, listens back while she sketches and lets the dialogue soak in. Friends and family now send her photographs of interesting faces, knowing they might be turned into another wrinkled old man in the margins of a script. She has described the process as putting her into “a really meditative state”, the opposite of the red-carpet chaos that once defined her.

Those sketches have taken on a life of their own. Knightley has turned the bedtime drawings she created for her eldest daughter, who was anxious about the arrival of a younger sibling, into a children’s book called *I Love You Just the Same*. “It was a book that I made originally for my daughter,” she explained. “She wasn’t sleeping, and we did this bedtime routine where I drew her a picture at night... when she woke up in the middle of the night, she’d know that I’d been thinking about her because there’d be a drawing.” What began as a love heart grew into a cast of girls, sisters, birds and cats. At one point, her daughter mischievously requested that the bird carry the baby away; Keira thought it was “the most genius thing” she had ever heard from a five-year-old, and realised there was a story there.

Which brings us back to *The Woman in Cabin 10*. On the surface it is pure entertainment, a tightly wound thriller on a boat, with Knightley’s *Lo Blacklock* trying to work out whether she really saw a body or whether someone is manipulating her perception. Look a little closer and it sits neatly inside the themes that have defined Keira’s second act. Here is a woman who has survived a traumatic break-in, who lives with anxiety, who drinks too much, whose own brain sometimes feels like a hostile witness. She is surrounded by people with money and power who tell her that what she saw is impossible and inconvenient. They angle for her to doubt herself. They encourage her to calm

down, have a drink, get some sleep. The film turns that all-too-familiar experience into a thriller, but for many women the echo of real life is hard to miss.

Filming it was not the glamorous yacht holiday it looks like on screen. Much of the production took place on the real superyacht *Savannah* in the English Channel. Cast and crew had to follow strict rules to avoid damaging the multi-million-dollar vessel. Tripods and lighting stands were banned from delicate surfaces, and a single scratch on the floor could cost hundreds to fix. Keira joked that the experience gave her a whole new kind of “PTSD”, saying the team spent weeks “crammed into tiny spaces”, forbidden to touch the carpets and unable to sit on any of the furniture unless the cameras were rolling. The fantasy on screen is smooth Champagne and teak decks; the reality was sandwiches in corners and constantly worrying about a US\$200,000 rug.

The film has promptly thrown her back into the centre of the cultural conversation: press days, late-night talk shows, red carpets. At the 2025 Golden Globes, she appeared with a sharp new bob and a feathered black Chanel gown, looking every bit the European movie star while chatting cheerfully about gaslighting and fake blood. She remains a Chanel ambassador, but these days the campaigns sit alongside interviews where she talks about dyslexia, children’s bedtime routines and banning social media at home to protect her daughters from what she calls a “terrifying” and “unregulated” online world. What makes this moment feel like a comeback is not that Keira Knightley ever truly went away. It is that the industry has moved enough for the stories she wants to tell to sit at the centre rather than the edge. *The Woman in Cabin 10* is a glossy global Netflix release carried entirely on the shoulders of a 40-year-old woman who has made no secret of the fact that she values her sanity over fame. The surrounding noise is no longer about her weight, or who she is dating, or how quickly a photographer can make her cry. It is about the work, the roles, the strange little drawings in the margins of the script that helped bring a character to life.

“I remember waking up one day and there were 10 men outside my front door, and they didn’t leave for about five years.”

The Deepest Sleeps

What is the number one hobby of the rich?

Making luxurious holes in the ground in Queenstown and planning for the end of the world. Currently my own personal prepper plans involve bottles of water and a box of tinned food I already can't stand the idea of eating.

But when I holiday I practice the underground lifestyle. I train my body under harsh five star conditions with tons of rocks and dirt suspended over me. I did all this in service of finding the best places to rest and recreate knowing that one day I'd have to write this article.



InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland

DEPTH: 88 METRES

Perhaps the most visible example right now of below-ground architecture is the InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland, which if you hadn't guessed by the name is based in China, a short drive from Shanghai. Much of the hotel is in fact, above ground, but it manages to get in on a technicality as it is built into the side of an abandoned quarry making it the deepest 5 star hotel.

The establishment is slick, and right from the get-go it leans into its subterranean roots with a bronze layered lobby. At the very bottom is an underwater restaurant, giving diners some of the most excellent views of sealife. If this is your thing there's also an aquarium suite for someone who prefers to watch fish in private. Every room faces out from the rock face, over the lake, to the opposite side, which at night is adorned with laser light and projection shows. While you're there be sure to visit the award winning Cai Feng Lou Chinese restaurant.

While it may not be buried, it makes full use of glass floors in the elevators and sky bridges above the quarry to ensure your fear of heights is being triggered at all times.



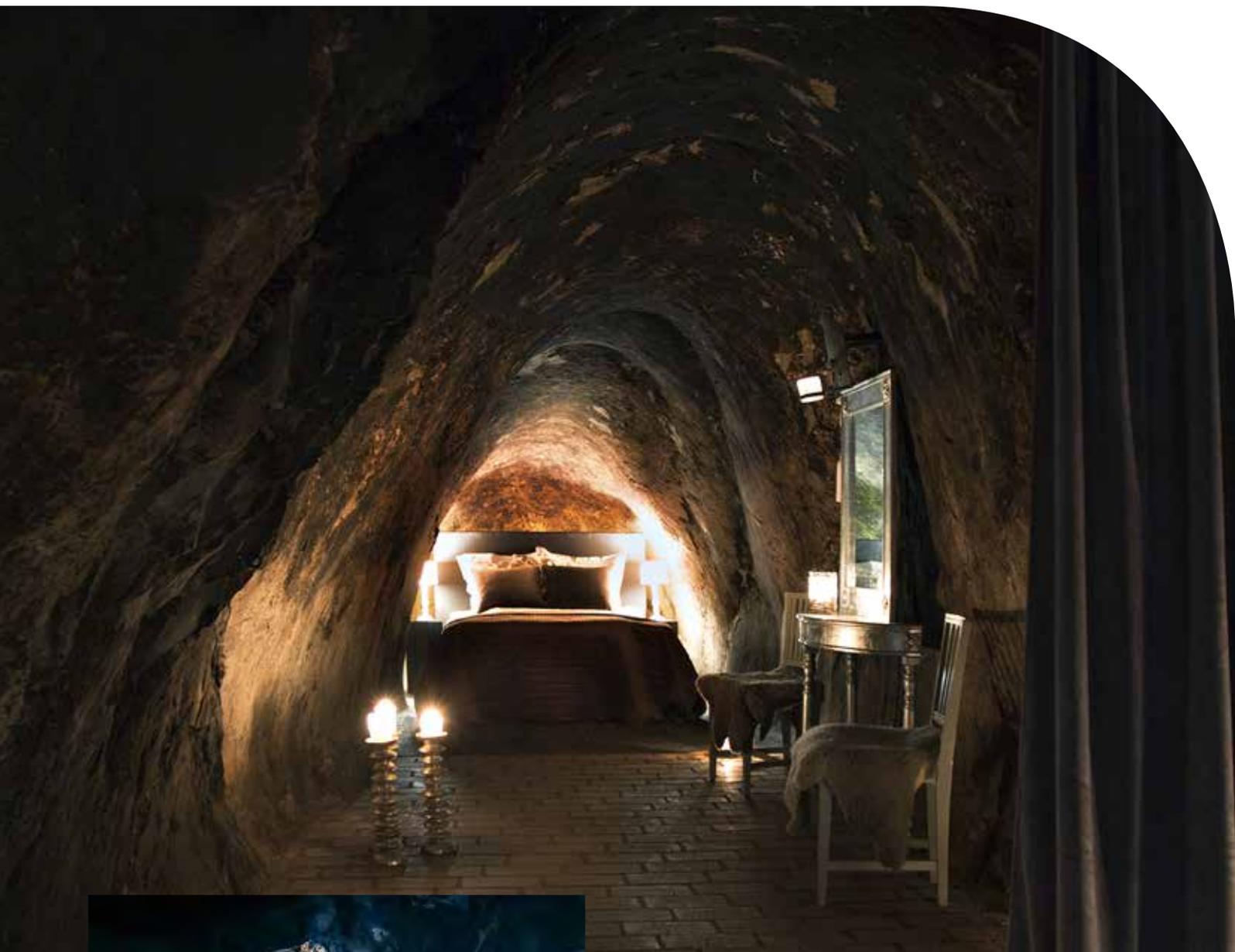


Grand Canyon Caverns Hotel

DEPTH: 73 METRES

In Northern Arizona an old cave that had been designated a fallout shelter in 1961 got a new lease of life after the cold war when the Grand Canyon Caverns & Inn above it turned it into a hotel for one lucky couple a night. The living space itself is on a plinth in the middle of a large cave with the roof looming 22 metres above. It looks like someone chopped an entire living room setup out of a house and plonked it in the middle of a cave. They make a lot of bold promises about it being the oldest, deepest (not quite), darkest, and quietest hotel stay in the world. They say quietest but usage of the space is limited due to the fact most of the time tour groups are tromping past it, and with no walls to speak of, you're going to be somewhat exposed lounging in it, so it's for evenings only.





Sala Silver Mine Hotel

DEPTH: 155 METRES

Found in the Swedish town of Sala the old silver mine used to be the largest mine in the country, and has existed for over 500 years. It used to be called the country's treasure chest due to how much silver came out of it. Today it plays host to balls, functions, and up until late last year even an overnight stay for people looking for a unique accommodation experience. Before the closure the guide would leave you down there at 155 metres with a food basket and then pick you up again in the morning. I'm just writing this so next time someone generates an article using Chat-GPT about the "future growth potential" of this place they know that it is in fact just a storage room now. Tours are still alive and well though, with an elevator down for people who don't want to do too much clambering.

Deep Sleep

DEPTH: 419 METRES

The United Kingdom might offer one of the deepest sleeping experiences in the world. 419 metres underground in an abandoned slate mine is a natty little cabin that must have been a real pain to put together. From the entrance near the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog it takes almost an hour of hiking underground to reach your destination. Along the way you'll find abandoned tracks, swing bridges, minercarts and dozens of winding cave systems to get lost in. To get there you need to book with Go Below Adventures and they give you the caving experience of a lifetime. There's no previous experience required and they aren't going to force you into any nightmare fuel style squeezed gaps. But you will be able to go abseiling and other kinds of traversal along with your accommodation, two meals, and tour. You might even climb a waterfall and take the longest underground zipline spanning 130 feet. The food underground isn't gourmet, but it gets the job done, and the hotel is set within a row of raised lodges and common area within the center of a large cave. Temperatures sit as low as 10° so stay rugged up. It's only available once a week and in the morning you get an 8am wakeup and a slow ascent to the surface where you get to see the sun once again.



Felsenhotel La Claustra

Perhaps the highest deepest hotel is the 4-star Felsenhotel La Claustra hotel 2,050 metres above sea level in the San Gottardo Area of the Swiss Alps. The rock rock carve-outs are rough, but it juxtaposes nicely with the new accommodations placed inside it. It also has a Turkish steam room and seasonal pool. While you're in the area go check out Furka Pass, the winding alpine road made famous by James Bond in Goldfinger. It's an incredible sight, and is home to the now abandoned Hotel Belvédère, which is perched on the cliff wrapped by one of the roads many hairpins. It's a beautiful old place, and it's a shame it had to shut its doors in 2016. I'll have to console myself with a spa in the Alps before retiring to my bunker.



The Gift of New Zealand's Art Story

For most of us, a visit to Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki is an occasional weekend outing. For Greg Moyle, it became a long-term habit that has now reshaped the national art story.



Moyle isn't a curator or an art-world insider. He's a financial adviser, a former Auckland City councillor and a long-time community figure who grew up in Grey Lynn. His professional life has revolved around numbers and public service, and alongside that he spent more than fifty years buying New Zealand art simply because it mattered to him.

In the process, he has built one of the most wide-ranging private collections of twentieth-century New Zealand art. Now, 20 of those works are heading into public hands. Through a bequest arranged with the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation, Moyle has pledged a group of paintings that would usually sit well beyond a gallery's acquisition budget, ensuring they stay together and stay visible, instead of disappearing into private auctions and living room walls. Moyle's promised bequest brings together a who's who of twentieth-century and contemporary New Zealand art. The

group includes works by Rita Angus, Frances Hodgkins, Ralph Hotere, Jacqueline Fahey, Louise Henderson, Raymond McIntyre, Michael Smither, John Pule and others, spanning from around 1913 to 2007.

Moyle's interest in art began at Mount Albert Grammar School, where his Year 9 art teacher was celebrated sculptor and educator Arnold Manaaki Wilson. Later, as a young accountant in Newmarket with an antiques dealer across the road, he started buying works whenever he could. The rule was simple: only what he liked, and only what he could afford.

"For me, purchasing a piece of art is an emotional experience," he says. "While I am not an artist, my appreciation of art has developed over the last fifty years. I count myself fortunate that circumstances have enabled me to assemble a unique collection of artwork that I have been able to share with my family, friends and the wider community."

The bequest has been carefully selected with the Gallery's curatorial team to complement existing holdings and to fill gaps in the story of New Zealand art. It also responds to something Moyle has watched with concern over the years.

"Over the years, I have witnessed a number of important collections, including works that should remain in the public domain, being sold," he says. "I am motivated to keep the important items from my collection together for the benefit of the community, including my family, rather than having them sold upon my death, and I am delighted that they will find a permanent home with Auckland Art Gallery."

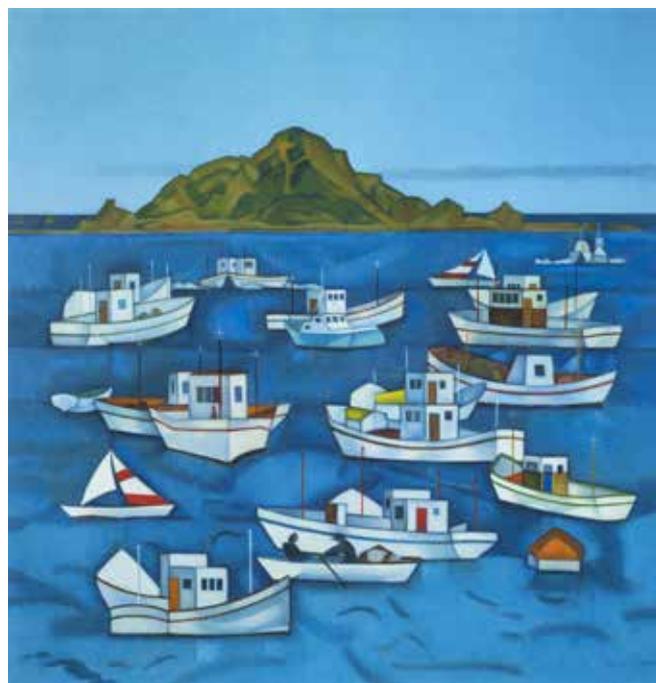
At the centre of the gift is Rita Angus's *Boats, Island Bay, 1968*, an oil on board that shows fishing boats and a headland at Island Bay in Wellington. It is a clear, structured coastal scene from the late period of one of New Zealand's most influential painters, and exactly the sort of major work that would usually

Opposite Page: Russell Clark, *The Shearer's Wife, 1952*. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, promised gift of Greg J Moyle Foundation through the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation.

Above: John Pule, *Higher Ground, Lower Ground, 2007*. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, promised gift of Greg J Moyle Foundation through the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation



Frances Hodgkins, *Chapel in the Field, Corfe Castle*, 1944. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, promised gift of Greg J Moyle Foundation through the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation



Rita Angus, *Boats, Island Bay*, 1968, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, promised gift of Greg J Moyle Foundation through the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation

be well beyond a public gallery's purchasing budget. Two other Angus works join it:

Evening View from the Studio, a watercolour and pencil study from around 1961–62, and *Houses*, Wellington, a 1964 watercolour that records the city's built landscape.

Frances Hodgkins, one of New Zealand's most important expatriate artists, is represented by two late career works made in England: *Chapel in the Field, Corfe Castle*, 1944, a gouache showing a church building in its rural setting, and *The River Tone, Somerset*, c.1939, a watercolour and gouache on paper view of riverbank and landscape. Together, they give a concise view of her mature style and overseas practice.

From the same broad period, Raymond McIntyre's *Evening, Chelsea Embankment*, c.1913, and *Woman in Chiffon Jacket*, c.1914, both oil on board, add early twentieth-century portrait and city scenes to the Gallery's holdings. Lois White's *News*, c.1939, oil on cardboard, shows figures grouped around a newspaper, capturing a moment of shared attention in the pre-digital era. Bessie Christie's *Knitting for Soldiers*, c.1949, oil on card, records women knitting for troops, anchoring the collection in the social history of the mid-century home front.

The bequest also strengthens the representation of key post-war and later modernist painters.

Russell Clark's *Maquettes and Carvings*, c.1950, oil on board, shows sculptural models and carvings in a studio context, while *The Shearer's Wife*, 1952, oil on board, presents a rural subject that reflects Clark's interest in everyday New Zealand life. Louise Henderson's *April* 1987 oil on canvas gives a late example of her structured, modernist approach to form and colour.

Jacqueline Fahey's "Augusta and Voss," 1962, oil on board, depicts two of her daughters in a matter-of-fact domestic setting, typical of her interest in family life and interiors. Kingseat, *Early Spring*, c. 1976, oil on board, draws its subject from the grounds of the former Kingseat psychiatric hospital, linking landscape to institutional history in a direct, observational manner.

Two works by Ralph Hotere, *Binisafua*, 1978, and *Menorca*, 1978, both oil on unstretched canvas, come from a series associated with his time in Spain's Balearic Islands. Their format and surfaces reflect his ongoing interest in materials and support, while the titles link them to specific places.

Michael Smither's *Boys Fighting over Pink Gun*, 1978, oil on board, shows two boys and a toy gun in a setting that includes domestic and industrial elements, a straightforward yet charged scene that has become one of his best-known works. Richard Lovell-Smith's *Oasis*, 1958, oil on canvas, and Douglas MacDiarmid's *Pataclaq (Street Gamblers, Bahamas)*, 1976, oil on canvas, introduce additional landscape and international subject matter.

The most recent work in the bequest is John Pule's *Higher Ground, Lower Ground*, 2007, a large acrylic, enamel, pastel and ink on canvas. It brings Pacific and migrant narratives into the group and shows contemporary practice alongside the earlier twentieth-century works.

In total, the bequest covers more than a century of art making in New Zealand and beyond, with a strong representation of women artists, major modernists and later contemporary voices. It continues a long tradition of philanthropy at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and ensures that these works will be conserved and accessible to the public rather than dispersed behind closed walls.

The gift will be celebrated in a dedicated exhibition at the Gallery, opening 23 May 2026.

Right: Raymond McIntyre, *Woman in Chiffon Jacket*, c.1914. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, promised gift of Greg J Moyle Foundation through the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation



FASHION



RESORT TO THIS

CAMILLA AND
MARC present its
Resort 26 Collection,
a poetic exploration
of the enduring
beauty of the natural
world, and the study
of sculpture, time,
and transformation.



SPOTTED

LAWRENCE IN LONGINES

Jennifer Lawrence, attended the premiere of her film *Die, My Love* on Monday evening at the 2025 Rome Film Festival.

She was wearing the new Longines PrimaLuna (ref. L8.126.o.71.6).

SPOTTED

TAKING THE COACH

Model Bella Hadid wears the Coach Tabby 26 Shoulder Bag in Loved Leather showcasing Coach's newest little black bag during Paris Fashion Week.



Tabby 26 Shoulder Bag in Loved Leather - \$895

MIU

MUSE

Miu Miu launches its 2025 holiday campaign, shot by Angela Hill and featuring Gigi Hadid, Dede Mansro, Viola Sharp and Ju Xiaowen.

A discreet sparkle lifts looks created for the festive season: crumpled and embroidered duchesse satin in soft shades, patchworked shearling, glitter and sequin embellished knits, liquid bias-cut satins, lingerie-inspired stretch georgette and ultra-feminine prints.

Signature moccasins, loafers, slippers and ballerinas are contrasted with knee-high stretch leather designs first seen on the Fall-Winter runway, ultra-flat sneakers and pointed-toe, grosgrain trimmed pumps with a high or kitten heel. Bags include the iconic Wander, Arcadie, Pocket, Beau, Solitaire and the backpack in classic colors and - for the holidays - seasonal red.

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: MIUCCIA PRADA | PHOTOGRAPHY: ANGELA HILL | STYLING: LOTTA VOLKOVA

CAST: GIGI HADID, DEDE MANSRO, VIOLA SHARP AND JU XIAOWEN







INTRODUCING

EVERMORE MI PIACI

Mi Piaci unveils Evermore, a refined bridal collection designed to accompany every step of a bride's journey. Thoughtfully curated, the edit celebrates romance, elegance, and timeless design - crafted to be cherished long after the wedding day.

The collection begins with playful heels, perfect for bachelorette celebrations, before moving into delicate kitten heels that bring romance to bridal showers and fittings. The journey culminates in statement heels - silhouettes designed to shine as she walks down the aisle, carrying her with confidence and grace into her next chapter.

Each pair has been crafted with luxurious materials, refined details, and timeless silhouettes, making them enduring keepsakes.







INTRODUCING

SUNSTRUCK MERCHANT 1948

Sunstruck, Merchant 1948's SS25 campaign invites to a cruiser less ordinary life. Designed to capture the carefree spirit of long days and golden evenings, the collection celebrates effortless style, made for every moment under the sun.

Inspired by coastal living, the collection showcases woven textures and airy open weaves that embody the relaxed ease of the season. The campaign includes sculptural sandals and modern thong styles, crafted for everything from leisurely brunches to sun-soaked strolls.

From fisherman sandals reimagined with a contemporary edge to statement-making, party-ready silhouettes, Sunstruck reflects the brand's balance of timeless design and modern flair. Studs, eyelets, and buttery-soft leathers deliver a sense of subtle boldness, while layered wedges and satin finishes offer understated elevation.

With versatility at its core, the SS25 collection is designed to move seamlessly through the season, whether it's a weekend escape, a summer soirée, or a quiet afternoon by the coast.

Merchant 1948's Sunstruck collection is available now in stores across New Zealand and online at merchant1948.co.nz

Cora Wedge Sandal

Dress up any outfit this season with CORA. this head turning wedge will compliment your wardrobe with a softly rounded toe and comfortable adjustable ankle strap that rests on a mid-height wrapped wedge. Slip them on with everything from midi skirts to tailored pants.

RRP\$259.90





Left: Dottie Sandal

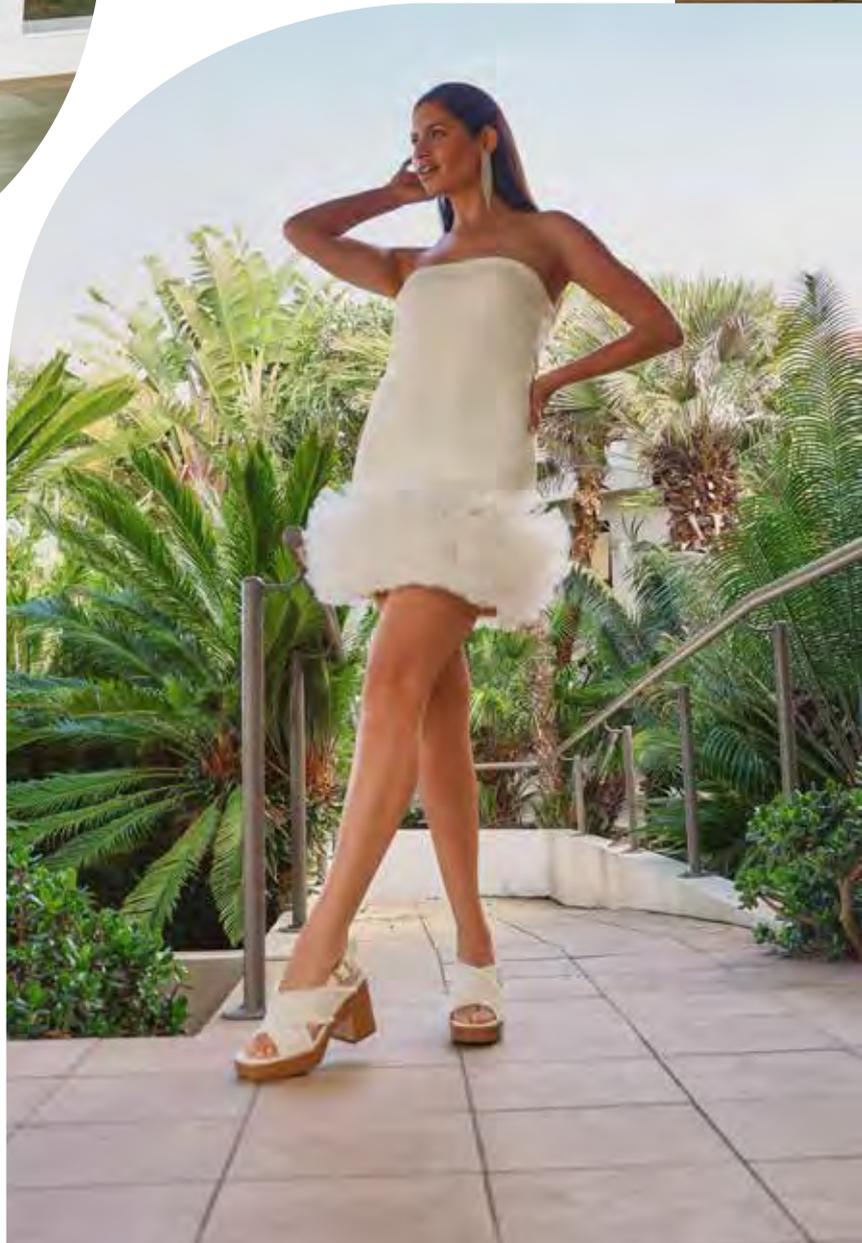
Discover the latest kitten heel mule, DOTTIE featuring a softly square toe shape, leather upper, resting on sublime underfoot padding. Style with anything from denim, to tailoring or linen.

RRP\$249.90

Below: Stephanie Platform Sandal

Step into style with our high-heeled platform sandal Stephanie, featuring crisscross textured straps and a sleek ankle buckle. Perfect for adding a modern twist to warm-weather looks, it's a standout piece that balances comfort with bold charm.

RRP\$259.90



Andre Sneaker

Crafted from leather and are designed with an on trend weave detail and a low profile rubber sole. Perfect for casual Monday-to-Sunday styling.

RRP \$189.90



Left: River Platform Sandal

Featuring a cork platform and heel, this standout design combines comfort with charm. The black fabric with white polka dots is accented by a flirty bow and a wraparound ankle tie, making it the perfect choice for summer soirées and statement looks.

RRP\$239.90

Below: Caleb Sandal

Pair Caleb with linen pants or flowy maxi dresses, to provide height and elongate your silhouette.

RRP\$249.90



Above: Pluto Sandal

Featuring intricately woven straps and cushioned footbeds on a sturdy platform sole, these sandals offer both height and stability and bring texture and vibrancy to any outfit.

RRP \$249.90





This Page: Stella Tennant for *Mirabella Magazine*, 1997.

GLEN LUCHFORD

The Photographer Every Creative Wants to Be

Earlier this northern autumn, Milan quietly reminded everyone why it still sets the pace in fashion imagery. At 10 Corso Como, Glen Luchford's first solo exhibition, Atlas, pulled three decades of work into one space and one mood. It has now wrapped, but the echo of it is still moving through studios, group chats and moodboards everywhere. For anyone in fashion or visual culture, it was a reminder of just how much of our shared visual language can be traced back to one quiet British photographer.

PICTURES COURTESY OF © GLEN LUCHFORD

Atlas was never meant to be a polite retrospective. Conceived and designed by Luchford himself, it played out like a slipstream through his head large-format prints, layered works, collages, iconic campaigns, personal images, outtakes and so-called mistakes all piled into one continuous flow. He has described his universe as a “visual orgy,” and the show leaned into that description with intent. You weren’t just looking at finished images; you were dropped into the mess of experimentation that produces them.

For many visitors, there was also a moment of recognition. You might not have known his name, but you had seen his eye. Those moody Prada campaigns from the late 1990s that felt like stills from a European art film. The Gucci images that made luxury look like a strange, beautiful hallucination. The editorials where models look less like mannequins and more like characters caught in the middle of a story. All of that is Luchford.

His path into that position was anything but conventional. He left school young, taught himself photography and first surfaced in the pages of *The Face*, the cult British style magazine that defined a generation. He started shooting bands, street kids, early Kate Moss. What marked him even then was a sense of cinema in the work the feeling that whatever you were seeing on the page was part of a larger, unseen narrative.

In interviews, he has talked about an





Above: Gucci SS17 campaign

Left: Glen Luchford. Atlas, collage, Malgosia Bela for Self Service Magazine, 2011

Far Left: Another Magazine, 2011

early job with a band where he stuck rigidly to his plan and ignored a wilder suggestion from them. The pictures were fine, but not special, and it stung. His takeaway was simple and has guided him ever since you have to be looser on set, more open to what unfolds in front of you. That looseness has become one of his trademarks. His most powerful photographs feel controlled and chaotic at the same time, as if the whole scene might collapse one second after the shutter clicks.

Of course, looseness is only possible if there is serious craft underneath it. Technically, Luchford's work is meticulous. He is known for building complex lighting setups that create atmosphere rather than just brightness. Instead of freezing everything with a blast of flash, he often uses continuous light sources, longer exposures and just enough movement to keep the frames alive. There is an almost cinematic patience to it lights nudged a fraction, colours of gels shifted slightly, models asked to hold a pose long enough for tension to creep into the body.

On big campaigns in the late 1990s and 2000s, sets could take hours to light and

refine before a single usable shot was taken. It is part of why his images feel like film stills rather than traditional fashion shots. The background is never just a backdrop. It is a real space, with its own weather and mood. You sense something has just happened off-camera, or is about to.

That cinematic pull comes directly from his own obsessions. As a child, watching *Taxi Driver* for the first time was a kind of epiphany. The way a film could make a city feel beautiful, dangerous and lonely all at once hit him hard. Add in teenage years steeped in British punk and skate culture, and you start to understand why his work never looks too polished, even when the clothes are. There is always a little grit at the edges, a feeling that the people in his pictures have lives outside the frame.

The Prada campaigns of the late 1990s are a good example of how all of this converges. Instead of the standard glossy perfection of luxury advertising at the time, he gave Prada murky skies, strange angles, awkward pauses and characters who looked like they were thinking about something other than the bag on their arm. In later years he admitted that



even he was surprised by how often people still return to those images, saying there is “something about them that people want to go back to and keep looking at.” That addictive quality lies in the atmosphere more than the clothes.

His work with Gucci under Alessandro Michele did something similar for a new generation. The campaigns looked like fragments of half-forgotten films: retro cars, faux sci-fi landscapes, tigers, teenagers and Hollywood references all colliding in one frame. Behind the scenes, he pushed for old-school techniques wherever he could. For one film, inspired by the stop-motion monsters of Ray Harryhausen, the team used practical animation rather than slick CGI. On set, models had to react to a man with a stick and a tennis ball standing in for a dinosaur’s head. The result was imperfect and strange in exactly the right way.

That willingness to blend analogue craft and new technology is very much where Luchford lives now. He is not nostalgic about the past; if anything, he is hungry

for what comes next. He has spoken about how digging through his archive can feel tedious, and that he is more excited by new cameras, new formats, new ways of moving images rather than just freezing them. This is part of why Atlas ended with a room of his fashion films, allowing visitors to see how his still image sensibility spills into motion.

Alongside all of this, there is the simple fact of career gravity. Over the last thirty years Luchford has shot for British Vogue, French Vogue, Vanity Fair and countless other titles. He has worked with Prada, Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Lanvin, Miu Miu, Chloé, Calvin Klein. His photographs sit in the collections of major museums around the world. Yet he has never lost that slightly outsider energy of the skate kid and film obsessive who taught himself how to make a camera feel like a storytelling tool.

What really makes him the photographer every creative references, though, is not the client list or the museum credentials. It is the way his images have quietly

Left: Tim Roth for Arena Magazine, 1993

Right: Kate Moss, 1989

shifted our idea of beauty. Before Luchford, a lot of luxury fashion photography aimed at an impossible, distant perfection. After Luchford, it became easier to show a crease, a shadow, a fleeting expression. He has helped dismantle the idea that fashion imagery has to be smooth and impenetrable, bringing it closer to something everyday and real, without ever losing its magic.

For M2woman readers who care about the culture around fashion as much as the clothes themselves, this is why his recent Milan exhibition mattered. Atlas may have been on for a brief moment in one gallery, but the work inside it has been living in our heads for years. It lives in the lighting references sent around before a shoot, the moodboards taped up in studios, the way younger

photographers talk about wanting images that feel like "a scene from a film" rather than a lookbook.

Luchford once described the show as a way of pulling his whole world into one place so people could see the connections for themselves. Taken that way, Atlas was less a victory lap and more a map skate parks

to Prada, punk gigs to Gucci, teenage film obsession to global campaigns. If you work in images, you have probably stolen from that map already. If you simply love fashion, chances are you have been moved by a Glen Luchford picture without even knowing it.

And that is the real measure of a legend. Not just that everyone knows his name, but that his way of seeing has quietly become part of how we all see.



DESIGNING A LIFE:

TURET KNUEFERMANN REFLECTS ON 20 YEARS IN FASHION

Two decades into her label, Turet Knuefermann is not interested in fashion as noise. Her world is built far more quietly, in fittings where women exhale, in conversations about real lives rather than trends, in the small daily decisions that slowly add up to a kind of armour. Her brand has grown largely through word of mouth, one woman recommending another, proof that what she is really designing is trust as much as clothing.

CREATIVE DIRECTION: OSBORNE SHIWAN

PHOTOGRAPHER: DANILO DAVID

MODEL: PETRA LEARY

When she looks back, the milestones that stand out are not the obvious ones. It is the tough conversations, the tax meetings, the late nights before a show, the courage to open her own store and curate pieces directly for the women she was getting to know. Each challenge has been a lesson in resilience and a reminder of how “colourful” life can be when work and pleasure blur into the same thing. For Turet, the store became a living studio, a place to listen, to solve problems and to see how her clients actually move through their days.

Her collections now carry that lived-in wisdom. The silhouettes are more refined, the design more assured, but the core feeling has not changed: femininity, quality, ease and a quiet confidence that does not need a spotlight. Beneath it all is a very personal philosophy about beauty, grounded in authenticity, strength and self-acceptance. As she marks 20 years in business, we sat down with Turet to talk about the real work behind KNUEFERMANN, the relationships that have sustained it, the legacy she hopes to leave for the women who wear her clothes and the next generation who are watching.

Twenty years on, when you look back at the arc of your career - from those first sketches to where your label stands today - what moments feel most defining, and what do they reveal about who you've become?

Looking back over 20 years, there have been so many defining moments because of the vast lessons that come with the variety of challenges that every entrepreneur faces - from taxes to putting together a show, navigating systems and aspiring to consistently improve. Every small challenge successfully overcome feels like a moment and a journey: each experience taught me about resilience, but mostly feeling privileged to have such a colourful life filled with getting to see the world and gain amazing friendships. These moments reveal my growth as both a designer and a person - instilling in me a deep appreciation for the journey and the unwavering support from my wonderful clientele and people I have been able to work with along the way. Opening the store gave me the freedom to curate items with and for the people I meet and get to know. To provide solutions and gain such an insight into how people live, and to share, is truly special.



Every designer evolves. How has your creative process - and what inspires you - shifted as your life, brand, and responsibilities have grown?

Over the years, my creative process has become more collaborative. It has always incorporated thoughtful consideration of sustainability and the needs of my clients to encompass narratives of strength and femininity; however, as I have had more growth, I have had more opportunity to diversify my product range and work with experts in their respective fields to develop and improve what we craft.

Was there ever a moment you almost walked away? What helped you find your footing again when things felt uncertain or overwhelming?

I am constantly evaluating, and with becoming a mum, it made me question where I need to be... However, I realise every time that this is where I want to be and I feel it is the biggest privilege to be allowed to share so many great relationships and learn together in this way.

Your collections carry a sense of quiet confidence - timeless yet unmistakably modern. How do you balance intuition with discipline when you're creating something new?

Creating a collection involves both intuition and discipline. I approach each project with a sense of playfulness, yet I also establish a framework to guide my ideas in that they need to provide a solution for my customer. This balance allows creativity to flourish while ensuring that the final pieces resonate with my brand's ethos of confident modernity. My clientele is forward-thinking, busy and modern in the way they live, so what I create is always a reflection of the time we live in and the stage of life in which the customers I have been serving are at.

Fashion can be deeply emotional work. What role does beauty play in your daily practice? Is it a pursuit, a philosophy, or something you stumble upon in the process?

Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder... as cheesy as it sounds, and transcends aesthetics. What we find beautiful shifts dramatically



throughout our lives and is also heavily influenced by our upbringing and environment. For me, beauty is in uniqueness, simplicity and the calm. Things or people who have a strong sense of self - often self-acceptance or strength. For me, beauty comes from authenticity and is often raw and unworked.

Yes, it's a pursuit... to encourage the craft of design and surround myself more and more with beauty, be it nature, architecture or music, as well as fashion and what we choose to wear. The philosophy: to make considered decisions, from how we live to what we choose in every aspect of our lives. It's a philosophy rooted in creating garments that empower women. My daily practice involves surrounding myself with inspiring details, whether in nature or art, which fuels my desire to bring beauty into the lives of my clients.

Many creative leaders describe their work as a kind of dialogue with fabric, form, and feeling. What does that inner dialogue sound like for you today, compared to twenty years ago?

I think the dialogue hasn't changed, but because I have, what is produced has become more classic. The essence of what creates this feeling is the same today as when I started: feminine, quality fabrics, but I like to think it is more refined now, a little more secure.

Leading a creative business demands both artistry and acumen. What have you learned about leadership - especially as a woman - over two decades of building something that lasts?

Not every opportunity is a good one. Stick to your knitting and do what you love. Every day. Consistency. Small amounts add up to a lot in every respect.

As your team and influence have expanded, how do you nurture creativity and inclusion while keeping the business grounded in its founding values?

As our team grows, I prioritise open communication and encourage diverse perspectives. Staying grounded in our founding values - honesty, quality and support - reminds

Knotted shirt in
fine SilkCotton
Shirting \$430 &
Kasia Pant \$289



us why we began this journey and helps maintain our creative spirit. I love to find the uniqueness in everyone and teaming with those who have complementary talents.

Over two decades, you've navigated both fashion's glamour and its grit. What has leadership looked like for you behind the scenes, especially as a creative founder balancing artistry with business realities?

Behind the scenes, leadership looks like a constant balancing act. I strive to nurture a creative atmosphere while maintaining laser focus on business realities. The grit of the industry teaches me that resilience is as critical as creativity. However, I have never thought of myself as a leader, and I prefer to work with people who take the initiative to see what is possible and take action in this direction. I have been lucky enough to have become surrounded by such incredible people.

You've cultivated a loyal following - women who understand and feel your aesthetic. How would you describe your relationship with your audience, and how has it shaped your evolution as a designer?

I love to listen to what people need so it's easy to respond to this. With the brand having little publicity and it being largely word of mouth, I have definitely felt a warmth and kindness flow into the store, which inspires me to work even harder to aspire to improve with every collection in order to give back.

My relationship with my audience is one of mutual respect and admiration. It's been shaped by their feedback and support, which allows me to refine my vision continuously. Knowing I design for intelligent, strong women instills me with purpose.



Pure silk Palomino
Dress \$550 & Go To
Leather Jacket \$1,500



Francoise
Jacket in Alpaca
Bouclé \$900

What does legacy mean to you now? Is it about craftsmanship, culture, or the kind of example you set for the next generation?

As time goes by, legacy has become more a sense of wanting to help, lift, and tread lightly on our environment. A desire to bring a sense of joy through helping people feel like themselves with what they choose to wear. To have confidence to express themselves more and to be content.

Legacy, to me, is about creating a lasting impact, not just through craftsmanship but through the ability to inspire future generations. I hope to foster a culture of empowerment and creativity that endures beyond my own career.



Oversized Coat
in Cashmere
Wool \$1,200 &
Mesh Skirt \$195

Behind the atelier doors, there's also family, life, and the quiet moments in between. How have you learned to create space for yourself - and for the people who anchor you?

I love the contrasts: the adrenaline of being busy with a huge variety of tasks and then a super-relaxing Sunday in nature, enjoying the simple life. I start my days quietly and allow enough time to get ready at a leisurely pace to feel set up for the day and try to avoid looking at the phone, and then go as fast as possible - followed by a relaxing dinner with family or friends... then catch-ups when everyone is asleep if necessary so that I have a clear head for the next day. It doesn't always work but mostly...

I cherish family time and try to be absolutely present during those times.

Family, team, clientele - your world spans generations. What have these relationships taught you about endurance, grace, and growth?

The relationships I've built over the years have taught me the essence of endurance and grace. Each interaction, whether with family, team, or clients, reinforces the idea that growth is often a collective journey.

What rituals or mantras keep you centred when the pace quickens or the pressure mounts?

I do love a wine. It's an instant fix for any emotional pressure, so I deem it a healthy solution.

And finally, if you could impart one truth or piece of advice to your younger self, what would you say?

Don't make big financial decisions on the spot. Sleep on it.

Living

As good as the classic kiwi beachside property is concerned, we've got it all

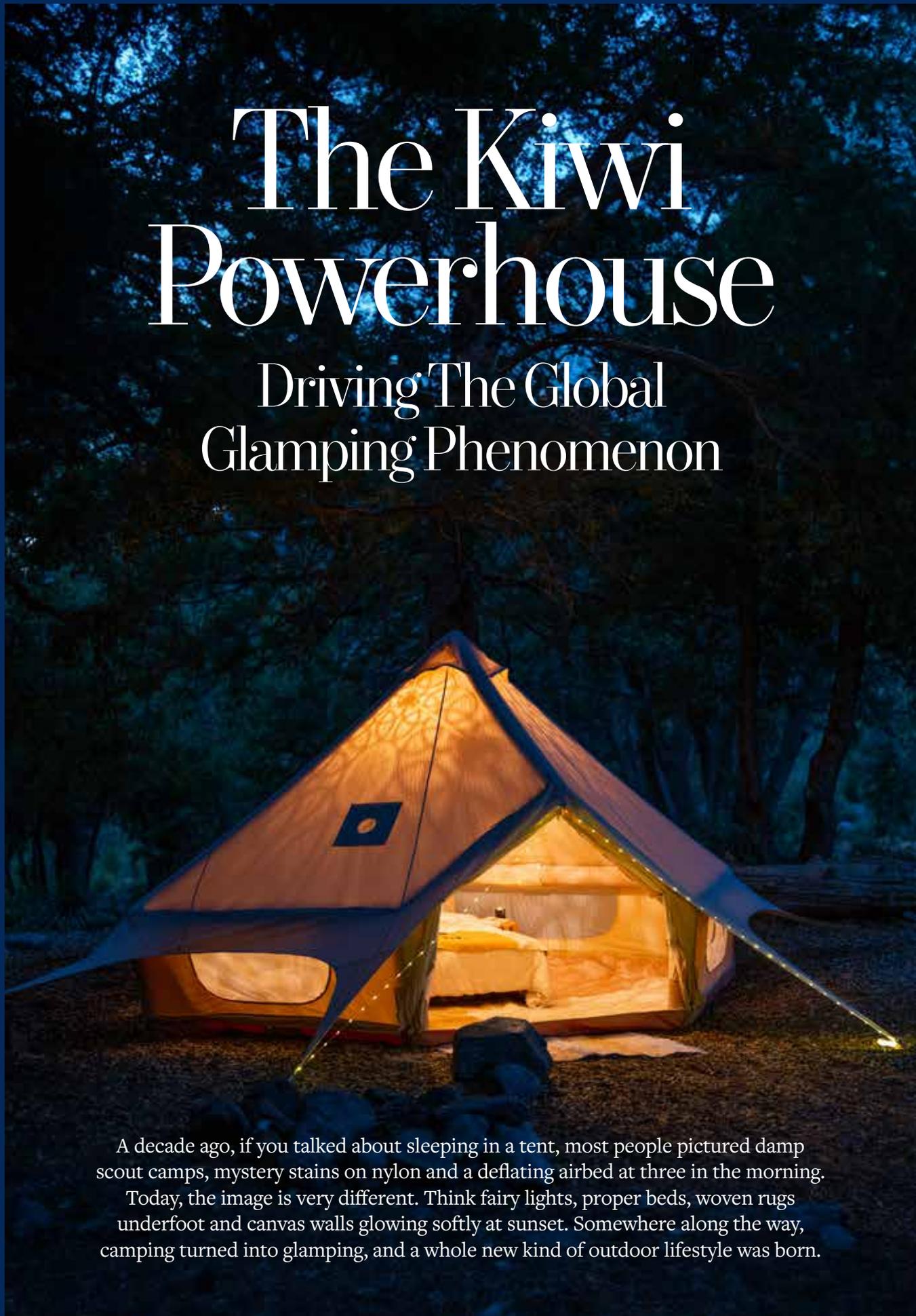
But taking inspiration from further afield we can enhance our aesthetics to another level. A mix of contemporary design and Art Deco makes this San Francisco property pop. As Covet House's new residential project, designed by Valery Zhavruk this property is a veritable palette of emotions and colors based on the unmistakable contemporary modern style so that summer vibing never ends.

You're immediately struck by mid-century modern aesthetics, whether in the desk area, through the statement Nougat, from Caffe Latte, the eloquent Charla Office Chair, by Luxxu, or the exquisite Basie Table Lamp, from Delightfull. In the small living area, there is a functional and stylish combo of pieces, thanks to the elegant presence of Kay Sofa by Essential Home and the wooden Biscotti Bookcase from Caffe Latte. Equally neutral and reinforcing the vintage side of the room, Philip, by Essential Home, unfolds into two fine center tables with clear and objective lines, besides Allen Rug, in an art deco inspiration from the same brand, and Coleman, a floor lamp with Delightfull signature.

caffelattehome.com

The Kiwi Powerhouse

Driving The Global
Glamping Phenomenon



A decade ago, if you talked about sleeping in a tent, most people pictured damp scout camps, mystery stains on nylon and a deflating airbed at three in the morning.

Today, the image is very different. Think fairy lights, proper beds, woven rugs underfoot and canvas walls glowing softly at sunset. Somewhere along the way, camping turned into glamping, and a whole new kind of outdoor lifestyle was born.

For a long time, that shift did not have a name or a face. It just seemed to appear in magazine shoots and festival galleries, fully formed. But if you follow the threads back through muddy UK fields, Californian canyons and the deep playa at Burning Man, you find the same signature tents cropping up again and again. Behind them is a quietly relentless New Zealander, now based in Byron Bay, who decided that temporary spaces could be as beautiful and considered as any home.

“I coined the phrase ‘tents for life, not the landfill’ back in those early festival days,” says Blue Bohemian founder Jessica Walsh. “It summed up my mission, to create tents people value, care for, and keep.”

Jessica started out on the UK festival circuit, watching fields fill up with cheap, one-weekend tents that would be abandoned by Sunday night. The waste was confronting.

“I remember standing in a muddy, rain-soaked festival field thinking, this cannot be it,” she says. Around her were piles of flimsy shelters that would not survive more than a single season. “That moment essentially became the spark for everything I built afterwards.”

A spark that has so far seen 15,000 customers around the world owning one of Jessica’s tents. “From families to luxury lodges, festival producers and high-profile clients.”

In the early days, glamping was still a niche. A handful of yurts and bell tents at boutique events, a few early adopters dressing their sites with



vintage furniture and Moroccan lanterns. Jessica saw an opportunity to take that feeling and give it structure, design language and durability.

She ignored the standard advice to grow slowly and stay close to home. Instead, she aimed straight at the United States.

“I did not listen to any of the warnings about the US market,” she says. “I just backed myself and went for it. Looking back, that stubbornness was one of my greatest assets.”

As glamping went global, so did her designs. At Burning Man, she walked out into the desert and saw her tents scattered from the city all the way to the deep playa, creating little villages of canvas. “When I went to Burning Man and saw my tents everywhere from the city to the deep playa, it felt surreal, like seeing your work take on a life of its own.”

There were quieter moments too, the kind that confirm you are part of something bigger than a product trend. “One of my favourite moments was a man pulling up beside me on the Golden Gate Bridge — I thought I’d cut him off,” she remembers. “He rolled down his window in traffic just to tell me he’d made a baby in one of my tents. It is still one of the wildest, sweetest compliments I have ever had.”

For a while, Jessica was based in Topanga Canyon in California, the hillside refuge for musicians, artists and dreamers that has its own mythology in film and music. Her tents sat in the yard, visible from the road. People would stop their cars and get out just to look.

“Topanga Canyon has always been this kind of magical place for bohemians, musicians and dreamers,” she says. “People would wander in just to ask what the tent was and where they could get one.”

By then, glamping had moved from fringe experiment to a legitimate part of the travel industry. Luxury lodges wanted tented suites. Festivals were creating premium camping villages. Couples were getting married under canvas and families were booking glamping weekends instead of hotels. What had started as a reaction to waste had become an entire category of experience.

Then, like so many tourism stories, the upward curve collided with global reality. Tariffs, supply chain shocks and a pandemic hit the sector hard. For Jessica, one policy decision in particular was devastating.

“The Trump tariffs absolutely decimated my business,” she says. “At the time it was brutal, it felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me.”

This is the part of the story that often gets skipped in glossy profiles. Yet it is also where you see the mindset that drives both a founder and a movement like glamping, which has had to continually prove that it is more than a passing fad.

“The tariffs were awful, but they also forced me to rethink everything,” Jessica says. “You can let things tick along, or you can be challenged and evolve. I have always believed in being pushed to grow. It is uncomfortable, but it is where the breakthroughs happen.”

She is philosophical about the timing now. “Some of the best businesses in the world came out of tough times,” she says. “When something difficult hits, I try to remind myself that disruption can be a doorway. It forces you to rethink everything you thought you knew.”



For Jessica, that doorway led to a new base in Byron Bay, a baby daughter named Rumi, and a complete rebuild.

“I rebuilt my entire company from the bones up with a newborn on my hip,” she says. “If that is not Kiwi grit, I do not know what is.”

As she started again, the glamping landscape she had helped create was also evolving. Guests were more discerning. Sustainability had shifted from nice to have to non-negotiable. Owners wanted structures that could work as hard as any small building while still packing up at the end of a season.

“Blue Bohemian is about creative freedom, better materials, and letting people experience the outdoors in a way that is both beautiful and sustainable,” Jessica says. It is her answer to where glamping goes next.

The new collection reads like a considered edit of everything she has learned from a decade in the field. The Better Bell Tent is a reimagining of the classic bell silhouette that launched a thousand glamping Pinterest boards. It is built from 100 percent breathable cotton canvas with reinforced seams and stress points, and a mesh and canvas wall system for airflow, so it feels as good on day three of a heatwave as it does on a cool evening. It is designed to be as at home at a high-end retreat as it is in a family backyard.

Then there is the one everyone keeps talking about, the Inflat-a-bell, Blue Bohemian’s inflatable bell tent.

“The Inflat-a-bell feels like this lovely full circle moment for me,” Jessica says. “It is exactly the kind of innovation I wish I had at those early festivals.”



In pure glamping terms, it solves one of the trickiest pain points: set up. Traditional canvas tents are beautiful and robust, but they involve poles, ropes and a certain level of patience. The Inflat-a-bell uses an air beam structure that inflates in minutes. “Blue Bohemian’s inflatable tent range delivers festival level speed with premium materials,” she says. No wrestling with pole bags in the rain, no deciphering diagrams by head torch. You roll it out, plug in the pump and watch the structure rise.

Around the tents, Jessica is designing what she calls soft architecture for the outdoors. SolWing, a giant shade wing with a huge span and sculptural profile, can be used on its own or paired with tents to create full outdoor environments.

“I am excited to be designing again, and I have got some great innovations coming through,” she says. “SolWing is this gorgeous, sculptural canopy for creating instant outdoor living.”

It is easy to see how this fits into the broader glamping story. What began as a few pretty tents on the edge of festival fields has become a holistic approach to outdoor life. Canvas is no longer just a roof for sleeping. It is a way to carve out spaces for gathering, wellness, work and play.

“Every Blue Bohemian product reflects a belief that all outdoor structures should be crafted, not consumed,” Jessica says. “I want tents that last, tents that inspire, and tents that are designed for life, not the landfill.”

In other words, glamping is growing up. It is less about props for photos and more about longevity, comfort and conscience. Guests want to know that the canvas above their heads has not been made to be thrown away in a few seasons. Owners want investments that pay their way year after year.

Alongside the design work, Jessica has become a bit of a guide for other entrepreneurs riding their own waves of change.

“When friends who run their own businesses started calling me for advice, I realised how much I had learned the hard way,” she says. She laughs about becoming the “camp counsellor” for founders, the person people ring when they have hit their limit. “If my experience can help someone else navigate their own journey, then that is a real privilege.”

The Great Outdoors



As the seasons begin to turn and the days stretch further into the evening, more homeowners are rethinking how they use their spaces, fortunately

G.J. Gardner Homes has a range of solutions. Longer nights and softer temperatures create the perfect invitation to extend entertaining beyond the walls of the home.

Instead of moving gatherings indoors at the end of the day, families are now moving the indoors out, dining, relaxing and socialising in covered patios, alfresco lounges and outdoor rooms designed to work across the seasons.



This shift has reshaped the way many New Zealanders think about home design. Outdoor areas are no longer seen as seasonal extras. They are becoming essential living spaces that can be enjoyed from the first warmth of spring through to the end of autumn, and often well into winter with the right features. Covered decks, sliding openings, outdoor fireplaces and serving windows are making it easier to create warmth, atmosphere and connection outside, even as the light fades.

Outdoor areas have long been a key feature in Kiwi-style living, and today they are seen as a top priority for many homeowners. The focus on seamless indoor-outdoor flow makes these spaces ideal for entertaining, especially during the long summer months filled with barbecues and gatherings. Connecting indoor areas, such as kitchens, to outdoor dining and lounge areas creates the perfect setting for socialising and relaxation, allowing for a continuous flow between the two.

Designs that make the most of sun exposure and the home's location offer a natural integration between the indoors and outdoors. This connection helps to bring the beauty of the outdoors inside, creating an open, airy space that is ideal for any occasion.

Homes like Bespoke in Brooklands and Te Awanui Lodge truly exemplify the benefits of outdoor living.

The Taranaki Showhome, Bespoke in Brooklands, features a stunning sunken fire pit that offers a perfect space for entertaining. Surrounded by native trees and scenic landscapes, it is easy to imagine a lively evening with friends and family, making the most of the beautiful surroundings. It proves that you do not need a vast section to make a striking outdoor statement. A well-placed feature can anchor a space and make outdoor gatherings feel relaxed and memorable as the night sky settles in.

Te Awanui Lodge in Tauranga North makes excellent use of its kitchen layout and deck space. A fold-out kitchen window and outside serving shelf make this home ideal for outdoor dining. Whether soaking up the morning sun with a coffee and cake or hosting a summer brunch, this practical feature enhances indoor-outdoor flow and creates a functional yet stylish space for everyday enjoyment. It is a reminder that outdoor living is as much about convenience as it is about atmosphere.

That same spirit continues across other G.J. Gardner showhomes around the country. Each one approaches outdoor living in its



Above 65 Brooklands Rd New Plymouth



Below 1 Flounder Drive Omokoroa 187 Indoor Outdoor Right 163 Maui St Pukete





Above 1 Flounder Drive Omokoroa Bottom Left 163 Maui St Pukete Bottom Right 38 Milldale Drive Milldale



own way, but all share a common goal: to make life outside feel as natural and inviting as life indoors.

In Rodney's Wainui area, Mindful in Milldale shows how effective a modestly sized outdoor space can be when it is well integrated. The alfresco area, though compact, connects directly to the main living zone and creates a sheltered nook that feels like part of the interior. It is the kind of space where you can slide a door open on a warm evening and instantly add an extra room to the house without stepping far. It is simple, usable and positioned for everyday living rather than occasional use.

Further south in Hamilton, Magnificent on Maui takes the idea further. With its larger floor plan and generous alfresco area, it treats outdoor living as an extension of the home's social centre. Dining, lounging and entertaining outside become effortless when the space supports multiple uses. The layout encourages gatherings that move naturally from kitchen to patio to garden. With room to furnish, personalise or adapt over time, the outdoor area becomes a long-term part of how the home functions.

Then there are homes that turn outdoor areas into destinations in their own right. Desert Romance in Papamoa is a strong expression of this idea. With more than 50 square metres of

alfresco space and additional covered porches, the home softens the boundary between inside and outside. The outdoor zones feel like fully developed living areas, suited to long summer lunches, evening conversations around an outdoor fireplace or quiet mornings listening to the sounds of the garden. The scale allows for flexibility and multiple settings within the one outdoor space.

These homes show that outdoor living does not depend on size, budget or climate. It depends on intention. Some achieve it through clever details, such as the fold-out window and serving shelf at Te Awanui Lodge. Others create atmosphere through design choices like the sunken fire pit at Bespoke in Brooklands, set into the landscape and framed with native planting to draw people outward. In every case, outdoor areas succeed when they feel connected to the way people actually live.

Across all of these homes, the most successful outdoor areas have a few things in common. They connect to daily life, make the most of sunlight and surroundings, and feel welcoming throughout the day. This could be a sheltered deck for morning coffee, a shaded dining space for summer evenings or a large alfresco room that functions like a second lounge. The aim is always the same: to make outdoor living part of

how the home is used, not just how it looks.

As the evenings lengthen and seasons shift, these spaces adapt with the light. Fire pits, outdoor heating, louvre roofs, screening and lighting make it possible to stay outside comfortably long after sunset. Entertaining does not end when the air cools or the light fades. It simply moves outward in a different way, with blankets thrown over chairs, lanterns glowing on tables and the scent of a meal travelling through an open kitchen window.

G.J. Gardner showhomes bring that philosophy to life. From intimate alfresco nooks to expansive decks and landscaped courtyards, they show the wide range of possibilities available to modern homeowners. Outdoor living can be cosy or generous, sheltered or open, practical or indulgent, but above all it should be lived in.

For many New Zealanders, the outdoors has always been more than a backdrop. It is part of how we gather, entertain and unwind. These homes celebrate that, not only in the height of summer, but across the shifting light and longer nights of the seasons. One evening at a time, they make the transition between inside and out feel effortless and inviting.

gjgardner.co.nz

Back to The Bronze Age

Back in the 70s, before cold stainless steel and chrome became the metal hue of choice for any modern household, bronze and brass ruled the roost. If anything could be cast in an off-gold alloy, it was. From tapware to door handles to lighting, even to those weird bronze pineapple bookends, we just couldn't seem to get enough of the stuff.

While it might have been a bit overkill back then, designers are leaning back into the warmth of these forgotten metals, albeit with a bit more restraint these days. Think of them as punctuation for your space. One statement light, a slim table detail, a mirror frame that catches the evening sun. Pick a finish that suits the mood. Brushed or satin for softer rooms, polished for a sharper edge, antiqued if you want instant character. In this feature, we show how a few well-placed pieces can shift a room from fine to finished, with examples you can lift straight into your own home.

BRASS TACTICS

Brass brings warmth and clarity to a bedroom, and this pairing shows how to use it with restraint. The NIKU pendant lights from Brabbu Design Forces, Portugal, create a focused pool of light that works for reading and soft ambient glow. The LURAY side tables, also by Brabbu, add a refined note with brushed brass legs and mixed tops in palisander veneer and bronze glass.

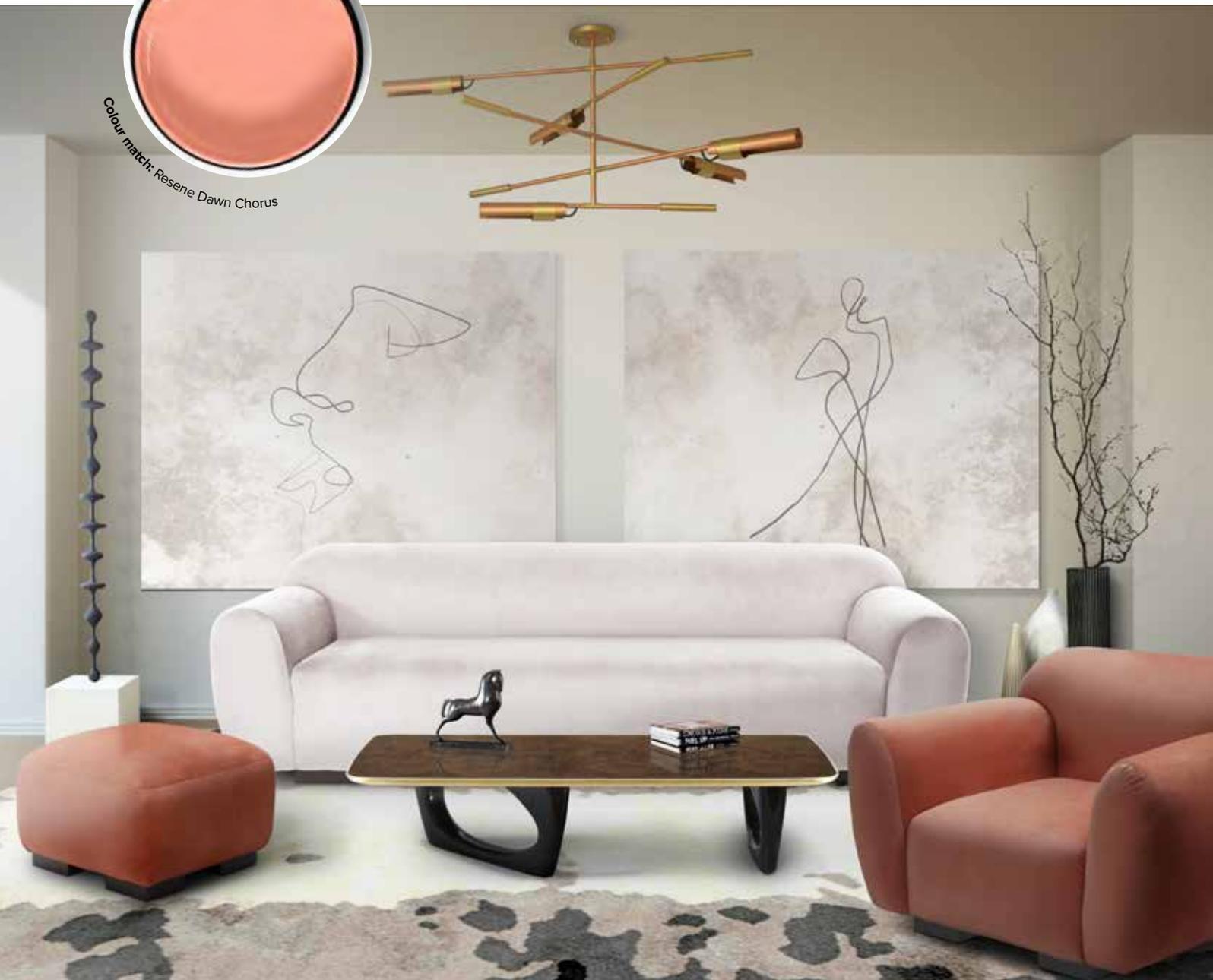
Deep, cool wall colour and an emerald headboard allow the metal finishes to stand out without feeling flashy. Keep textiles matte and tactile so the brass remains the highlight. If you are introducing brass for the first time, start with one key piece such as a pendant or bedside table, then repeat the finish once more in a smaller accessory for a cohesive look.



Colour match: Resene Permanent Green



Colour match: Resene Dawn Chorus



SOFT TOUCH

When a bronze statement is doing the talking, it is sometimes nice to let everything else step back. Use a muted backdrop in soft whites or stone greys, keep finishes matte, and balance the heat of the metal with cooler, lighter furniture. In this room, the sculptural bronze chandelier takes centre stage while Brabbu's OTTER Sofa, OTTER Single Sofa and OTTER Ottoman do the calming work with rounded forms and soft blush-and-oat upholstery.

The contrast feels intentional because the furniture is low and plush, the art is quiet, and the palette stays restrained. Echo the metal once, maybe twice, a slim edge on the coffee table or a small accent on the mantel, and leave it there. Linen, bouclé and wool add texture without noise, warm-white light keeps the glow flattering, and the hero bronze gets the space it needs to shine.



Colour match: Resene Paddock

FILAMENT OF SURPRISE

Brass and bronze are easy ways to add depth and a little intrigue to a room. Start with a single, well-made piece that earns its place, then echo the finish once or twice so it feels intentional. The Modern Round Table Lamp from Juliettes Interiors is a good example. Its bronze patina and soft gold mesh create a warm, controlled glow that works for both task light and mood light.

You do not have to buy everything new. A retro or steampunk find from a second-hand store can bring character to a space. Look for pieces with real weight, patina and simple mechanics. Pair them with clean surfaces and tactile textiles so the metal is the highlight rather than visual noise.

Placement matters. Keep metallic lighting slightly forward of your sightline to avoid glare, and aim for warm white bulbs around 2700–3000K to flatter skin tones and materials. Use darker paint or stone to make brass read richer, or set it against pale timber for a softer look. The goal is quiet drama, not a theme park.

COOL GLAM

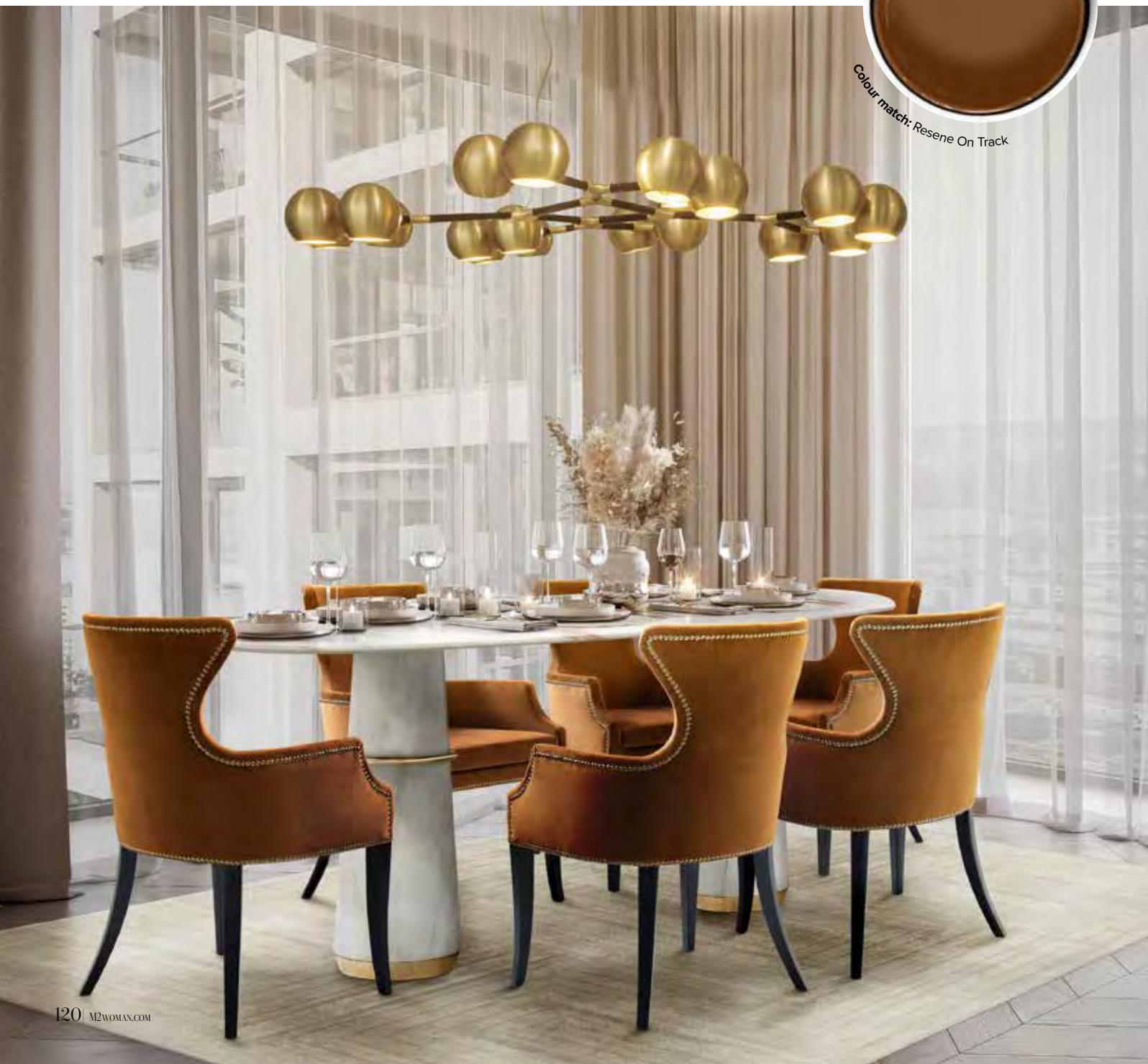
This is a good example of soft brass used for atmosphere rather than spectacle. The Horus suspension reads satin rather than shiny, so it warms the room without competing with the Agra marble table. Dukono chairs in russet velvet bring colour and texture, while the pale rug and sheer curtains keep everything airy.

If you are after a gentler brass look, choose brushed or satin finishes and pair them with natural stone and light textiles. Repeat the metal once at floor level or in hardware, and let the fabric carry the richness. Keep centrepieces low and simple so the soft glow can do the work. The result is calm, welcoming and easy to live with.

Add a rug that's at least 60 cm wider than the table on all sides so chairs slide without catching. Keep chair legs dark or timber so the satin brass stays the hero, and use brushed metal cutlery rather than high-shine to match the softer finish above. If you want a little contrast, swap in one cooler accent like smoked glass tumblers to stop the scheme from feeling too warm.



Colour match: Resene On Track





FLUTEY TOOTY

A cluster pendant is the easiest way to turn height into drama. J. Adams & Co's Flume 50 uses antique brass and bronze bodies with reeded glass to throw a soft, glare-free glow. The concealed LED keeps the focus on the texture, so you get warmth and sparkle without hard hotspots.

This works especially well in stairwells and double-height spaces where a single shade gets lost. Stagger the drops just above eye line on each landing so the glass catches the light as you move. Pair with deep wall colours for contrast, or keep it crisp over pale walls and let the brass do the warming. If your room already has brass hardware, echo the finish with a small accent nearby so the feature feels integrated.

MARBLE MEETS METAL

A reading corner works best when each element earns its place. Use a woven screen to carve out a quiet zone, then anchor it with a substantial chair in something tactile like shearling or bouclé. Keep surfaces practical. A side table set to arm height makes books and cups easy, and a chunkier patterned rug grounds the furniture without stealing attention.

Let metal act as the accent, not the theme. J. Adams & Co's Spot Table and Spot Floor Lamps in antique brass with black marble bases bring definition and polish. Echo the brass once more in a small object or hardware so it feels deliberate, then stop. Vary heights between screen, lamp, chair and table for a simple rhythm, and leave a little negative space so the corner feels calm rather than crowded.

Mixing stone and marble with brass and timber is the shortcut to depth. Cool, honed marble tightens the look, warm brass adds edge, and natural wood keeps it approachable. If you are layering stones, change the finish rather than the colour. Polished on the tabletop, honed or leathered at the base, with a subtle vein that plays well with the rug pattern. Tidy the practicalities with concealed cords and a tray for small things, and the nook will look considered and stay that way.





Colour match: Resene Ruck N Maul

GILDED GREEN

Green loves brass because they sit opposite on the warmth scale. The cool depth of forest and bottle tones makes yellow metal read richer, while the brass returns the favour by warming the green and pulling out its luxe side. Covet House's Wales sofa and Bogarde armchairs carry the colour with dense velvet so the shade stays saturated. The Empire Center Table Set I brings bronze brass to the centre of the room and L'Chandelier repeats the metal above, which is enough to lock the palette without flooding the space.

If you are chasing this balance at home, pick your green first. Darker greens take polished or satin brass well; lighter sages prefer brushed or antique finishes. Keep walls deep and matte so the metal can glow cleanly and the upholstery keeps its shape. Limit brass to two or three moments that your eye can connect: a chandelier, the table detail, and a small accent like a lamp base or tray. Add one pale stone surface to cool things slightly and avoid an all-warm scheme.

Texture is your friend. Velvet or mohair for the green pieces, ribbed or fluted metal on the table base, and a rug with a strong, grounded pattern will keep the look composed. Bring in a single tall plant to echo the green in a softer register. The aim is dialogue, not competition: green provides the depth, brass adds the glow, and the room feels confident rather than busy.



SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Consider this a straightforward example of how a single brass piece can lift a room. The Lilly Pendant Light from Lime Lace combines a slim brass stem with three opal globes that diffuse light evenly, so you get warmth without glare. Hang one over a side table or use a pair over a kitchen island to create a soft pool of light and a clear focal point.

The materials do the work. Brass adds warmth. Opal glass keeps the glow gentle. If you want the pendant to read as a feature, place it against a darker wall so the globes stand out. If you prefer a lighter look, echo the round forms over pale stone or marble. Repeat the brass once more in a small object or frame so it feels integrated with the rest of the room.

POLISHED DINNER

This setting shows how to let polished brass do the talking without overwhelming the room. The Beyond Dining Table mixes a dark, reflective top with brass detailing, so you get warmth and a little glamour while the surface still reads tailored. Charla chairs in soft, cool upholstery hold the balance and stop the metal from feeling hot. Pharo's linear suspension spreads the glow evenly along the length of the table, which is what you want for long dinners and fewer shadows.

Keep the background calm and textured. Sheer curtains, a plush rug and stone or plaster walls take the edge off the shine and add depth. If you have a strong brass table or light, repeat the metal once more in a quiet detail like chair feet or a tray, then let the rest of the finishes stay matte. Black accents help define the silhouette and give the brass contrast. On the table, go low and simple with a single centrepiece or a run of small votives so sightlines stay clear. The result is warm, confident and usable, not just a showpiece.



Colour match: Resene Beaten Track

SHAPING OUR WORLD

YVONNE FARRELL &
SHELLEY MCNAMARA

Architecture often celebrates the individual, usually male, “the architect”, but Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara have worked together in equal collaboration where authorship is shared and decisions are argued through rather than imposed for the last 50 years. In the process, they have scooped up some of the world’s most prestigious architecture awards and helped shape our relationship with architecture and the resulting buildings.

PICTURES COURTESY OF THE PRITZKER ARCHITECTURE PRIZE

They met as students at University College Dublin in the early 1970s, graduating in 1974 into a profession that was overwhelmingly male. In 1978 they founded Grafton Architects, named after the street where they opened their first office, and began combining practice with teaching. That dual focus has run through their entire career. They have taught generations of students in Ireland and abroad while steadily taking on public, educational and cultural commissions that would come to define their practice.

Their breakthrough on the global stage came with the Università Luigi Bocconi School of Economics in Milan, completed in 2008. The building's deep public base and powerful concrete forms impressed juries and critics alike. It was named World Building of the Year at the inaugural World Architecture Festival, beating much larger and better-known practices. That recognition was followed by a string of international honours: in 2016 their campus for the Universidad de Ingeniería y Tecnología (UPEC) in Lima won the first-ever RIBA International Prize, praised for its response to a difficult urban site and its use of open terraces to harness the local climate.

By 2019, the profession was starting to acknowledge the full depth of their contribution. The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland awarded them the James Gandon Medal for Lifetime Achievement, its highest honour. That same year, the Royal Institute of British Architects announced that Grafton Architects would receive the 2020 RIBA Royal Gold Medal, the UK's top architecture award, approved by the monarch. It was only the second time in the medal's 170-plus year history that the prize had gone to a women-led firm, and the first time it had been awarded to an all-female pair.

The most high-profile recognition arrived in 2020, when Farrell and McNamara were named Pritzker Architecture Prize laureates. The jury highlighted their integrity, their collaborative way of practising, their strong sense of place and their ability to make buildings that are both modern and deeply rooted in their context. It also acknowledged that their work consistently serves people and cities rather than seeking attention for its own sake. In 2022 they were recognised again, this time



for a quality that runs quietly through their work: light. The Daylight Award named them its architecture laureates, noting their mastery of daylight to create legible, humane spaces in complex buildings.

Alongside these awards, Farrell and McNamara have also helped shape the global conversation about architecture. In 2018 they were appointed co-curators of the Venice Architecture Biennale, one of the field's most important events. Their theme, "Freespace", invited architects around the world to focus on generosity, public value and the quality of space that is freely shared rather than commercially driven.

Farrell and McNamara treat architecture as a framework for human life rather than a series of isolated objects. In interviews, McNamara has described architecture as something that anchors us and connects us to the world, while Farrell has called it one of the most complex cultural activities we have and an enormous privilege. Their projects begin with close attention to place: the geography of an Irish city street, the topography of a Lima ravine, the climate of a French campus. They work with robust materials and use section, proportion and daylight to keep even large institutional buildings at a human scale.

UPEC in Lima is a good example. The site lies between a sunken highway and a residential neighbourhood. Rather than sealing itself off, the building steps and terraces upwards, creating outdoor teaching and social spaces that catch coastal breezes and reduce the need for air-conditioning. In Dublin, their Department of Finance building uses thick local limestone panels, recessed openings and carefully detailed bronze gates to give a sense of solidity and public seriousness, while still bringing light and air deep into the plan.

Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara have spent more than four decades proving that architecture can be ambitious without losing sight of the people who use it. Their studio combines design, teaching and research, and they have mentored generations of younger architects, including many women who now lead practices of their own.

2009, DUBLIN, IRELAND

OFFICES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNIS GILBERT

Located on a complex site in central Dublin, the Offices for the Department of Finance respond to the layered context of St Stephen's Green, the Huguenot Cemetery and surrounding Georgian streets. The six-storey building, plus basement, brings Department staff together in a single location and continues a Dublin tradition where significant buildings negotiate shifts in scale at key points in the streetscape. A restrained but careful palette of materials gives the building its sense of solidity and quiet dignity, most notably the handcrafted bronze entrance gate and Irish limestone façades. Inside, a main staircase set near the Merrion Row elevation softens harsh sunlight and buffers city noise. Unusually for Dublin, the building has exposures on all sides, offering panoramic views and changing light from every window, and maintaining a strong visual connection between those working inside and the city outside.





2008, MILAN, ITALY

UNIVERSITÀ LUIGI BOCCONI

PHOTO COURTESY OF FEDERICO BRUNETTI

Occupying an entire city block, this project reads more like a vertical campus of pavilions and courtyards than a single building. Conference halls, lecture theatres, offices, meeting rooms, a library and a café together accommodate around 1,000 professors and students, fostering a strong sense of community while sitting comfortably within the surrounding city. Throughout, generous and varied open spaces invite spontaneous encounters and exchanges. Winner of the World Building of the Year 2008 award, the stone-clad complex can be understood as three main parts: the sunken volume, which houses the impressive aula magna; the flowing, open ground floor; and the more functional “floating” boxes above. The aula magna occupies the main frontage, giving the building a clear symbolic presence.

2012, LIMERICK, IRELAND

MEDICAL SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

Straddling both sides of the River Shannon, the Medical School at the University of Limerick forms part of the university's continuing northward expansion. Linked to the main campus by a pedestrian bridge, the development includes the medical school itself, a sequence of three red-brick residences by the same architects and a new public space that acts as a focal point for the precinct. An outer limestone wall, drawing on a material long associated with the region, is folded, profiled and layered in response to orientation, sun, wind, rain and patterns of public use. The four-storey building is organised around a double-height atrium and a broad, open staircase, allowing views across and between levels and reinforcing a sense of connection throughout the interior.

Photo courtesy of Dennis Gilbert

Photo courtesy of Iwan Baan



2015, LIMA, PERU

UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

UTEC LIMA

Set on a challenging site between a busy motorway and the low-rise edge of the city, the UTEC Lima campus is conceived as a vertical, layered structure inspired by Lima's coastal cliffs. The north side of the building reads as a new "cliff" along the highway, while the south steps down in terraces, gardens and open spaces to connect with the smaller scale of the surrounding neighbourhood. Raw concrete structure and circulation are closely integrated to form a three-dimensional landscape of ramps, stairs and platforms, creating numerous informal and humane gathering spaces throughout the building. Larger volumes sit closer to the ground, with teaching spaces, administration and staff offices staggered on the upper levels, and a library near the roof offering panoramic views over the city and the sea.



2022, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE – THE MARSHALL BUILDING

RENDERING COURTESY OF PICTURE PLANE

Located on the dense urban campus of the London School of Economics and Political Science at Lincoln's Inn Fields, at the meeting point of three distinct boroughs, the Marshall Building brings together several business-related academic departments alongside a performing arts facility, multi-purpose halls, a café and shared student spaces. At its heart is the Great Hall, the main point of entry and a generous public space of around 800 square metres designed as flexible civic room for daily use by hundreds of people and for large-scale events such as exhibitions, talks, dinners and open days.

2019, PARIS, FRANCE

INSTITUT MINES TÉLÉCOM

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXANDRE SORIA

This 46,200 m² building in Palaiseau houses Institut Mines Télécom, Télécom ParisTech and Télécom SudParis, serving a large community of scholars, professors and students. Generous open spaces, extensive glazing, glass curtain walls and exposed ceilings allow natural light to filter through a sequence of rooms, creating varied impressions of light across both large and intimate areas, and within the interlocking spaces that form five courtyards and a central quadrangle. The master plan introduces streets, squares and boulevards with a carefully integrated landscape and ecological strategy, drawing on the long tradition of educational institutions defined by lawns, quads, cloisters and courtyards, and translating that legacy into a contemporary campus setting.



UNDER CONSTRUCTION, DUBLIN, IRELAND

PARNELL SQUARE CULTURAL QUARTER, CITY LIBRARY

RENDERING COURTESY OF PICTURE PLANE

This 8,000 m² city library is designed to serve the 1.2 million people of the Greater Dublin Area and is expected to welcome around 3,000 visitors a day, replacing the nearby Dublin Central Library, which opened in 1986 and no longer meets contemporary needs. The project restores six four-storey-over-basement Georgian houses at 23–28 Parnell Square, incorporates two further houses at 20 and 21, and adds a substantial new building to the rear. The design renews the finely proportioned 18th-century rooms while introducing a memorable 21st-century addition that weaves historic and contemporary elements together. A tiered, multi-level interior with large openings brings daylight deep into the building.





1st Place, Zhang You, Kunming, Yunnan, China. Rice weevil (*Sitophilus oryzae*) on a grain of rice.
5X (Objective Lens Magnification).

NIKON SMALL WORLD 2025

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

It's the 51st year of Nikon's Small World photography competition. This year there were 1,925 entries from 77 countries, celebrating the microscopic world of life and the tech that has increasingly shrunk to this level.

The first images were released in 1975, attracting entries from a diverse range of fields, including photography, biology, chemistry, and metrology, to name a few. Since then our ability to record things at a microscopic level has only improved, to the point that in 2011 a Small World in Motion video competition was spun up. Unfortunately for us the printed page doesn't do animated GIFs very well so we'll have to contend with the static version of the competition.



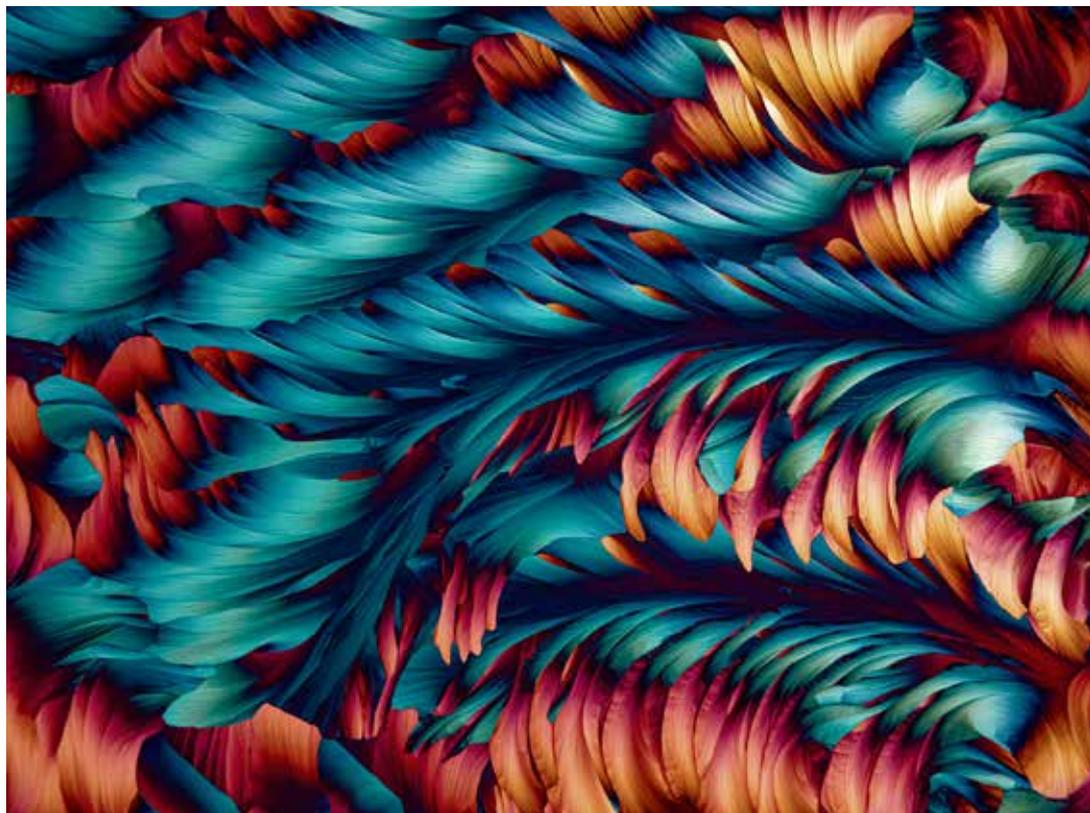
IoD. Marek Miś. Marek Miś Photography. Suwalki, Podlaskie, Poland. Air bubbles in melted polyvinyl alcohol.
10X (Objective Lens Magnification).



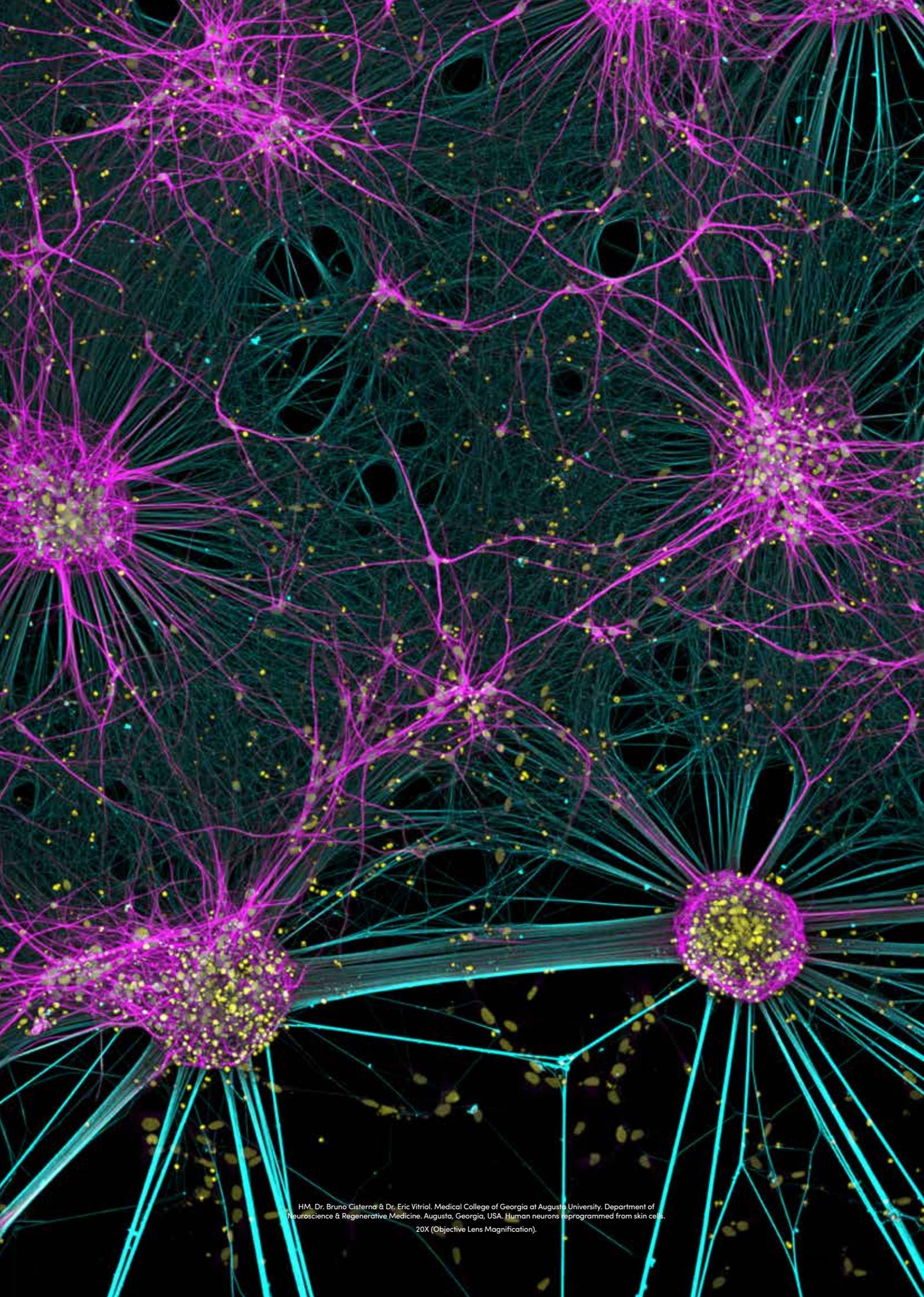
Solvin Zankl. Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. A floating sea slug (*Glaucus atlanticus*, also known as the blue sea dragon).
5X (Objective Lens Magnification).



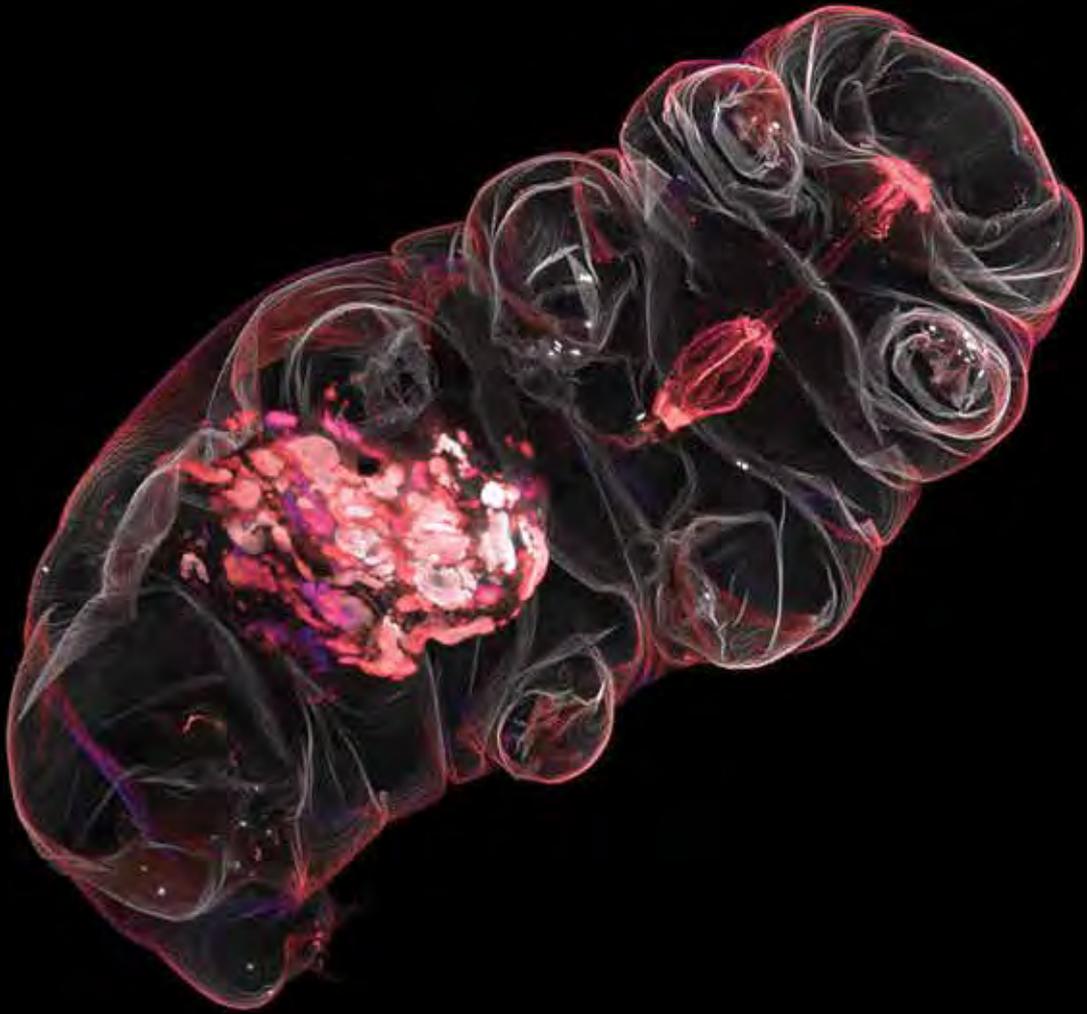
2nd Place, Dr. Jan Rosenboom, Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany. Colonial algae (Volvox) spheres in a drop of water. 5X (Objective Lens Magnification).



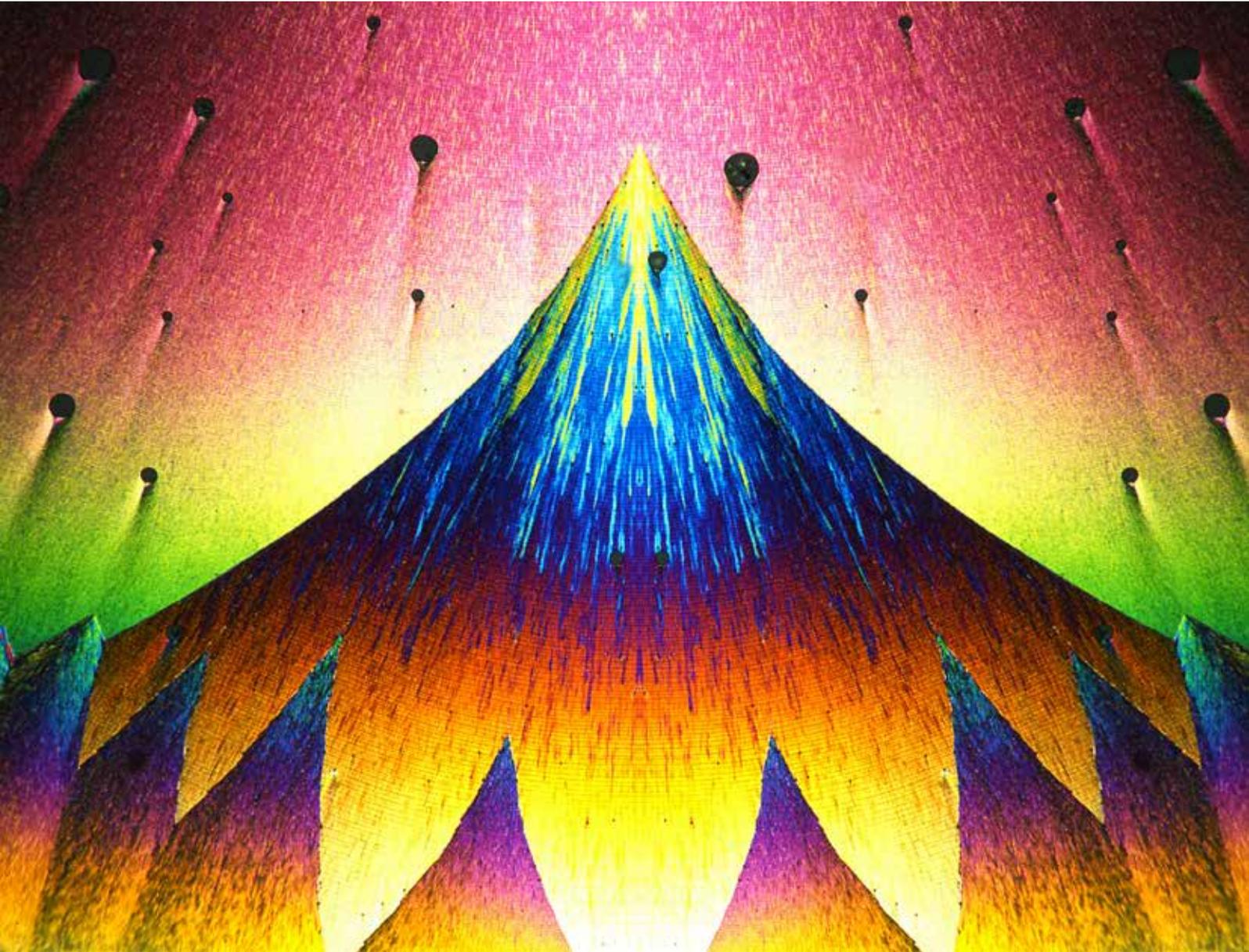
Doong Yien, Xmato Works, Beijing, China. Crystallization of a mixed solution of alanine and glutamine under polarized light. 20X (Objective Lens Magnification).



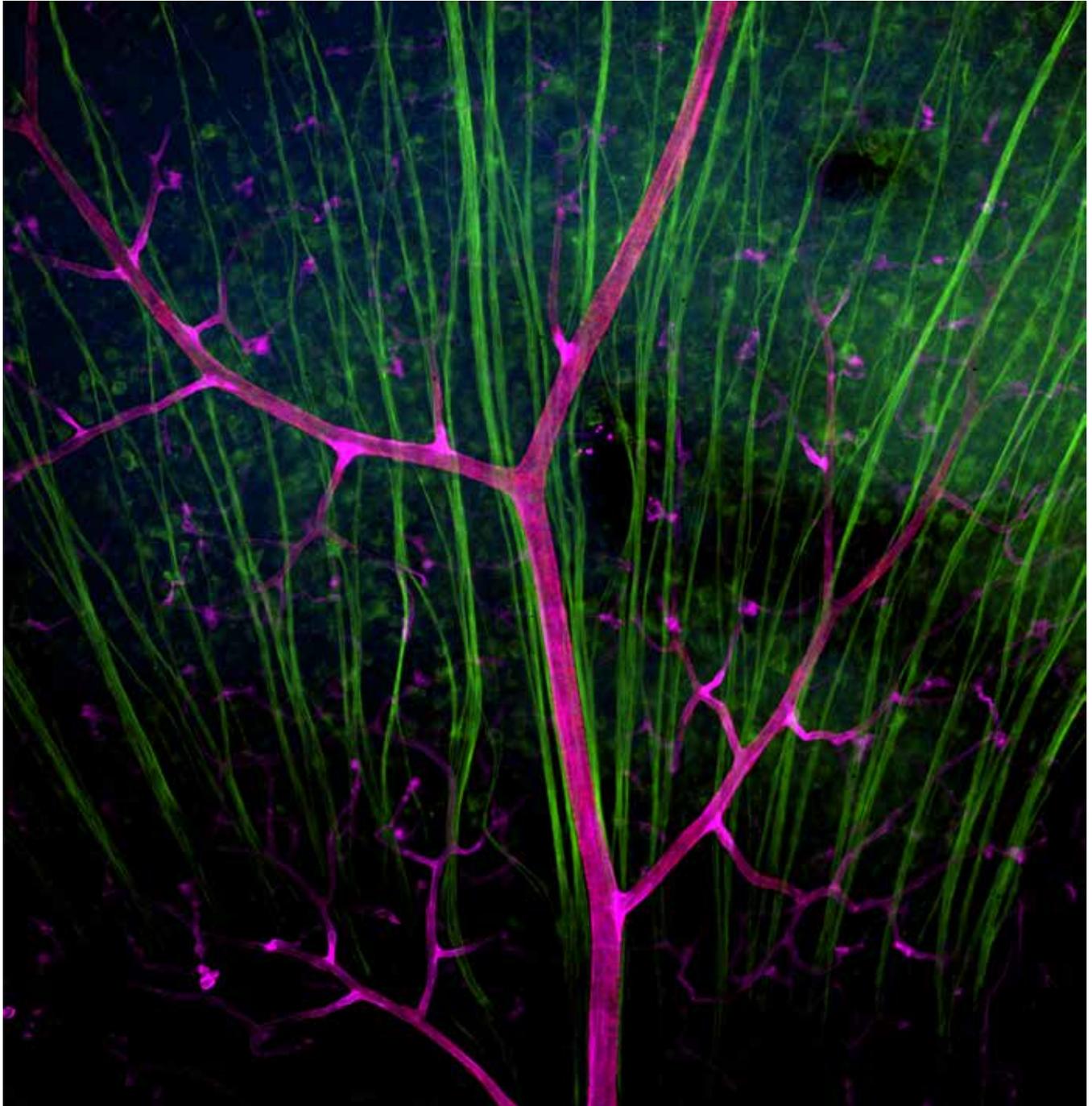
HM, Dr. Bruno Cisterna & Dr. Eric Vitriol, Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University, Department of Neuroscience & Regenerative Medicine, Augusta, Georgia, USA. Human neurons reprogrammed from skin cells. 20X (Objective Lens Magnification).



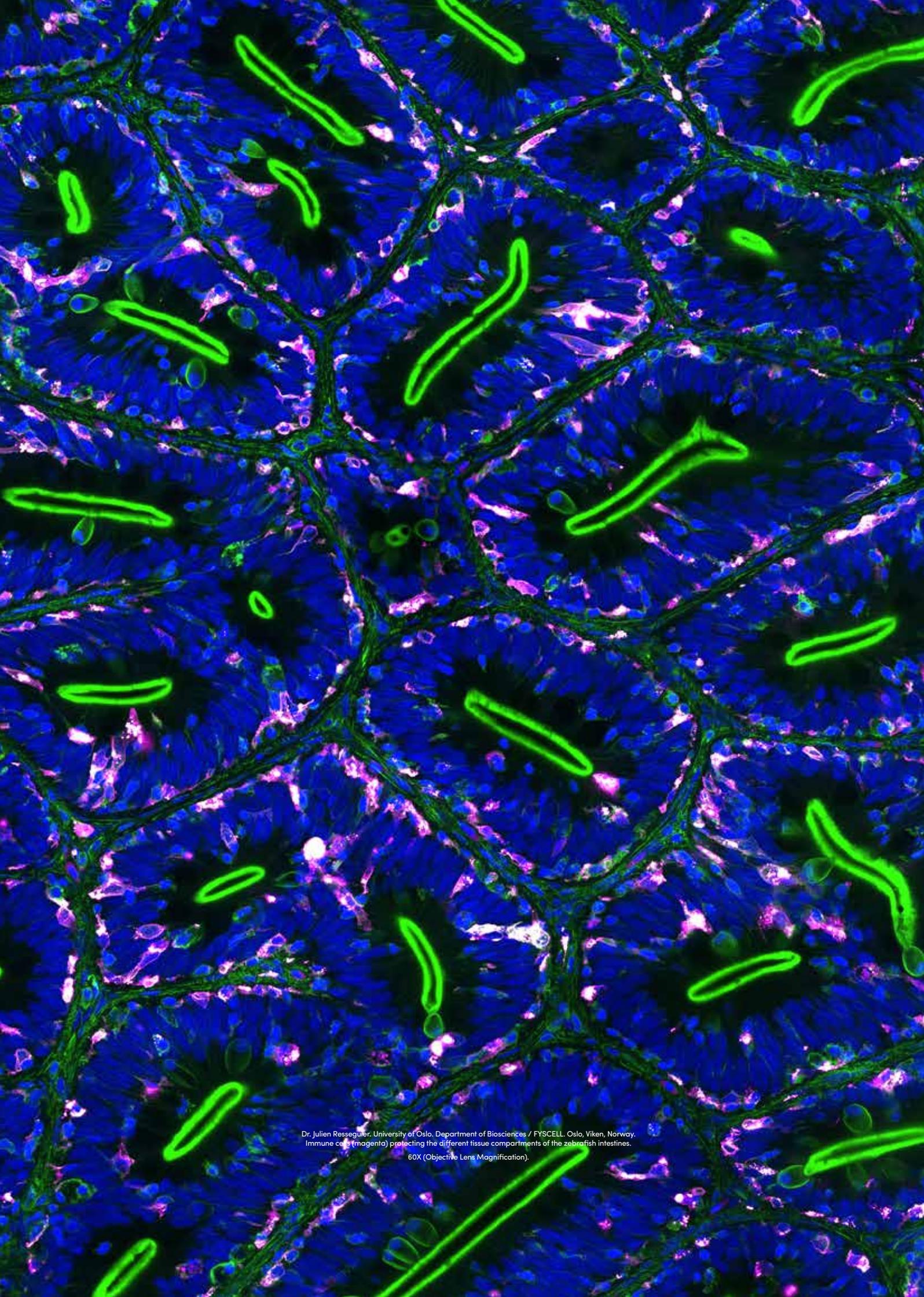
IoD. Dr. Gonzalo Quiroga Artigas. CRBM-CNRS. Montpellier, Herault, France. Tardigrade.
40X (Objective Lens Magnification).



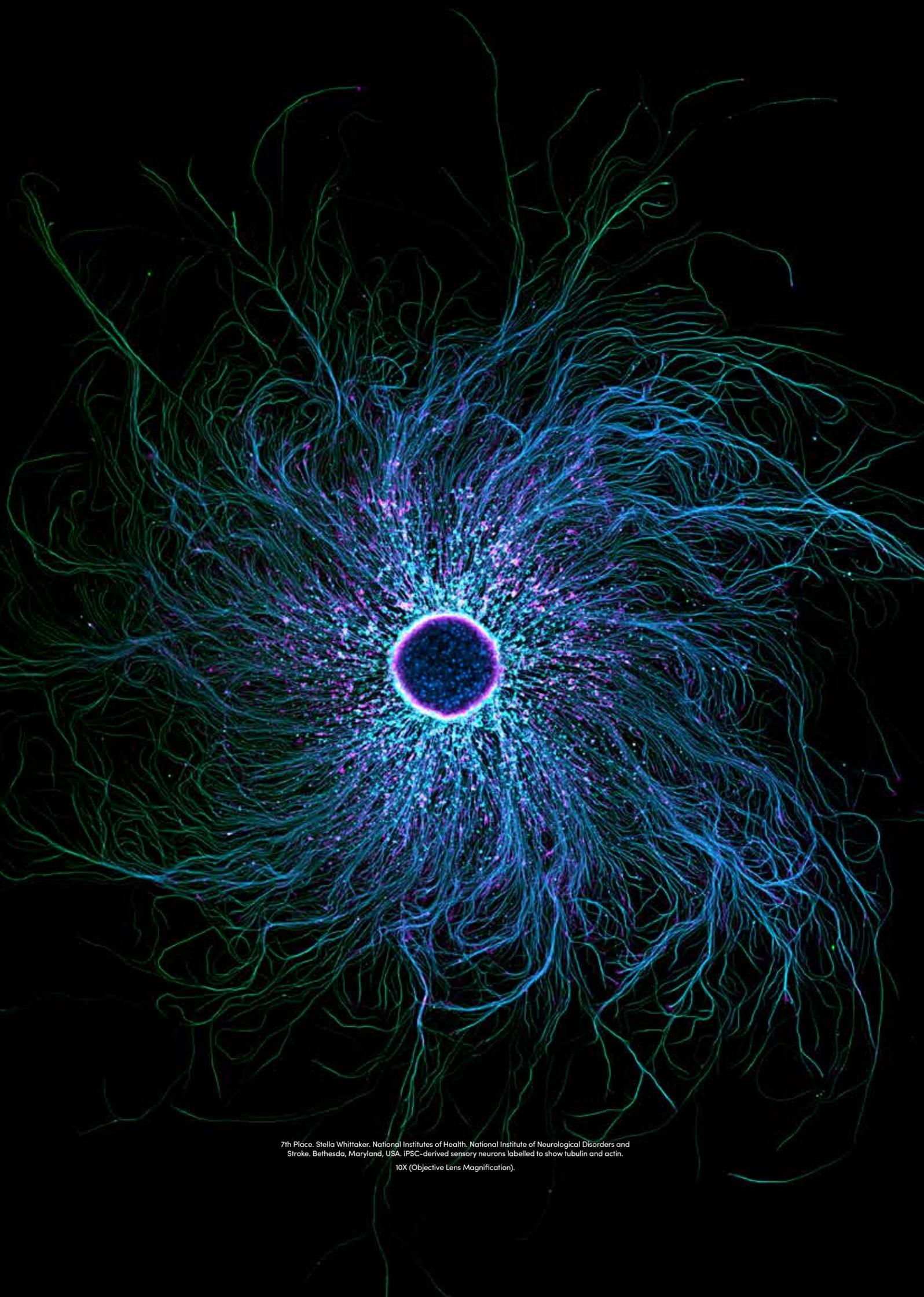
IoD. Karl Deckart. Eckental, Bavaria, Germany. Recrystallization of phenyl imidazole. Brightfield, Polarized Light.
10X (Objective Lens Magnification).



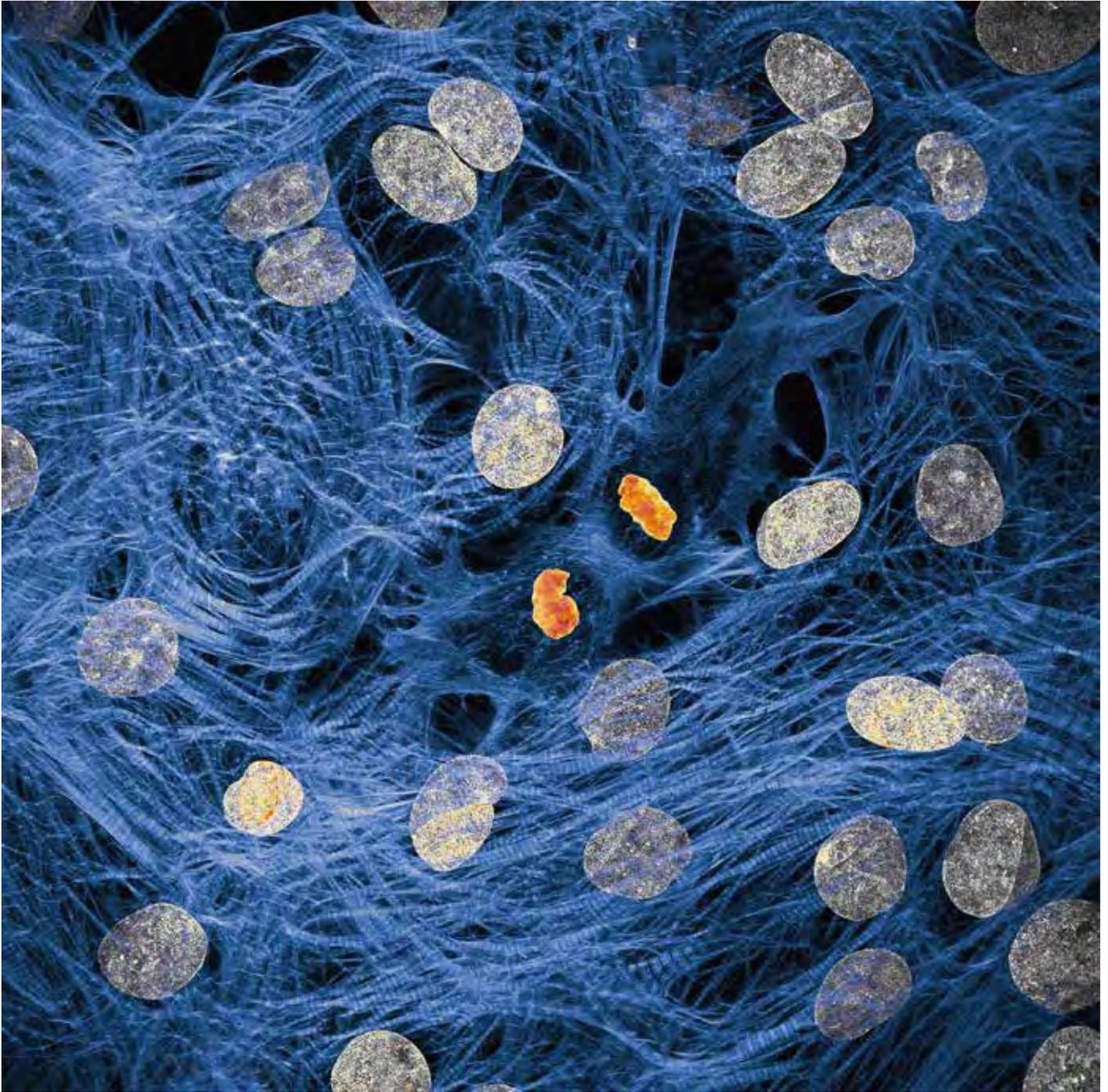
IoD. Lauren (Wren) Johnson. Powered Research. In Vitro Services. Durham, North Carolina, USA.
Mouse retina showing vasculature (red), nerve bundles (green) and macrophages (magenta).
20X (Objective Lens Magnification).



Dr. Julien Resseguier, University of Oslo, Department of Biosciences / FYSCELL, Oslo, Viken, Norway.
Immune cells (magenta) protecting the different tissue compartments of the zebrafish intestines.
60X (Objective Lens Magnification).



7th Place. Stella Whittaker. National Institutes of Health. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Bethesda, Maryland, USA. iPSC-derived sensory neurons labelled to show tubulin and actin.
10X (Objective Lens Magnification).



4th Place. Dr. James Hayes. Vanderbilt University, Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, Nashville, Tennessee, USA. Heart muscle cells with chromosomes condensed following cell division.
100X (Objective Lens Magnification).

Redesigning Infrastructure and Leadership in New Zealand

When talking to Tracey Ryan, you quickly get the sense she has lived several careers in one lifetime. Chief Executive of Aurecon New Zealand, she sits at the intersection of engineering, infrastructure and national strategy, but her story starts a long way from project boards and government forums. It begins in rural Ireland, in a farming and land surveying family.

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Some of her earliest memories are of being sent down the paddock to help her father. “I remember being out in the field holding the staff while my dad was surveying,” she recalls. “It was very hands-on, very practical. That is probably where the love of the land and the built environment came from.”

Curiosity and being open to opportunities became a kind of compass. “I was always curious, driven to do something else,” she says. “When the opportunities presented themselves, if I think back, I never went searching for something and said, I need this next job or I need this next role. There was always someone who saw potential in me.”

Tracey began her career as a hydrogeologist. At the time, she was providing environmental advice for big transactions, the kind of due diligence that sits behind major mergers and acquisitions. One day, a colleague suggested she move into the earlier stages of the deal process, the so-called phase one or transaction due diligence.

What she discovered was that her strength was not only in gathering data, but in translating it. “I could go out and see a lot of the bigger picture and then distil it into business issues and pull those risks,” she explains. “One of my strengths was being able to work across multiple disciplines, to translate a lot of those technical aspects into risk and to ask those higher-level questions. What does that mean? What does it mean for this transaction? What does this mean for compliance? What does this mean for the banks or the lawyers?”



“Be in control of the choices that you make. That remains part of who you are.”

That ability to connect dots took her into the world of global infrastructure and project finance at a pivotal moment for the sector. “When I started to go across into the world of broader infrastructure, particularly working with the multilaterals and the IFC and the World Bank, that was the time when the Equator Principles and the IFC Performance Standards were coming out,” she says. “A lot of what we were doing with the banks like Barclays and HSBC was really early days. It was cutting-edge at the time.”

The work took her to places that never appear in glossy travel campaigns. In post-conflict Georgia, she found herself walking through damaged industrial sites and communities that were just starting to rebuild. “I remember ringing the bank and going, I do not know what you want me to do here because this place has been devastated,” she says. “They are just surviving, never mind thinking about where they need to be. It was far more than just an environmental audit. There was a big capacity building element that needed to come in to get things moving again.”

In one workshop, a welder quietly began working on something while Tracey carried out her assessment. “He made me an iron rose,” she says. “He produced an iron rose while I was there for the week and gave it to me. I still have it. I have moved many times around the world since then, but that is the one thing I have kept.” It is not just an ornament. For Tracey, it is a reminder that “behind all these things we do and the technical things like that, everything is still real people with real lives” and that local communities often see visiting professionals as a point of hope for a better future.

That sense of purpose is a thread that runs through her career. “If I look back at my career over 30 years, they are the stories that I tell the most,” she says. “They remind me why I keep doing what I do and why I am passionate about this world of infrastructure.”

Today, that passion is anchored in New Zealand. Tracey is now a dual Irish and New Zealand citizen, leading Aurecon’s New Zealand business as part of the global executive leadership team. The company is behind some of the most significant projects in the country, from hospitals and schools to highways and tunnels. One of the projects closest to her heart is Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū Tararua Highway. She talks about it not as an engineering exercise, but as something almost emotional, a road that reconnects communities, honours the land and weaves iwi narratives into the design.

Auckland’s City Rail Link is another long-running chapter. Aurecon has served as the Principal’s Technical Advisor for City Rail Link Limited for more than 14 years, walking alongside the client on the journey from concept to reality. There is a personal dimension too. Tracey’s daughters painted tiles that will feature in one of the underground stations as part of an initiative to engage schools in the project. Soon, they will ride those same trains as young adults. For her, that is the definition of infrastructure that matters. It changes how a generation moves through their own city.

Beyond the projects, she spends a substantial amount of time in the broader system. “People ask me, why do I do so much externally?” she says. “You have a big role, you travel a lot, you have your family. But I am deeply passionate about the long-term success of New Zealand and about dealing with big, complex things like climate change. I will get involved with things like Business New Zealand, Infrastructure New Zealand, because someone has to do it. Someone has to put up their hand and try and connect people.” Up until recently, Tracey also chaired the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC) Sustainable Development Committee.

She believes that silence is no longer an option. “There are too many people who are far too silent,” she says. “Leaders cannot do that anymore. Business leaders cannot do that anymore.” She is very clear that using her voice in these forums is not a side hobby. It is part of the job.

Another defining aspect of her story is her openness about neurodiversity. Tracey lived most of her life knowing she was dyslexic, but it was only a few years ago that she received a formal diagnosis of ADHD. “It was interesting, and it made me quite emotional,” she says. “You are always kind of told things, that you talk too much or you are distracted, all these sorts of things. But actually, I do think my neurodiversity is a great superpower.”

For her, that superpower shows up most clearly in how she handles uncertainty. “I like complexity,” she says. “I like uncertainty. I do not mind taking risks.” She sees that as a critical advantage in a world of geopolitical shocks, climate disruption and rapid technological change. “In that navigation of the world of complexity of what is happening geopolitically, what is happening in the economy, it does not scare me,” she explains. “So as a leader, it is about how I lean into that unknown and that uncertainty and then how I work with my leadership team to create an environment for our people. We might not have all the answers, but we can bring a lot of our smarts together to start working through this.”

Aurecon itself has played a role in her journey of self-understanding. “I have to acknowledge Aurecon,” she says. “As we are driving inclusivity here, Aurecon has been fantastic. A lot of this journey of my discovery of being ADHD has been through Aurecon and through doing leadership development and growth.” That experience has strengthened her determination to build workplaces where people who think differently are not only accepted but actively valued. “Aurecon is focused on leveraging diverse thinking to create an innovative culture that delivers focused, intentional outcomes for clients.”

Her advice to younger women coming through is simple. “Be in control of your decisions,” she says. “Be in control of the choices that you make. That remains part of who you are.” She shares a piece of guidance that came from a professor at Darden Business School during a leadership programme years ago. “They said, if you are knocking your head against an organisation and it does not align with your core values anymore, just leave,” she recalls. “It was an aha moment. You have choices. Remember you can make good choices. Be yourself.” As an echo to that Tracey also references the famous Oscar Wilde quote, “Be yourself, everyone else is already taken.”

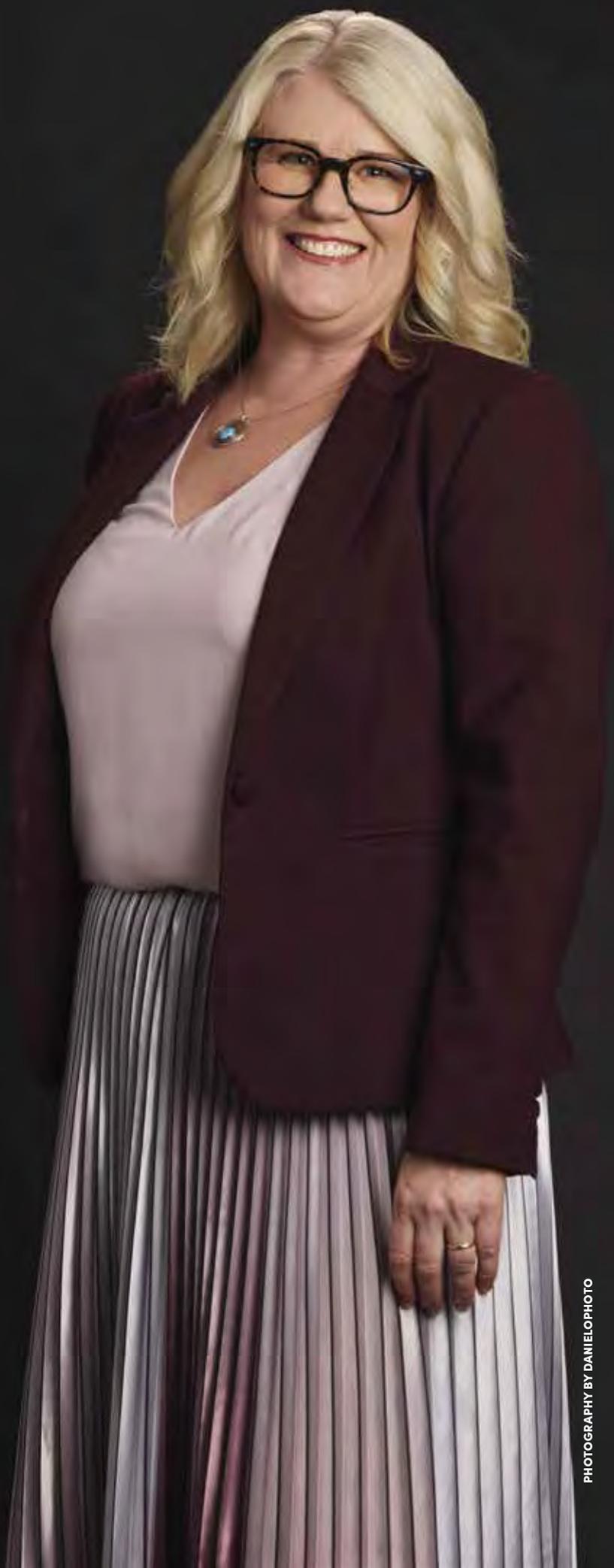


Order in Chaos

Kristy Brown's Journey to Leading One of ANZ's Largest Tech Partners

Fusion5 is a big ship. It began as a small Wellington venture and has grown into a trans-Tasman technology services company of around a thousand people. It implements core platforms, runs managed services, integrates data so decisions move faster, and is increasingly known for getting AI out of slide decks and into real work. "Nice, nimble, fast implementations, then a repeatable cadence of automation, process by process, team by team," says Kristy Brown, who leads Fusion5's New Zealand business. "Get the work out of slides and into people's hands. Remove friction. Shorten cycles. Measure what matters."

The scale is not the story by itself. The contrast is. Brown's settings were built a long way from boardrooms. "I was born into a farm household in South Australia. I'm a late seventies baby," she says. "It was a very messy start. That relationship was marred with alcoholism and violence. Not a safe environment." Her mother left with three girls for a small coastal town on the New South Wales and Queensland border. "There was not a lot of social welfare back then. I still remember helping her pack tomatoes." She remembers The Smith Family charity turning up with shoes when the school made footwear compulsory. She remembers Christmas arriving in a donated box. "My mum cried because the box had headless Barbie dolls. All broken. She thought that was going to be her answer to Christmas for her three girls."



Inside the house, her mother tried to make order where there was none. “She would lay the table perfectly every night. Then we would reset it for breakfast. She tried to create normality while you were surrounded by chaos.” That habit became Brown’s operating model. “I’m okay being injected into a situation of chaos. That feels familiar. First you create calm. Then you create a high-performance team and culture.”

School was basic, but two switches flipped. “I got sent to a women in tech event. We played with technology for a day and even sent emails when it was still a green screen. That lit something up.” A science teacher then asked the class to own real projects. “We raised money, built greenhouses, restored dunes, and won a National Landcare Award in Sydney. It taught me there is no excuse. Pick a problem and do the work.”

Work started even earlier. “Within the first week at McDonald’s at the age of 13, well, 13 and nine months, I was almost 14, I started working forty hours. If I wanted to go on a school excursion, that was on me,” she says. “I became one of the youngest managers in Queensland. I was on the national super crew. And yes, I am the proud recipient of a Bachelor of Hamburgerology. It is a thing. I finished on the Dean’s List, the top nine percent.” The point is not novelty. It is muscle memory. “Put the uniform on and do the role. The real you can be shy in the change room. The person the customer needs turns up at the counter. That professional range still matters in leadership.”

Adulthood arrived with pressure. “I met my husband when he was eighteen and I was twenty. Within a few weeks we had the wonderful surprise of a baby.” Two weeks off work. No maternity pay. Then the crisis. “When he was four and a half months old, my son went into cardiac arrest. He was without oxygen for forty-five minutes. He was not expected to survive.” He did. “The next five years were about monitoring development and keeping a young family going.” Amidst this chaos, Kristy acquired a retail business, balancing entrepreneurship with motherhood. When the lease on the main store ended and the building was being demolished, they took an offer of family support and moved to New Zealand. “I liquidated stock and arrived in Dunedin with a ten-thousand-dollar bank cheque. Sliding-door moment.”

That moment opened a new chapter. A short temp role at PGG Wrightson led to accounts, then stream leadership on a large ERP, then a Business Performance role created for her to translate between operations and technology. “I realised I was fluent in two languages. What the business needs, and what the technology can do.” Sitting in a Fusion5 workshop, she saw it clearly. “I thought, holy moly, you do

what I do. Maybe I should do that as a career.” After building practices and going through acquisitions, she returned to Fusion5 and today runs its New Zealand business at pace.

Her leadership playbook is compact. “Calm first. Then performance,” she says. “Write it down. Decide where the delay is. Fix the handover. Use an agent where it helps. Keep the human parts visible.” She is blunt about mindset. “Growth mindset is not a poster. After a miss, own your part, adjust, and move.” She is equally clear on sponsorship. “I have been the main earner for years. My husband runs his own business and his number one job is enabling me to be the best I can. No one judges a male CEO for that support. Why do we not celebrate the reverse. Treat support at home and at work as performance infrastructure.”



The same no-drama attitude shows up in how she talks about AI. Fusion5 turned itself into customer zero before selling anything to anyone else. “We often sign on customer paper. It is a massive job to review terms. One human can take forty to eighty hours just to digest a complex agreement,” she says. “Throwing more people at it wasn’t the answer.” The team built an internal agent. “Her name is Claire, our Contracting Legal AI Review Engine. You drop the file in Teams and leave her alone. She is grounded in a very clear knowledge base with very clear rules. She scans the agreements and gives you a summary report. Here’s what’s fine. Here are your medium-risk clauses. Here are your high-risk clauses. Our legal professionals go straight to what needs their brainpower.”

The impact was immediate. “We went from slow to ‘oh my God, you guys are amazing.’ We took a government engagement from terms to signature in three working days. That would

have taken months before.” What matters is the pattern underneath. “Write out your business process. Where is it strained. Where are your delays and bottlenecks. Where are the risky handovers. That is just business analysis,” she says. “You do not need one agent to replace an entire business flow. The tech is not there yet and your humans are not ready for that yet. Target sub-tasks that remove bottlenecks.”

She is just as direct about adoption. “Tech readiness is only half the job. Human readiness matters just as much. If people do not feel safe or see the point, a proof of concept will fail.” Fusion5 pairs permission with expectation. “AI literacy is part of induction. Adoption is tracked. Licences follow usage. We are trying to give specialists time back, not run a science experiment.”

For customers, this inside-out credibility lowers risk. “Use your partner’s patterns. We can show you what we did to ourselves and what changed. That is how you move in weeks, not quarters,” she says. The scoreboard is simple. “Cycle time, error rates, handovers, customer feedback. Show me those metrics moving.”

Brown thinks New Zealand can punch above its weight in this phase. “We are brave and we can move fast when the value is clear,” she says. “The difference is the pace and trying to keep up with it. That is where a partner can help.” She sees the benefits of scale as both defensive and offensive. “Do the work so well that global competitors have no reason to be here. Then take your working patterns offshore.”

Asked what leaders should do now, she turns to a list that sounds like it came from the shop floor and the boardroom at once. “Start with the work, not the tool,” she says. “Map the process with the people who actually do it. Decide where an agent can create a better starting point. Run a short cycle. Measure the change. Keep what works. Drop what does not.” She pushes literacy over licences. “Teach people how to use the thing in their own work. If a tool is not being used, reclaim it and invest where there is pull.” She wants leaders to normalise sponsorship. “Build a support network for women earlier and more deliberately. Treat it as part of the operating model.” And she keeps a human rule at the centre. “Be present when the customer is stressed. Do the courageous conversation. Machines will not replace that.”

The origin story and the operating model are not separate threads. They are the same settings in different rooms. A kid who learned to make order at the dinner table now runs a company that makes order in complex organisations. A teenager who put on a uniform to perform a role now asks leaders to show professional range on cue. A young mother who made a sliding-door move to restart in New Zealand now asks customers to make short, deliberate moves that compound into transformation.

How Curiosity Shapes a Leader

Hannah Walton's Metlifecare Journey

People often talk about leadership in terms of scale. The size of a business. The size of a transformation. The size of a mandate. But for Hannah Walton, the most meaningful measure is not scale at all. It is the human experience behind the numbers. It is how older New Zealanders feel in their homes. It is how her teams feel in their work. It is how one decision can ripple into someone's life at a stage where every detail matters.

As Chief Operating and Strategy Officer at Metlifecare, Hannah carries one of the broadest portfolios in New Zealand retirement living and aged care. She oversees 37 villages. She leads the company's long-term transformation programme, the Full Potential Plan Forward. She is responsible for village financial performance, employee engagement, compliance, and the experience of thousands of residents and their families. She also leads the company's overall sustainability agenda.

While the operations side might be complex, the purpose is simple. "Our approach is that residents don't live in our workplace, we work in their homes," she says. "It comes with a responsibility and a privilege." She often describes retirement living as the most personal commercial environment she has ever worked in. "Their wellbeing is tied directly to the choices we make every day. You hold that very close."

Her role sits at the intersection of operations and future strategy. Hannah must ensure that today's performance is strong and stable while also preparing for a future shaped by demographic change, digital expectations and evolving customer demands. It is an industry where the commercial realities are undeniable, but so is the emotional weight. "It is not like running a standard service business," she says. "You cannot separate the operational from the human."



Hannah's parents once held a strong bias against living in a retirement village or aged care setting, largely influenced by the perception of the historical style of institutionalised care. That shaped her early thinking and, unintentionally, her career. "I wanted to understand why older people felt that way," she says. "I wanted to see whether that perception matched reality and what we could do to shift it."

What she found at Metlifecare was a sector full of people who genuinely care passionately about their work. "So many people do this work because it brings them joy," she says. "They want to make a difference. It is a values-based workforce. That has shaped my own sense of purpose." She says working in the sector has made her "more connected, more grounded and more aware of the human impact of leadership."

Many of Metlifecare's achievements, including their nationwide Dementia Friendly accreditation, were born not just from process, but from belief. "I am very proud of that milestone," she says. "It took massive effort from our village teams. It shows our commitment to inclusive communities and to sustainability, which is now embedded in our language and our actions. We're building a culture where people take ownership, work together with genuine purpose, and constantly look for ways to deliver better results."

Feedback from residents is regularly sought and highly valued. When she visits villages during their respective AGMs, residents speak to her directly about what is working and what is not. It is not like listening to customers. It is like listening to neighbours. "Those conversations are a gift," she says. "They remind you why you are doing it." She says resident feedback is central to improvement. "It shapes our priorities. It shapes our village plans. It shapes who we are."

Hannah is the first to say she did not have a master plan for her career. She studied English, management and marketing. She moved between sectors. She worked in aviation, telecommunications, ICT and finance. She learned discipline and analytical thinking at Air New Zealand. "It was my first exposure to a large, complex organisation," she says. "It taught me commercial thinking, planning and the importance of precision. Air New Zealand was where I realised the value of understanding how systems fit together."

"For a long time, I really did not know what I wanted to do," she says. "But keeping things broad gave me opportunities to try different things. I have accumulated so many transferable skills. The power of the generalist is underrated."

One constant thread across all those roles has been curiosity. Hannah sees it as one of the most important leadership traits she has developed. "Curiosity is essential," she says. "You cannot lead if you are not genuinely interested in people. You cannot make decisions if you are not curious about context." She describes herself as "a listener first, then

a leader," and says deep understanding comes from asking the right questions. "Listening tells you everything," she says. "You just need to be present enough to hear it."

This adaptability would later become one of her greatest leadership strengths. When she entered Metlifecare before the EQT acquisition, change readiness was low. The organisation was purpose-led but not conditioned for fast transformation. Hannah understood she needed a different approach from her Spark days. "At Spark, change at pace was the norm," she says. "Here, people needed empathy, patience and context. Adaptive leadership became critical."

She learned to adjust her style for operations managers, village managers, clinical leaders and corporate teams. She learned that leadership in retirement living requires not just clarity, but emotional intelligence. "You never know what is going on in someone's life," she says. "Do not make presumptions. Read the room. Understand what might be driving someone. Then adapt." She says learning to lead this way has made her "a far better and more compassionate leader."

"You cannot lead if
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interested in people.
You cannot make
decisions if you are not
curious about context."

The toughest decisions in her career have been people decisions. They are the ones that stay with her the longest. "Effective leadership includes the ability to make tough calls and have courageous conversations, even when they are unpopular," she says. "The key is to deliver the message with integrity and empathy." She is open about the emotional weight these moments carry. "You never forget the big people decisions. They teach you who you are."

That clarity carried over into Metlifecare's transformation. When EQT acquired the business, the strategy was developed with uncompromising focus. Every part of the organisation, from digital systems to asset remediation to operations, was expected to contribute. "I have felt really energised by the private equity environment," she says. "It is not that I changed my leadership style, but the clarity, alignment and investment allowed us to drive tangible change." She says it was the first time in her career she felt an entire organisation "moving in one cohesive direction."

Transformation is often depicted as a technical exercise. Systems. Processes. Timelines. But Hannah approaches it as a human journey. "The why is critical," she says.

"Change lands better when people understand the context. You need leadership buy in. You need capability. You need support. And you need expectations that are clear." She talks about the workforce composition. "We have a richly diverse workforce in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, tenure and ability. It's a superpower for us. We also have multi-level frontline teams, support office staff, tech-savvy and non-technical roles. You cannot apply a one-size-fits-all approach."

She talks about creating layers of support. Centralised teams. Peer champions. Super users. She talks about celebrating wins. She talks about Metlifecare's Extraordinaries Awards, which honour those who go above and beyond. "The emotion in the room when those people are acknowledged is amazing," she says. "Those moments keep people going and inspire others." She says celebration energises people. "People need to feel seen."

Hannah's recent trip to San Francisco with her CEO to visit OpenAI has clearly shifted her perspective on what is possible. "It was phenomenal," she says. "There is hype, but also huge potential for our organisation." She now sees AI not as a trend but as a tool. "I am already using it for communication, analysis and preparation. We are at the start of our journey, but the prospects are exciting."

Metlifecare has deployed new core systems over the past few years. CRM. Finance. HRIS. Health and safety. Learning. These were foundational. Now the organisation is shifting its focus to developing digital technologies that enhance our residents' experience. "The next generation of retirees will expect digitally enabled experiences," she says. That includes the resident app, now in development, and AI tools that reduce admin time for clinical and village teams. "The more we can reduce administrative burden, the more time people have for meaningful resident interaction."

But Hannah is clear. Technology must never replace the human touch. "There are things humans do that technology cannot replicate," she says. "Especially empathy and nuance." She believes digital enablement can enhance dignity, not diminish it. "It should support independence. It should not replace connection."

Her experience as a board member with Equestrian Sports New Zealand offers a contrast to her corporate role. "It has given me a greater appreciation for scarce resources," she says. "It is about balancing consistency with the subtleties of different disciplines. Governance is a distinct dimension of organisational leadership, centred on setting direction and providing guidance, rather than carrying out day-to-day operations."

If she could go back to the start of her career, she knows exactly what she would ask her younger self. "What are your strengths, and how might you use them to best effect?" she says. "It would have helped me understand myself earlier. But I am grateful for the path I took, and I'm excited about the future we're building."

Scale with Heart

Dawn Engelbrecht is no stranger to building scale. She grew a six-child after-school programme into 183 locations with 58 franchisees in New Zealand and branches in Australia, Canada, England, Ireland and South Africa caring for over 9,000 children a day, then brought that experience to Kitchen Studio, where she now leads a 44-year-old brand through its next chapter. But it is the type of scale based on shared success that strengthens everyone involved.

This ethos was shaped early in life. “I grew up in England in a little coal mining village called Kirkby-in-Ashfield,” she says. “My Dad worked in the mines from the age of 14 and later became a self-taught draftsman. When the strikes hit in the ‘80s, everything changed. The mine he worked in never reopened. It took a thriving area and just wiped it out. Unemployment was through the roof. It was life-changing in a very negative way.”

That collapse taught her what scarcity feels like and what happens when whole communities lose their footing. “I’m extraordinarily self-reliant,” she says. “And quite possibly that came from those days. I’m also a bit pig-headed, which helps.” The sense of self-determination never left her. At 18, she followed her childhood sweetheart to Johannesburg, leaving behind a university place in law and languages. Within a year, the relationship ended, but her love for Africa began. “We spent 16 years there, but the crime was getting out of control. It was no longer a matter of if but when you’d be a victim. So we decided to move.”

Instead of returning to England, Dawn took what she calls her “LSD trip” - look, see and decide - to New Zealand. “I came to Auckland on my own for three weeks, met people, visited places, and went back to Johannesburg saying, ‘Yep, we can live there.’ We arrived with nine cubic metres of belongings, most of which were children’s toys. We had enough for a second-hand car, a laptop and a small house deposit. For two years, I divided our wages into envelopes for gas, food and fun. We weren’t rolling in it, but we got through.”

Then came the opportunity that would change everything. “At my kids’ school, there was a before- and after-school programme called sKids. My kids were three of the six attending. I told the lady who owned it, ‘I’m giving you half your profits. You need to sell this to me.’ And she did. That was the sum total of my due diligence,” she laughs. “As an accountant, that’s shocking. But instinctively, I knew it made sense.”

Within a few years, she had created almost every process herself. “So what was I paying the franchisor for?” She and another operator, Bev Parsons, joined forces and took over the brand. They grew it from 19 branches to 183 across New Zealand, supporting 58 franchisees and around 6,500 children every day. Dawn then took the model offshore under the name Sherpa Kids, expanding into Australia, England, Ireland, Canada and South Africa.

“It was probably one of New Zealand’s best-kept secrets, and that was deliberate,” she says. “The tall-poppy thing is alive and well here. People think childcare should be free, but you can’t provide good quality care if you’re not paying decent wages.”

When she sold the business in 2019, she thought she might finally slow down. “That lasted six weeks and nearly killed me,” she laughs. “I trained as a business broker and loved it because I could help other small-business owners have a successful exit.” She later joined the board of Kitchen Studio, one of New Zealand’s longest-running kitchen design brands. When the CEO left suddenly, the board asked her to fill in. Six weeks later, they asked her to stay.

Kitchen Studio is now in its mid-40s as a brand and operates as a cooperative franchise, meaning profits go back to the franchise owners. “I essentially have 16 bosses - 32 if you include their partners,” she says. “My goal isn’t to make profit for me. My goal is to create profit to distribute back to the owners.” It is a structure that gives every owner a stake in the outcome and a reason to collaborate rather than compete. “Every franchisee knows their patch inside and out. They see opportunities and challenges before head office ever would. That knowledge makes the whole network stronger.”

Dawn believes franchising remains one of the most misunderstood business models despite being one of the most human. “If you own everything, you keep all the profits. But in a franchise, you share them, and you grow faster. You don’t have to go to the bank for money. You’re using someone else’s investment to expand, and they’re using your systems and brand to build something of their own. It’s about wealth distribution. At sKids, many of our franchisees were immigrants. When we sold, so many came to tell me that because of their business, they’d bought their first home. That’s powerful.”

She laments the fact that the model is often left out of business education. “It’s barely mentioned in universities. New Zealand has the highest per-capita rate of franchises in the world, yet it’s still not understood. Policymakers forget that behind every brand name, there’s usually a small business owner running it.”

That sense of shared ownership has defined her transparent leadership style. “If we’ve had a bad quarter, I tell them. I’m not just going to share the good stuff. That doesn’t help anyone,” she says. She holds quarterly meetings with all

the franchisees and maintains an open-door policy. “They can ask me anything at any time. Whether they like the answer or not is another story, but they’ll always get honesty.”

Her decisions now as CEO are also guided by a sense of ownership. “Everything I do, I ask myself, if I were a franchisee, how would this land? If I want them to rebrand, is now the right time? You have to think like an owner even if you’re the CEO.” Her daily focus is simple.



“New Zealand has the highest per-capita rate of franchises in the world, yet it’s still not understood. Policymakers forget that behind every brand name, there’s usually a small business owner running it.”

“My job is to protect the brand and to help our franchisees survive and grow. If that means letting go of a top salesperson, so be it. The brand comes first.”

She hopes people describe her as both passionate and compassionate. “But sometimes, you have to make hard calls, and I can and I will. If you get everything else right, you rarely have to make those awful calls.” In two decades running sKids she only ever terminated two franchisees. “Both times it was because they refused to talk. You can work through almost anything if people are willing to communicate.”

She credits much of her resilience to her husband. “Peter’s been incredible. The day I told him I’d sold my car to pay wages, he didn’t even ask why. He just made sure I could get there and back.”

What drives her now is seeing others succeed. “We’ve got two guys in Tauranga who bought their franchise just as the recession hit. It’s been tough, but they called to say they’d not only met but exceeded their budget. That’s so cool. And a young couple in Dunedin who used to be a designer and an installer now own the branch and they’re hitting every goal. That’s what I enjoy. That’s legacy.”

She also has a genuine affection for the product itself. “A kitchen is worth about eight percent of your home’s value, but it’s worth so much more in joy. It’s where families gather. It should work for you and bring you happiness.”

Unlike many competitors, Kitchen Studio doesn’t manufacture its own products. “That means we’re not limited by what one machine can make. We can work with almost any material. If you came to us wanting a pink kitchen with upside-down doors, we could do it. We’d talk you out of it, but we could. We work with top international suppliers and require a ten-year guarantee on everything, so our franchisees can focus on design and service rather than supply issues.”

As trends move toward natural materials and more sustainable options, she sees design as an expression of how people live now. “We’ve got more choice than ever. It’s about flow and function and joy.”

If she could speak to her 17-year-old self, she says she would keep it simple. “Don’t waste your time with punk rock,” she laughs. “I had a purple Mohawk. But seriously, I’d tell myself to back yourself. It’s okay to make mistakes. Just get up and keep going. I used to be scared to do something in case it went wrong. Now I’m scared not to, in case I miss out on something good.”

The Power Of The Comeback

“You win or lose in the second half.” For Lisa Oakley, founder of People Associates, that line isn’t about age or timing or some midpoint in life. It is about the comeback. It is the belief that no matter how messy the beginning, how chaotic the middle or how far behind you feel, there is always time to turn the game around. The first half might empty you, knock you flat or strip everything back, but it does not get to decide the ending. Not if you refuse to let it.

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Lisa never set out to become one of the country’s most successful go-to problem solvers in HR and dispute resolution. She grew up watching her mother reinvent herself over and over. “I was raised by a single mother who was quite a lateral person,” she says. “She didn’t have a linear, perfect career. She did this, and then she did that, and then she retrained to do something else. She just did everything.” From that came two traits that have carried Lisa through since. “A really strong work ethic” and a mindset that if you see something that needs doing, you figure it out and do it. When her mother later married a man who ran a small business, they took on projects not for wealth but purpose. “They didn’t necessarily do it for the money,” she says. “Their motivation was contribution. They’d cross-lease, subdivide, sell, renovate, and build. They were hands-on.” That blend of hustle and service helped to form Lisa’s blueprint.



Lisa built a career inside a global corporates, before leaving with no deck, no guaranteed revenue, no investor or partner. “When I left, I didn’t have one client,” she says. “I had no revenue. I just knew I could make it work.” Then came what she calls the trifecta: IVF, lockdown and divorce, all while trying to get a new business off the ground. Most people would have taken at least one of those as a sign to pause. Instead, she treated it as pressure she could work inside of. “Some days, you just get out of bed,” she says. “That’s the win. You can’t succeed if your head’s still on the pillow.”

Lisa leveraged a gap in the market to build People Associates. She had seen too much dead weight in HR, too many people hiding behind policies and paperwork instead of solving anything. “I just parachute in and get shit done,” she says. “I only work with ninjas. I’ve got no patience for incompetence.” The consultancy quickly gained a reputation for being fast, messy in the right way and uninterested in bureaucracy. She does not want to write documents that get filed away. “We’re there to fix things. We’re not there to create more work,” she says.

Conflict, to Lisa, is movement. Avoidance is what kills momentum. “Conflict is my jam,” she says. “If there’s no conflict, someone’s bullshitting.” She gets called in when organisations are stuck, broken or circling the same issue with no resolution. She does not come in to soothe. She comes in to change the temperature and force clarity. It is why founders, boards and CEOs bring her into messy environments.

One of the most confronting dynamics she deals with inside organisations is what she calls “the Sally effect,” when the first person to speak up gets punished and everyone else watches the fallout. She has seen how quickly psychological safety erodes when leadership protects itself instead of the truth. “People don’t leave companies, they leave feelings,” she says. “They leave being dismissed or unheard.” For her, culture is not a values statement; it is whether people feel safe enough to be honest and whether leaders can tolerate hearing it.

Lisa is not trying to build a massive team. She is trying to work only with people who can carry their own weight and then some. “I’m not interested in hiring people I have to babysit,” she says. “I’m not a school.” Her team is intentionally small, made up of people who can walk into a boardroom, handle whatever is thrown at them and walk out having shifted something real. “We’re small because we can be. And I like being able to choose who we work with,” she says.

Her view of relevance is pragmatic. “You’ve got to stay useful. The only way to stay useful is to stay curious.” She sees AI as a filter that will remove the kind of HR roles that hide behind compliance. “AI will wipe out half the HR jobs that are just box-ticking. But that’s good. It means you have to be better.”

She is also blunt about New Zealand’s productivity problem. “We’re amazing at starting things and terrible at finishing them,” she says. “Our tall poppy thing is exhausting. We’ve got to get over ourselves.” She believes women, especially, have been conditioned to apologise for capability. “If you’re good, be good. Don’t pretend to be half as good to make someone else comfortable.”

Her definition of resilience is practical: it is momentum in any form. “Some days, resilience is getting the email sent. That’s

“Anyone can look like a leader when everything’s working. It’s when it’s falling apart that you see who’s got it.”



it. Other days, it’s closing a massive deal. But you have to keep moving. Stillness is death.” That is where the second-half mindset kicks in. The first half might knock you around, stall you or strip everything back, but you are not out unless you stop playing. “The first half is not the whole story,” she says. “You can still come back from almost anything.”

Looking back, she is clear that the hardest years gave her a kind of mettle she would not trade. IVF, divorce, building a company in lockdown - none of it broke her. It recalibrated her. “When you’ve held your life together with one hand and built a company with the other, you stop being scared,” she says. “You realise most people never even try.” That is why clients come to her. Not because she is polished, but because she is fearless and fast, and not interested in pretending.

She does not sell herself as a mentor or a coach. She is a fixer. “We get brought in when people are stuck or sinking. We don’t stay for long. That’s the point.” She has no desire for empire-building but every desire for impact. Leadership, in her view, is not what you call yourself when things are going well. “Anyone can look like a leader when everything’s working,” she says. “It’s when it’s falling apart that you see who’s got it.”

Her life now is a constant rebalancing between motherhood, business and momentum. “I’m not here to be everything to everyone,” she says. “I’m here to be present where it counts.” She rejects burnout as proof of commitment. “Rest is not a reward. It’s fuel. And you’re useless without fuel.”

The second half, for Lisa, is not a midpoint. It is the space you enter when you decide the story is not finished, no matter what went wrong. It is the comeback zone, not the clean slate. It is where the scoreboard doesn’t scare you anymore because you’ve already survived the worst parts. “You don’t get to write the whole script,” she says. “But you get to decide how you show up in it.”



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Executive Summary

Christchurch got its first taste of M2woman Journey to Excellence on 12 September 2025 at the aptly named Majestic on Durham. Our host for the Afternoon Ali Harper is one of New Zealand's most accomplished performers, with a three-decade career across theatre, cabaret, television, and music.

A Toi Whakaari graduate, she has twice won Best Actress at New York's United Solo Festival, received the Chapman Tripp Best Actress award, and headlined at the New York Cabaret Convention at Lincoln Center. So of course, not only did she keep the run sheet crisp but she added in some singing for good measure.

With a focus on the Journey to Excellence themes of Personal Growth, Resilience and Leadership, the speaker lineup gave Christchurch a mix of perspective and practice. Danu Abeysuriya, founder and CTO of Rush Digital, framed AI as leverage for people, not a threat to them, showing how assistants and agents free teams to do better human work. James Laughlin reframed negotiation through shared stories, focusing on trust, preparation, and clean questions that move conversations forward. Michelle Batchelor connected elite sport habits to executive leadership,

turning discipline, recovery, and standards into an operating system for the C-suite. Peri Drysdale made resilience tangible, tying purpose and uncompromising quality to agility when markets shift. The themes threaded cleanly across talks: design leadership that scales past heroics, build resilience with daily practices that hold under pressure, and invest in personal growth that compounds.

The panel brought Michelle and Peri back with Ali to connect tactics to reality: how to keep energy up through shocks, tailor communication to different people, and turn setbacks into momentum without dropping standards. It was candid and useful, and it kept the afternoon anchored to decisions leaders make in real time.

JAMES LAUGHLIN

How To Be A Better Negotiator

James Laughlin is a high performance leadership strategist and executive coach based in Christchurch. A seven time world champion musician, he coaches elite teams and senior leaders, including work with Canterbury Rugby. He hosts the Lead On Purpose podcast and translates mindset science into practical leadership tools.

Ali Harper gives James a quick, warm handover and he wastes no time. “Negotiation starts before numbers,” he says. “The first move is trust, and trust begins with a story.” He calls the approach “shared story, shared strength,” and it becomes the spine of his talk. “When people feel seen, they actually hear you. Once they hear you, the metrics land.”

James goes first with his own story. “I grew up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles,” he says, “and I learned how dangerous simple stories can be.” His father was Protestant, his mother Catholic. For a while he carried the easy narrative of us and them until his mum’s quiet honesty cut through it. “Belonging matters,” he says. “The story you tell yourself about others decides how you treat them.” He ties that straight back to leadership and deal-making. “If I want to shift someone, I need to see them first.”

Then he flips a cliché. “Everyone is full of BS,” he grins, letting the room laugh before he defines it. “Belief systems.” We all carry scripts about money, status, gender, power, and what we deserve. “Those beliefs set your negotiation long before you open your mouth.” His invitation is blunt and useful. “Surface the script, test it, and swap it if you need to. Achieving begins with believing. You have already believed before you achieved in other parts of life. Bring that muscle to the table.”

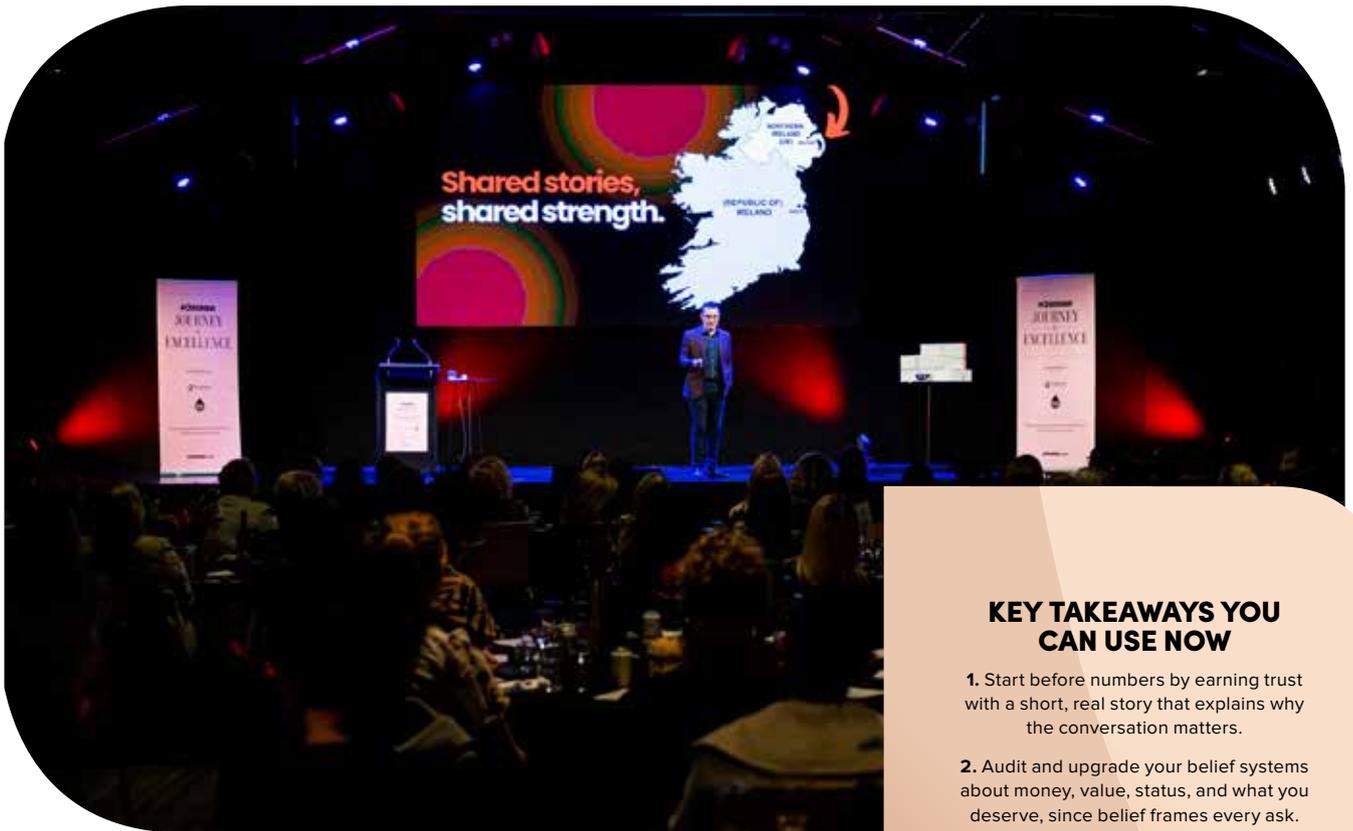
Curiosity is his next lever. “The most interesting person in the room is usually the most interested.” He demonstrates with a string of clean, non-leading prompts that shift the tone of a conversation. “What would make this a win for you?” “What constraints are you working within?” “What would make this easy to say yes to?” Then the reminder: “Learn-it-all beats know-it-all.” He is not asking people to surrender their point of view, only to earn

the right to express it by understanding the other side’s.

He lands the connection between performance and negotiation by talking about a headmaster who changed his life. “He was a possibilitarian,” James says, the word landing with a smile. As a kid, James fought too much and could have gone the wrong way. The principal walked into assembly with a bagpipe band and handed James a pair of sticks. “Channel it.” That channel grew into world titles in drumming and later into coaching teams that became world champions too. “Skill matters. Mindset matters. Heart set carries the day.” He draws the line directly to business. “If you want to be compelling, get clear on the lane where your strengths create disproportionate value, then negotiate from there.”

He keeps circling back to sequencing. “Connection first, then logic. Heart to





heart, then head to head.” He tells a short client example. A founder started every enterprise sale with a deck of metrics and was getting stalled deals. James asked him to swap the opening slide for a two-minute story about a customer whose problem looked like the one in front of them. “Trust went up. Objections went down. The same numbers suddenly mattered more.”

James is clear that inspiration without systems fades by Monday. “Busy being busy always wins unless you write things down.” He shares a one-page planning template that locks story and belief into daily work. At the top are three priorities for the week. Under that, the three most important conversations to have. Then one belief you will upgrade this week, written as a sentence in the present tense. Finally, a short weekly review that asks what moved forward, what stalled, and what you learned. “Put it on paper. Return to it each morning. That is how you keep your story at the front of the negotiation.”

He takes aim at underpricing and invites a live experiment. “If you consistently underprice, test a bold reset,” he says. “State your value clearly to yourself first. If you do not believe it, no one else will.” He pairs that with a classic move. “Let the other side go first on price when you can. Information is leverage.” If a client asks for your rate, he suggests pivoting to outcomes and scope

before anchoring a number. “Tell a short client story that links your work to a result they care about, then show the number through that lens.”

Then he zooms out to the table itself. “Who is missing?” he asks. If the decision room all looks and sounds the same, the pie usually stays small. “Invite different perspectives. More angles create more ways to say yes.” He talks about coaching leaders who added operators from different age groups and backgrounds to key conversations and watched the option set expand. “Diversity is not slogans. It is deal space.”

He threads a final loop back to belief. “Bring your belief up to the level of your ability,” he says. The room laughs at the phrasing, but he holds it. “So many of you have the ability already. Belief is the part that lags.” He points at the page again. “Write it down. One belief you will upgrade this week. Tie it to a specific negotiation. Review it daily. Belief grows when you see yourself keeping small promises in public.”

As he closes, he returns to the opener. “Negotiation is a relationship. Lead with a story that earns trust. Ask better questions. Stand in your strengths. Then the numbers will land the way they should.” It feels less like a trick and more like a standard. Story, belief, curiosity, clarity, and the discipline to make it visible in simple weekly habits.

KEY TAKEAWAYS YOU CAN USE NOW

1. Start before numbers by earning trust with a short, real story that explains why the conversation matters.
2. Audit and upgrade your belief systems about money, value, status, and what you deserve, since belief frames every ask.
3. Use curiosity deliberately by asking clean questions that reveal desired outcomes, constraints, and easy-yes paths.
4. Negotiate from strengths by naming the lane where you create disproportionate value and anchoring your proposal there.
5. Sequence the conversation so connection comes first and logic follows, which increases the impact of your metrics.
6. Let the other side go first on price when possible to gather information and widen your negotiating range.
7. Reframe price through outcomes by pairing a brief client result with your number so the fee lives in context.
8. If you underprice, run a deliberate price reset and observe the effect on perception, confidence, and demand.
9. Build a one-page weekly plan that captures three priorities, three key conversations, one belief to upgrade, and a short review.
10. Design the table as well as the pitch by adding diverse voices that expand options and improve the deal space.
11. Practice “possibilitarian” thinking by listing three viable paths before constraints to change the room’s energy.
12. Share team stories so belief scales beyond the leader and the organisation can negotiate with one voice.
13. Debrief negotiations and systemise what worked so story, belief, and questions become repeatable operating habits.

MICHELLE BATCHELOR (NÉE PRESTON)

How To Become A C Suite Leader

Michelle Batchelor is the CEO of Life Plus NZ, Preston and Blythe, and Little Life, with deep experience across healthcare, staffing, and recruitment. Before the boardroom she competed internationally as Michelle “Pressure” Preston, winning multiple titles across Muay Thai and boxing. She pairs high performance habits with practical people leadership and disciplined execution.

Ali Harper gives Michelle a warm welcome and the room meets a leader who has lived two demanding arenas. In sport she is Michelle “Pressure” Preston, a multiple world champion who has fought more than a hundred times. In business she is Michelle Batchelor, CEO of Life Plus and Preston & Blythe. She opens simply: “You get out what you put in.” The line threads through everything that follows as she maps ring habits to boardroom results.

She starts with origin and mindset. “I grew up in Manchester,” she says, describing a home where her father’s rules were clear. “If you get hit, hit back twice as hard. If you get knocked down, get back up.” At fourteen she walked into a Thai boxing class, the only girl in a room full of men. “There were no girls to fight, so I fought boys.” She laughs softly at the memory, not to glamorise it, but to show where her tolerance for discomfort began. “You learn early to walk into hard rooms.”

A British Army stint added accountability. “Structure helps, but you still have to

show up,” she says. Back in civilian life she “fell into” healthcare recruitment and discovered the same mechanics. “It is repetition. You do the reps and track the progress. Small improvements compound.” The translation is direct. Training blocks turn into weekly targets. Pad rounds turn into client calls. Cutting weight becomes cutting distractions. “The scoreboard changes, the habits do not.”

Her move to New Zealand sharpened the lesson about proximity. “I went to every gym I could find, watched, asked questions, chose the coach whose results I wanted, and copied the habits.” She makes the principle explicit for leaders. “Stand next to people who are already where you want to go.” She applies the same filter to hiring and team design. “Your corner determines your ceiling. Choose it with intent.”

Michelle’s most vivid story is a world-title week that delivered both her best performance and one of her hardest lessons. “At the weigh-in I was one and a half kilos over,” she says. “I thought, how long is my hair, can I cut it off.” The room laughs. “Instead I put on layers and ran in a car park for three hours. I made weight.” Fight night brought a career-best performance and a decision that did not go her way. “Sometimes you do everything right and you still do not get the outcome. Life is not always fair. What you do next is on you.”

What came next is a system she still uses. “Twenty-four hours to sulk,” she grins. “Ice cream, burgers, a bit of a cry. Then back to training and back to the plan.” In business she treats a lost tender or a tough quarter the same way. “Never a loss, always a lesson. Contain it, learn from it, move.” She is clear about the practical payoffs. “Energy is precious. A short reset protects it. A long spiral wastes it.”

Ali later asks about fatigue and the ninth round. Michelle does not romanticise it. “In a ten-round fight you can hit round nine and think, my legs have disappeared.” The solution is not a miracle. “It comes down to grit, determination, strength of character.” That grit is not vague. It is anchored to purpose. “You have to know the why. Family. Community. A sustainable future. Whatever yours is, it needs to sit right in front of your mind when the body wants to stop.”

The leadership throughline is consistency. “Excellence is built when nobody is watching,” she says. “People learn who you are from how you show up every day.” She pushes against the idea that charisma wins the day. “Consistency wins the day. Treat people well, set the standard with your own behavior, and repeat.” She adds a sharp note about goals. “Fuzzy goals do not



idea that charisma wins the day. “Consistency wins the day. Treat people well, set the standard with your own behavior, and repeat.” She adds a sharp note about goals. “Fuzzy goals do not work. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” She encourages leaders to make goals crisp, visible, and connected to a reason that survives pressure.

Communication and emotional intelligence come next, framed as trainable skills. “Tailor your approach to each individual,” she says. “I am quite blunt and usually say it how it is.” The work is learning how others are wired. “Be aware of who they are, what drives them, how they react.” How do you build that awareness. “Self-reflection is key,” she says. “Beginning and end of the day, ask what went right, what went wrong, what can

“Consistency wins the day. Treat people well, set the standard with your own behavior, and repeat.”

I learn.” She treats wins and misses as data. “If you review both with curiosity, you get useful insight.”

Michelle returns more than once to the importance of team. “We work beside each other,” she says, echoing a theme that also surfaced in the panel. “Everyone brings something different.” The quality of the corner in a fight becomes the quality of the leadership bench in a company. “The wrong corner costs you. The right one protects you in the late rounds.”

She speaks plainly about recovery habits. “Training is stress management,” she says. “Thai boxing keeps me sane.” She smiles when she mentions her daughter and two golden retrievers. “That time grounds me.” The point is not lifestyle theater. It is performance infrastructure. “Build things into your day that keep you steady.”

When the topic turns to external shocks, she does not exaggerate or minimize. “You take it on the chin,” she says. “Stay alert, be agile, and move quickly.” She believes resilience can be designed. “Name your stressors, decide how you will respond, and practice the reset.”

She closes where she began. “You get out what you put in.” Then she gives the line that many in the room wrote

KEY TAKEAWAYS YOU CAN USE NOW

1. Treat purpose as a performance tool by writing your why where you will see it in hard moments.
2. Translate ring habits into operating habits by turning training blocks into weekly targets and pad rounds into scheduled client conversations.
3. Choose proximity on purpose by standing next to people whose results you want and copying their repeatable habits.
4. Contain setbacks with a 24-hour reset that acknowledges emotion, extracts learning, and returns you to the plan.
5. Make goals crisp and visible because fuzzy goals drain energy and weaken execution.
6. Build consistency as a brand by showing up the same way in the quiet moments when nobody is watching.
7. Design your corner by hiring and developing a leadership bench that raises your ceiling and protects you under pressure.
8. Train emotional intelligence through daily reflection that captures wins, misses, and one adjustment for tomorrow.
9. Tailor communication to the person in front of you by understanding their drivers and likely reactions.
10. Protect energy with simple anchors such as training, meditation, or family time that stabilize mood and focus.
11. Expect ninth-round moments and pre-decide your response so grit is a plan and not a hope.
11. Treat failure as data by running short post mortems that capture causes and countermeasures without blame.
12. Practice deletion and focus by cutting distractions the way you would cut weight before a fight.
13. Share the load by making the vision shared and credit shared so the team feels ownership.
14. Keep moving in volatility by watching key signals, acting quickly, and adjusting strategy without drama.



down. “When you know your why, you will find your way.” It sounds simple, but it explains how she connects ninth-round grit to long-cycle leadership. Purpose feeds consistency. Consistency builds trust. Trust compounds results.

DANU ABEYSURIYA

Using AI To Make Yourself Irreplaceable

Danu Abeysuriya is the founder and CTO of Rush Digital. Under his technical leadership Rush has delivered large scale platforms and applied AI systems used by millions, including software used daily by one in ten New Zealanders. He is known for turning cutting edge research into practical products and for building cultures where people learn to pilot AI.

Danu jumps onto the stage and laments his place in the order. “I’m following a world champion and a high performance coach,” he laughs, “so I’ll keep the footwork light.” The joke sets a human tone before he gets to the point. Rush began in a garage. “Today, one in ten New Zealanders use software we build or operate.” The mission has not changed. “We design and build technology that better serves people.” The challenge is that generative AI can look like a threat to that promise unless leaders design for it. His throughline is practical and calm. “You do not have to be replaced. You can learn to pilot the tools.”

He frames the last two years as a test of posture. “We treated AI as an existential risk and an opportunity at the same time.” The team ran what he calls a crawl, walk, run transformation. “Crawl meant experiments and training.” No big claims, just hands on. “Walk meant systemising prompts, security, and quality controls.” He shrugs at the unglamorous work. “Run meant teams building assistants, piloting them, and then codifying what worked.” They measured. “Daily usage went from about 40 percent to about 95 percent.” Commercial results followed. “Revenue



grew about 20 percent, headcount grew three to four percent.” His interpretation is simple. “People who learn to pilot assistants do more valuable work without burning out.”

To give the moment scale, he rewinds. “The first AI conference was in 1956.” Fraud detection has been running for decades. Compute has compounded for half a century. “We put a guidance computer on the moon, your phone is stronger, and the models read trillions of words.” He smiles at the contrast. “We put that power in our pockets and use it for Snapchat.” Then the turn. “The people who learn to pilot it will win.”

The most memorable story is about a person, not a platform. “Heather leads People and Performance at Rush.” Danu asked her to step into a sales oriented role and rebuild a managed services line around AI. “She had never been a salesperson. We made speed the constraint.” They asked a blunt question. “What if assistants could help her learn a new job in weeks instead of years.” Heather mapped the transition with prompts. “We took her current scope and drafted a crisp future scope.” She took formal courses, then distilled notes and collateral into a custom GPT. “It became a living coach.” She built task specific assistants for customer research, product research, pipeline hygiene, agenda design, and deal reviews. “The new line is humming, and we already acquired a small company into it.” He pauses so the point lands. “AI did not replace a role. It made a capable leader unstoppable in a new one.”

He draws the org chart of the near future in one sentence. “It is not people or AI, it is people piloting AI.” The practical move is to redraw your current chart. “Attach assistants and agents to roles, not to random individuals.” Then teach delegation like it matters. “Delete, defer, delegate to humans, or delegate to assistants.” He jokes about being told to wear pants on live TV after he turned up in shorts, and the room laughs. The subtext is intentional. “Humor lowers fear. Empathy keeps adoption high.”

Danu talks directly to careers. “Structured thinkers can cross borders.” He sees accountants and lawyers who can learn to code, and coders who can learn to sell. “Critical thinking transfers.” AI lowers the cost of trying. “You can try on the doing at a much lower cost now.” That is not a

reason to freeze. “It is a reason to act.” He quotes futurist Frances Valintine on the widening gap between movers and laggards. “Find the blast radius of the next platform shift and get inside it.” That was true for the internet, for mobile, and now for AI. He does not worship speed for its own sake. “You can wait for perfect clarity or you can start lightly jogging.” The jog matters because compounding matters. “Early movers define standards and win advantages that are hard to catch.”

He is specific about where leverage shows up. “Do not ask which job a robot can do. Ask which job becomes a better human job when the assistant takes the grind away.” He lists work that can be offloaded. “Research, first drafts, meeting prep, QA passes, handover notes.” He returns to precision. “Do not build one assistant that does everything. Build narrow helpers that you can trust.” Prompts get the same treatment as processes. “If you do it twice, write it down. If you do it three times, make an assistant and share it.”

He keeps privacy, security, and fatigue in view. “Adopt with empathy.” Change needs a tone. “People first, equity and education, human language.” He suggests role playing hard conversations with an assistant. “Practice before it is live.” He pushes leaders to measure adoption and impact. “Track daily usage, time saved, quality lifts, and revenue per head.” The point is not a dashboard for its own sake. “What gets measured becomes culture.”

The simple daily tools still count. “Use Eisenhower’s matrix.” Delete what is noise, defer what is not urgent, delegate to humans, delegate to assistants. Put your strengths on the work that requires judgment and taste. He returns to the Heather story to close the loop. “We mapped the role change with prompts, built the assistants, turned training into tools, shipped fast.” None of it was magic. “The magic was in the posture. People first, assistants as leverage, measurement without drama.”

He finishes with a steady challenge. “Move now.” Not recklessly, but deliberately. “Start with experiments, systemise the wins, productise what works.” The last line is as human as the first. “Make AI additive. Ask which parts of your job become more human when the assistant takes the grunt work. Double down there. That is how you make yourself irreplaceable.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS YOU CAN USE NOW

1. Treat AI as leverage by learning to pilot tools that multiply output and quality without multiplying hours.
2. Run a crawl, walk, run adoption plan that starts with experiments, moves to standardised prompts and controls, then productises what works.
3. Redraw your org chart with role based assistants attached to people so AI support is designed, not accidental.
4. Teach delegation explicitly with a delete, defer, delegate to humans, or delegate to assistants framework.
5. Build narrow, task specific assistants for research, drafting, agenda design, QA, and handover so trust and quality stay high.
6. Map role changes with prompts that draft scope, responsibilities, and 30, 60, 90 day milestones, then iterate with a mentor.
7. Turn training into tools by distilling course notes and internal collateral into custom GPTs that capture how you work here.
8. Measure adoption and impact with daily usage, time saved, quality lifts, and revenue per head so wins become culture.
9. Keep humans at the center by checking privacy, security, and change fatigue, and by using humor and empathy to lower fear.
10. Use simple prioritisation like Eisenhower’s matrix to clear noise and focus assistants on high value tasks.
11. Role play hard conversations with an assistant to test approaches and reduce risk before live moments.
12. Cross skill with confidence because critical thinking transfers across functions and AI lowers the cost of trying.
 13. Move early and steadily since compounding favors early adopters who define standards and earn durable advantages.
14. Aim yourself at the blast radius of platform shifts such as AI to increase exposure to opportunity.
15. Ask which parts of the job become more human when assistants take the grind, then double down on those human strengths.

PERI DRYSDALE

Building and Maintaining Resilience

Peri Drysdale is the founder of Snowy Peak and Untouched World, and the founder of the Untouched World Foundation. She built a global knitwear business from a home start, pioneered possum merino innovation, and grew a brand recognised internationally for quality and sustainability. She is a long standing advocate for values led commerce and practical environmental responsibility.

Peri Drysdale takes us back to the beginning of business journey. "I started with almost nothing," she says, "and I learned to choose courage over comfort." She frames the arc quickly. "From hand knits at the kitchen table to global showrooms. From raw wool to breakthrough yarns. Purpose has to be a practice." Sustainability is not a slogan in her world. "Treat it like a design brief that sharpens decisions."

The first spark is a child's memory. "A parcel fell from the rural mailbag," she recalls. "Inside were red shoes stamped Made in England." That tiny inscription stayed with her. "It was my first lesson in country brand. Products carry stories." Years later, as an at-home mother in Christchurch, she decided that New Zealand should add value to its wool instead of exporting it raw. "I had about two hundred dollars and no idea how to knit," she says with a small smile. "So I asked a neighbor to teach me." She wrote simple patterns. "I made garter stitch garments and mittens without thumbs because I had not worked out thumbs yet." Then she walked into Trade and Industry with a box of samples. "Export was the plan from day one."

The cottage model scaled fast. "Ten home knitters became hundreds," she says. "At one point there were about five hundred outworkers." The standards were unforgiving. "Half the garments went into a seconds pile at the start," she admits. "I refused to lower the bar. We fixed the system instead." Delivery was fragile because life is real. "Family life and flu seasons change your production curve when you are working out of homes," she says. "You learn to move."

Then came a stop-go moment. "We bought a state-of-the-art Japanese knitting machine," she says. "Interest was twenty-seven percent and the family home was on the line." The machine arrived without documentation. "There was no manual. The engineer



had none either. Japan had not written it yet.” She and her team went to work. “We reverse engineered major parts and wrote our own process. It demanded every bit of mental, physical, and financial resource.” Around the same time her husband, Alex, became ill. “The little hobby became the full family support,” she says. “So scale was not optional.”

Experts said Japan would not want what she made. “I went anyway,” she says. She stood outside Takashimaya in Tokyo with a small bag of samples. “I waited for the doors to open and walked to the knitwear floor.” Photography was forbidden. “I took a few pictures to study design,” she laughs, “and staff came running. I opened the sample bag and explained.” They called a buyer. “By the end of day one I had an introduction to a major wholesaler,” she says. “The market everyone said did not exist was there.” Her summary is plain. “Preparation. Instinct. Ask.”

Innovation became a habit. “We prototyped a possum and merino blend that felt absolutely delicious,” she says. Supply and production were the real tests. “People said it would never be viable.” She refused to hand back the samples. “I said I will return these when a container of yarn is on the way to my door.” Then she flew back to Japan. “I sat with a technologist and worked through the problem end to end.” There was also a narrative challenge. “We had to elevate the story beyond pest fur,” she says. She convened a business development circle. “Leaders from Prada Japan and Senken Shimbun sat at the table.” She chaired in Ichinomiya as the only woman in the room. “They teased me as an honorary man,” she says with a shrug. “I was fine with that. The point was the work.” In that period a stunning possum coat was cut to Princess Diana’s measurements in a Burberry collaboration. “She died before it could be sent,” Peri says quietly. “The coat now lives at Te Papa.”

Travel sharpened her sense of responsibility. “I kept seeing beautiful places degrade,” she says. “Then I would sit in rooms where the only topic was GDP and growth.” She decided to build a different model. “We launched Untouched World to prove that style and quality can thrive without trashing the environment.” The design brief was practical. “Easy wear and easy care,” she says. “Garments that travel well, live well, and tread lightly.” In 2000 she founded the Untouched World Foundation. “Young leaders go out and work on real sustainability challenges,” she says. Recognition came later. “The United Nations nominated our company as a global exemplar,” she notes. “They even granted permission to place the UN education logo on garments.” She is pleased but not sentimental. “Recognition opens doors. The work has to earn the right to stay in the room.” President Clinton invited her to present at the Clinton Global Initiative in

Asia. “Our commitments were called deep and far-reaching,” she says. “That was encouraging, but it also raised the bar.”

Peri’s operating system has a few steady lines. “Start before you know how,” she says. “Skills can be learned.” She is clear about standards. “Set a bar that hurts to miss,” she says. “High rejection rates are data about process.” She is equally clear about asking. “Ask for what the work deserves,” she says. “The worst answer is a polite no.” The best answer is a new door. “It opens only for the person who knocks,” she adds. She is not romantic about resilience. “Make it a system,” she says. “Diagnose. Adapt. Keep moving.” She gives credit to people who go all in. “Surround yourself with people who give their all as if the company were their own,” she says. “You can do more than you think if you are not doing it alone.”

Underneath the strategy is a personal discipline. “I do not front up at work until I have meditated,” she says. “Short, medium, long term. If I skip it I can feel the tension rise.” For years she swam at five in the morning. “You build things into your day,” she says. The tone stays practical even when she talks about legacy. “Ask what your red shoes moment is,” she says. “The spark that still pulls you forward.” Then the market question. “Where is your Japan,” she asks. “The place the experts say no but your gut says go.” And the standard. “Which lines will you refuse to lower when pressure is on.”

She closes with a simple invitation to act. “Start with one thing,” she says. “Write the story you want your product to carry. Fix one quality step. Ask one person you are nervous to ask.” She smiles. “Momentum is a teacher.” The room understands why. The story she told was not about luck. It was a sequence of choices that turned instinct into innovation, innovation into brand, and brand into a platform for impact.

KEY TAKEAWAYS YOU CAN USE NOW

1. Anchor your product in a clear place story so country and company brand earn premium positioning.
2. Start before you know how and let momentum teach you the skills you lack.
3. Set unforgiving standards and treat high rejection rates as process data to fix, not as a reason to lower the bar.
4. Invest in capability that unlocks the next horizon and be willing to document and master the tool yourself.
5. Test expert opinion in the market by walking the floor, meeting buyers, and showing the work.
6. Ask for what the work deserves and make respectful requests a daily practice.
7. Turn materials into meaning by pairing technical innovation with a story customers can feel.
8. Convene senior advisors and run the room to borrow perspective and credibility while you learn.
9. Build products for people and planet at the same time and use sustainability as a design constraint.
10. Institutionalise impact through education or foundation work that outlives any single season.
11. Use recognition to open doors but rely on sustained quality to stay in the room.
12. Read weak signals from travel and culture and adjust strategy before small issues become crises.
13. Systemise resilience with a routine that diagnoses issues, adapts quickly, and keeps momentum.
14. Hire and develop people who behave like owners to raise the ceiling on what is possible.
15. Protect personal energy with daily anchors such as meditation or early movement so decisions stay clear.

“Start before you know how, skills can be learned.”



The Q&A Panel Discussion

Ali is joined by Peri and Michelle for the panel discussion and gets straight into the takeaways. “You’ve both faced very stressful moments where it’s make or break. What’s in your toolkit that gives you the stamina to keep going?”

Peri doesn’t hesitate. “For me it’s all about energy.” She describes the stop-go moments that punctuate a company’s life and the choice to move when the purpose is clear. “Our industry is so bad for the environment, it has to change.” Ali reflects it back. “Something bigger than yourself?” Peri smiles. “Oh yes.”

Michelle points to the anchor she spoke about earlier. “You’ve got to know the why. What’s driving you every day.” When the body is pushed to its limits, she leans on mindset. “In a ten-round fight you hit round nine and think, my legs have disappeared. It comes down to grit, determination, strength of character.” She widens it beyond sport. “Whether your why is family, community, a sustainable planet, or our kids, that’s what keeps you going.”

Ali shifts to teams. “Have you found that working beside people with different skill sets has been the key?” Peri reframes hierarchy. “I like to think it’s our vision.” She is clear about contribution. “We couldn’t run our business without every single person. Everyone brings something different. If one of them wasn’t there, we wouldn’t be there.”

She treats highs and lows as data. “If you constantly review, you’ll get valuable insight. You need a growth mindset.”

On recovery, Peri jokes lightly. “Hobbies, how do you spell that word?” Then she gets specific. “I don’t front up at work until I’ve meditated. Short, medium, long term. If I haven’t done that I get tense.” She used to swim at five in the morning. “You build things into your day.” Michelle’s pressure valve is familiar. “Thai boxing, boxing, training.” It began as a hobby and now doubles as “really good stress management.” She adds the personal reset. “Time with my daughter and our two golden retrievers.”

Ali asks about shocks and exporting. Peri is matter-of-fact. “COVID was huge.” The company shipped to many countries, and tariffs bit hard. “Our numbers dropped to 54 percent of what we’d expect.” Experience shapes her stance. “Be alert and agile and move quickly.” She adds a steady line. “You take it on the chin. Something will turn up.”

Final asks for the room. “What do you wish you’d known earlier?” Peri returns to mindset. “Keep your energy up. Don’t sink down into what could be.” She uses a simple mantra when things go wrong. “I wonder what great things will come out of this.” She has seen the pattern. “For some curious reason, when you think that way, great things do come out of it.” Michelle closes with action. “Take action. If you’ve decided to do something, do one small thing today.” Examples come quickly. “Book the PT session. Meditate for 10 minutes.” The principle is the point. “It doesn’t have to be big. Just start.”

Then the question of translating the ring to the room. Ali grins. “You can’t knock someone’s block off in the boardroom. How do you use the skill set from the ring?” Michelle answers with composure. “Tailor your approach to each individual.” She knows her default. “I am quite blunt and usually say it how it is.” The work is adaptive. “Be aware of who they are, what drives them, and how they react.”

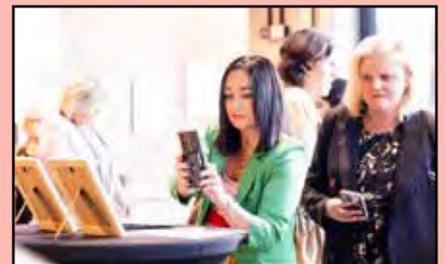
“How do people learn to be emotionally intelligent?” Ali asks. Michelle keeps it simple. “Self-reflection is key.” Her routine is deliberate. “Beginning and end of the day, what did I get right, what did I get wrong, what can I learn?”



KEY TAKEAWAYS YOU CAN USE NOW

1. Treat energy as a strategic resource and plan daily habits that protect it.
2. Connect hard pushes to a purpose larger than yourself, stated in one clear sentence.
3. Keep your why visible so it guides you when the work gets heavy.
4. Pre-decide how you will respond in late-round moments when fatigue and pressure spike.
5. Build a genuinely shared vision so credit and ownership travel across the team.
6. Design roles around distinct strengths rather than one-size approaches.
7. Adapt your communication to the person in front of you, not just the problem.
8. Know your default style and compensate with situational awareness.
9. Run a daily reflection loop to capture wins, misses, and one adjustment for tomorrow.
10. Lock in stabilising routines such as meditation, movement, or quiet planning before the inbox.
11. When shocks hit, acknowledge quickly, then move fast on the next best step.
12. Use deliberate reframing in setbacks to keep energy and creativity available.
13. Lower the bar for starting and take one concrete action today.
14. Surround yourself with people who rely on you and want you to succeed.
15. Protect simple anchors outside work, like time with family or pets, to stay grounded.





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BEAUTY

SUNLIT SPOTLIGHT

A curated holiday edit
of opulent beauty for
sun, sand, and soirées.

BEAUTY HOTLIST

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

1
LUXE ESCAPE

In collaboration with Australian fashion label **SIR.**, **Mecca Cosmetica** has launched a limited edition Facial SPF & Sarong, \$130, set to take you from the beach to the bar.

2
RADIANT RITUAL

Designed for lipid-deficient skin, **Dermaviduals** Nourish Holiday Kit, \$192.80, is the perfect troika to refresh your summer complexion.

3
CHERRY CHIC

This year, **ghd** brings their most loved styling tools in a deep cherry finish with opulent snake-skin textured vanity cases for an indulgent treat.

4
TIMELESS GLAMOUR

Featuring eight versatile shades of neutral mattes and twinkly shimmers, **Bobbi Brown** Sweet Decadence Eye Shadow Palette, \$138, is your go-to for both everyday elegance and after-hours glam.

5
BOTANICAL BLISS

Milou's bestsellers unite in The SkinIntroduction Limited Edition Holiday Set, \$250, delivering a clean, sustainable routine powered by New Zealand's potent botanicals and revitalising seaweed.

6
SUMMER SAVIOUR

Beat the heat with a cooling spritz of **Dermalogica** Hyaluronic Ceramide Mist, \$102; a nourishing and hydrating mist to instantly calm, revive and refresh the skin.

7
MAKEUP MASTERY

They say an artist is only as good as his tools. Designed for effortless makeup artistry, Emma Peters unveiled a limited-edition quartet of **Aleph** brushes, \$52-69, to help bring a refined touch of finesse to every look.

8
GILDED BEAUTY

A moisturising lip balm with 24 carat gold, **Tom Ford** Soleil Lip Blush, \$94, reacts to the skin's pH to transform into a bespoke pink stain.

9
LIQUID LIGHT

Blending skin-caring ingredients with pearlescent brilliance, **MAC** Skinfinish Lightstruck Liquid Highlighter, \$81, is a versatile fluid that casts an effortlessly luminous sheen.

10
CELESTIAL STORY

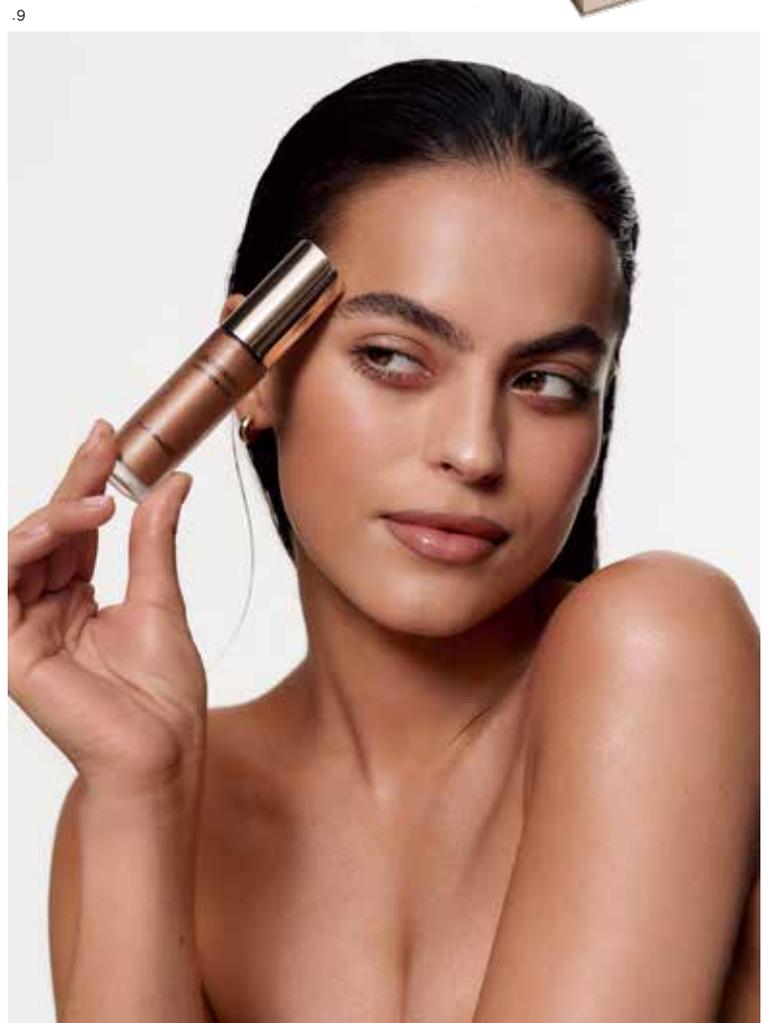
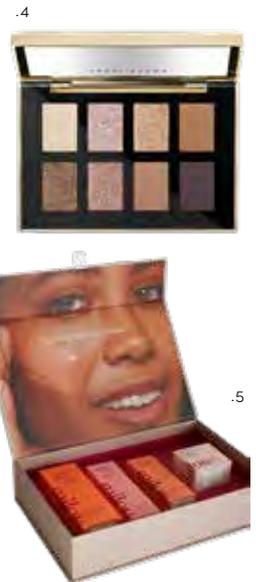
Amber and cardamom come together in **Aesop** Above Us Steorra, 50ml, EDP, \$280, to create a luminous spicy olfactory sensation laced with frankincense, labdanum and vanilla bean.

11
SILKEN LATHER

Consisting of 50% glycerin and linoleic-rich oils, **Naturium** The Glow Getter Multi-Oil Body Wash, \$36, delivers a luxurious oil-to-foam sensory cleanse that restores moisture and radiance in one step.

12
VITAL BREATH

Dermalogica A Moment in Nature, \$359, pairs the Phyto Nature Oxygen Cream and Lifting Eye Cream with a double-ended gua sha tool to visibly revive and reawaken ageing skin.



BEAUTY SPOT

From sun-kissed glow to long-wear colour, explore the season's must-have summer launches



GLOSS GUARD

Maintain glossy, manageable, and frizz-free hair with a pair of styling treatments designed to shield, soften, and enhance every strand. A styling cream that hydrates, strengthens and smoothes hair, **Angel en Provence** Camellia Versatile Cream Leave-In, \$54.90, works to protect the hair against heat styling and UV damage. A high-gloss oil that smooths hair for up to 4 days, **Kérastase** Gloss Absolu Glaze Drops Hair Oil, \$84, imparts mirror-like shine for even the coarsest of hair types. Formerly known as 'The Dehumidifier' **Lee Stafford** Anti-Humidity Spray, \$23.99, is an invisible spray that veils the hair in styling polymers that helps tackle frizz and keeps strands smooth in the sticky air.

PLUMPED PERFECTION

Curated for the summer season, these new essentials will envelop the skin in rich hydration and refine texture to perfectly prime the complexion. A once-a-week treatment, Osmosis Summer Cooling Enzyme Mask, \$126, leans on the powers of watermelon fruit extract, niacinamide, and lactic acid to refine, brighten, and invigorate the skin. Packed with moisture retaining ingredients, **Max and Louie** Prepy Bakuchiol Face Milk, \$49, sold out within days of its launch, celebrated for its unique plumping effects. Thoughtfully created to support mind-skin connection, **SIORA** blends sustainably sourced botanicals and probiotics with tuberose and rosewood for a calming, sensory experience. Supporting the natural synthesis of Hyaluronic Acid within our skin, **Elizabeth Arden** Peptides Ceramide Hydra-Plumping Water Cream, \$180, promotes firmness and imparts a visibly filling effect. Powered by next-generation actives like sunflower seed sprout extract, cannabis sativa callus lysate, and peptides, **Aspect Dr** Restorative 8 Night Cream, \$138, synchronises with the skin's overnight recovery cycle to reveal a renewed, refreshed complexion by morning.



SILKEN TOUCH



Get celebration-ready with a luxurious body care duo from **Corbin Rd** that will have you glowing from neck to toe. Mineral-rich sea salt and sugar is enriched with natural oils in the Sugar & Salt Body Scrub, \$89.95, to polish away dull, dry skin while leaving it supple and revitalised. Follow with the Body Butter, \$159.95; a sumptuous concoction of milk thistle stem cell extract and bearberry leaf combined with shea, cacao, flaxseed, and jojoba oils and butters, which provides ultra-nourishing hydration while helping to reduce the appearance of cellulite after a month of daily use.



PARTY PROOFERS

During the silly season when the pop of a cork is heard as often as Mariah Carey's Christmas album, it's worth integrating a few healthy habits to keep your systems in check. **The Beauty Chef** Daily Supergreens, delivers bio-fermented supergreens like green banana starch, broccoli sprout, barley grass, spinach, kale, spirulina and milk thistle to support liver function and fat metabolism. **BePure** Blood Sugar Balance, \$49.90, pairs myo-inositol and selenium to encourage healthy insulin signalling, helping cells absorb and utilise glucose more effectively. And of course, skin health remains front of mind - **Dose & Co** Pure Collagen Peptides Peach, \$39.99, uses bovine collagen peptides to boost hydration and maintain a healthy, radiant complexion.

GLOW THERAPY

Refresh and revitalise the skin with **Saint Beauty** Ultimate Facial, \$285; a 90-minute bespoke facial customised to each individual's skin concerns. Including a facial massage cleanse with steam, peel, LED and an oxygenation massage with vitamin infusion, your complexion will be visibly renewed, luminous, and perfectly primed for every occasion.



HYDRATION HEROES

For skin that feels quenched, luminous, and perfectly primed, turn to this curated selection of protective moisturisers. **SIMKA** Day Cream, \$82.50, supports the skin's natural barrier with EGCG, vitamin E, and shea butter, nurturing hydration while fortifying defences. Glycerin and hyaluronic acid combine in **Clinique** Dramatically Different Moisturizing Lotion SPF50+, \$77, to deliver all day hydration in a lightweight formula that works well under makeup. **Trinnny London** BFF Cream Skin Perfector SPF 30, \$87, features microencapsulated pigments that impart a sheer wash of coverage and luminosity, instantly waking up tired-looking skin.



FLAWLESS FLUSH

Beauty feeds are buzzing with the news of two **Haus Labs** releases. First, the Precision Sculpt Shaping Balm, \$61, comes in cool-toned shades designed to mimic natural shadows with effortless precision. And secondly, four universally flattering neutrals have joined the viral **Haus Labs** Color Fuse Glassy Blush Balm Stick, \$67. Glassy Ginger, Cayenne, Clove, and Cinnamon offer sophisticated shades that can be worn seamlessly on both lips and cheeks.

LONGWEAR ESSENTIALS

In the thick of summer, a minimalist makeup mindset naturally takes over. Having sifted through the best in long-wear formulas, these are the standouts that I return to. Non-caking, crease-resistant and fade-resistant, **Bobbi Brown** Weightless Skin Foundation SPF15, \$105, is an oil-absorbing yet hydrating formula that lasts all day. A dark horse product that has quickly become a makeup staple, **Revlon** ColorStay Multi-Liner, \$29.99, is a creamy easy-to-use pencil that comes in 7 covetable neutral shades, designed to contour and line the eyes and lips. An instant sell-out for a reason, **Smashbox** Always On Eye Shadow Stick, \$49, sweeps on with ease, layers seamlessly, and locks into a budge-proof finish that stays put all day. Buildable from a soft wash to a bold flush, **Jane Iredale** Liquid Blush, \$81, is enriched with squalane, vitamin E and castor seed oil to enhance the skin's natural radiance. To seal your facebeat with staying power, **Clinique** Set The Day Makeup Setting Spray, \$65, veils the skin in an alcohol-free, transfer-resistant and waterproof mist that settles evenly for all-day hold and freshness.



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VIRTUAL BLUE

The recent M2 AI Summit turned the Majestic on Durham in Christchurch into a kind of national hub for AI. In the room were CEOs, founders, senior leaders from finance, tech, manufacturing, logistics, health and safety, public sector agencies, marketing and HR, along with advisors, investors and a fair number of quietly AI-obsessed operators who are already experimenting after hours. The brief was simple: what is actually working with AI right now, and how do you turn that into real-world advantage without breaking your people or your risk profile. What followed was a full day of keynotes and practical insights with action points from those already implementing AI across a range of sectors.

Here is a recap of the speakers and some of their action points.



**DR PETER CATT – DIRECTOR OF
QUANTUM & AI, VIRTUAL BLUE**

**3 YEARS OF AI MADNESS AND WHAT IT
MEANS FOR BUSINESS**

"Move from old static
spreadsheets to models
that update continuously
with new data."

Peter sits at the intersection of serious maths and boardroom reality. His session focused on moving beyond static spreadsheet logic into live, AI-enhanced forecasting that lets organisations predict, plan and act with more confidence, particularly in demand, risk and financial planning.

KEY ACTIONS FROM PETER:

Map one "predict-plan-act" loop in your business, such as demand or churn, and identify where it currently breaks.

Move from old static spreadsheets to models that update continuously with new data.

Standardise how you communicate uncertainty so decision-makers can see confidence levels at a glance.

Use more than one model for high-impact calls, so you are not relying on a single hero forecast.

Define when a model only informs, when it recommends and when it is allowed to trigger action, and review performance regularly.

**NYSSA WATERS – CO-FOUNDER & CEO,
POSSIBL.AI**

WHAT HAS DEVELOPED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

"Bake AI into annual
planning and budgets
instead of treating it as an
afterthought."

Nyssa opened by resetting the timeline. The last year has not been incremental. When up to 90 percent of code can be written by AI and most future apps will be built by end users in natural language, you cannot treat AI as a small add-on. Her focus was on what it means to become an AI-native organisation, where people, data, governance and security are ready for that reality.

KEY ACTIONS FROM NYSSA:

Plan for AI-written code and "citizen-built" apps, with clear rules for which tools are allowed and how AI-generated code is reviewed.

Teach staff to describe processes and outcomes clearly in natural language so models can actually help.

Stand up a safe internal AI sandbox so teams can experiment with non-sensitive data and promote the winners into supported products.

Refresh data and security foundations so information is labelled and stored in ways that are safe for LLM use.

Bake AI into annual planning and budgets instead of treating it as an afterthought.





**BEDE CAMMOCK-ELLIOTT – FOUNDER, SEEO.
AI & SEEDIGITAL**

IMPROVING HEALTH & SAFETY WITH AI TO
COMPLIMENT EXISTING PROGRAMMES,
PEOPLE AND TEAMS

"Review how big the gap is
between your procedures
and what actually happens
day to day."

Bede anchored his talk in a tragic real-world case, then showed how computer vision can turn existing CCTV into a proactive safety tool. His core point was that there is often a large gap between "work as imagined" in a manual and "work as done" on the floor, and AI can help close that gap before people get hurt.

KEY ACTIONS FROM BEDE:

Identify your highest-risk areas where people and machines interact, such as forklifts, trucks and cranes.

Review how big the gap is between your procedures and what actually happens day to day.

Turn existing cameras into a safety asset that can surface near-misses, not just record incidents after the fact.

Assign visible ownership for AI-supported safety so it does not become "everyone's job and no one's job".

Track proactive metrics such as near-misses and coaching conversations, not only injury statistics.



**CAELAN HUNTRESS – HEAD OF TRAINING &
ENABLEMENT, AGENTIC INTELLIGENCE**

AI & AI AGENTS YOUR TEAM SHOULD BE USING
NOW FOR GROWTH

"Design roles as 'human plus
AI' collaborations rather than
replacements."

Caelan demystified AI agents and the alphabet soup of GPTs, LLMs and NLP. His focus was on how organisations of all sizes can use agents as "force multipliers" in support, sales and compliance, without losing their values or their brand voice.

KEY ACTIONS FROM CAELAN:

Lift basic AI literacy across the organisation so people know what agents are and are not.

Audit workflows in support, sales, finance and compliance for repetitive, rules-based tasks that an agent could handle.

Start with one small, tightly scoped pilot agent that has clear success metrics.

Set strong ethical guardrails so agents are helpful, honest and harmless before you scale them.

Design roles as "human plus AI" collaborations rather than replacements.



JOHN-DANIEL (JD) TRASK – CEO, AUTOHIVE & RAYGUN

WHAT WE DID TO GROW PRODUCTIVITY

"Ring-fence dedicated time for AI experimentation, even if it is one focused day..."

JD spoke from lived experience of turning a New Zealand software company into an AI-native business. From giving his team dedicated "AI weeks" to treating token spend as a proxy for productivity, his stories were full of the numbers and experiments that many in the room wanted to see.

KEY ACTIONS FROM JD:

- Track AI usage, including token spend, as a new form of productive capital rather than just a cost.
- Ring-fence dedicated time for AI experimentation, even if it is one focused day, so progress does not rely on after-hours effort.
- Ask each person to pick one repetitive task they dislike and build or adopt an agent to handle just that slice.
- Start agents on internal processes such as reporting or email triage before exposing them to customers.
- Give non-technical people the tools and backing to lead agent experiments, then celebrate their wins.

JAMES LAUGHLIN, HIGH-PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIST & EXECUTIVE COACH

THE TALENT NEEDED TO FILL THE AI SKILL GAP

"Lead with story before metrics when you are asking people to change."

James brought the conversation back to people. Drawing on his journey from divided Northern Ireland to seven-time world champion musician and mental skills coach, he argued that the real AI skills gap is not technical. It is leaders who are willing to examine their belief systems, lead with story and build cultures where people feel safe to grow through change.

KEY ACTIONS FROM JAMES:

- Audit your "BS" belief systems around money, leadership and AI, and deliberately replace the ones that keep you small.
- Lead with story before metrics when you are asking people to change.
- Check that your leadership consistently answers three questions for your teams: do you care about me, do you value me, will you help me grow.
- Reward curiosity and learning as core skills, not nice-to-haves.
- Turn event inspiration into small weekly rituals so it becomes habit, not just a good feeling on the day.



**COWAN HENDERSON – FOUNDER,
AVOCADO AI**

INNOVATION, REGULATION AND THE
EXPONENTIAL RISE OF GEN AI

"Teach a simple shared
prompt structure, so teams
are not starting from
scratch every time."

Cowan's message was simple and uncomfortable. AI adoption is 90 percent people and culture, 10 percent tools. If you ignore the human side, staff will quietly use whatever tools they can find anyway, often without the right guardrails. His talk was all about turning that reality into something safe and powerful.

KEY ACTIONS FROM COWAN:

Frame AI internally as a people and culture project before you talk about vendors.

Co-design practical AI safety guidelines with staff so everyone knows what "smart and safe" use looks like in your context.

Teach a simple shared prompt structure, so teams are not starting from scratch every time.

Build one or two custom assistants that embed your own brand, rules and knowledge.

Normalise the question "have you tried this with AI" inside existing workflows, so experimentation becomes part of the job.



**ALEX JOHNSON – SENIOR SYSTEMS ENGINEER,
ARCTIC WOLF**

AI & CYBERSECURITY – WHAT YOU NEED
TO KNOW

"Retire the 'we are too small
to be a target' mindset and
assume your data is valuable
to someone."

Alex brought the security reality check. He shared how attackers are already using AI to create convincing video and voice deepfakes of executives, jumping on Zoom, sounding calm and credible, and persuading staff to move large sums of money. From his vantage point at Arctic Wolf, seeing trillions of security events across thousands of customers, his message was blunt: AI is accelerating both attack and defence, and mid-sized organisations are very much in scope.

KEY ACTIONS FROM ALEX:

Treat every new AI tool as both an opportunity and a security risk and ask how it could be abused, not just what it can do.

Make speed and effectiveness your north stars in security - review how fast you would currently spot an issue and how well you would respond.

Retire the "we are too small to be a target" mindset and assume your data is valuable to someone.

Wire AI into security operations so models help triage logs, surface anomalies and support your team, not just into sales and marketing.

Put clear ownership around AI usage policies, including what staff can share, which tools are approved and how usage is monitored.

Rehearse incident response and verification protocols for high-value payments, especially in a deepfake world.



ANDREW NICOL – FOUNDER, PREDUCTIVE

KEY AREAS BUSINESSES CAN START TODAY
THAT ARE SIMPLE & EFFECTIVE

"Run short AI sprints on
real business problems..."

Andrew grounded the conversation in one blunt reality. Despite huge investment, productivity has barely shifted. Most AI projects are failing to create meaningful uplift. His focus was on simple, human-centred ways to move from pilots to actual productivity improvements.

KEY ACTIONS FROM ANDREW:

- Define productivity in plain language as "more value per hour" and use that as the lens for every AI idea.
- Give every knowledge worker a secure AI licence and set clear expectations for how much time they should be saving.
- Bring shadow AI into the open with sanctioned tools and transparent rules.
- Run short AI sprints on real business problems with cross-functional teams and clear outcomes.
- Use AI explicitly to free up time for creativity, mentoring and leadership, not only for cost cutting.



ASA COX – CEO & FOUNDER, ARCANUM.AI

CUSTOMER RETENTION & GROWTH AT
SCALE

"Choose platforms that
plug into your existing
systems so non-technical
owners can run with them
day to day."

Asa spoke directly to the mid-market leaders in the room - franchises, councils, family businesses and SME networks who do not have a huge data science team. His core idea is AI as an e-bike: you still pedal and choose the route, but now you have a motor to help you up the hills. It only works if you have the basics sorted first: clear processes, usable data, realistic expectations and decent security.

KEY ACTIONS FROM ASA:

- Use an "AI adoption canvas" or similar framework to map your first three concrete AI moves instead of staying in vague strategy mode.
- Start where the money and relationships are by focusing on customer retention and lifetime value, not just new acquisition.
- Pick one conversation-heavy workflow, such as coaching sessions or key client meetings, and let AI handle notes and summaries so humans can stay fully present.
- Tune AI outputs to your existing brand voice and templates so they are immediately usable, not just interesting drafts.
- Measure success in time given back to frontline people and improvements in retention or revenue per customer, not just tool count.
- Choose platforms that plug into your existing systems so non-technical owners can run with them day to day.

DANU ABEYSURIYA – FOUNDER & CTO, RUSH DIGITAL

USING AI TO MAKE YOUR TEAM GREAT

"Start by lifting literacy at leadership level..."

Danu closed the day with a very human playbook for bringing AI into a 100-person product studio that already builds systems many New Zealanders use. His "crawl, walk, run" approach and focus on enablement gave leaders a clear, non-dramatic way to move forward.

KEY ACTIONS FROM DANU:

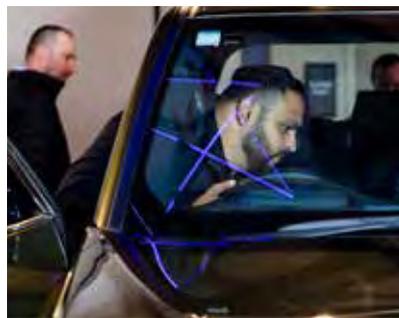
Treat AI as a whole-organisation transformation, not just another software rollout.

Start by lifting literacy at leadership level, then layer in small, low-risk changes to text-heavy workflows.

Use off-the-shelf tools to improve single steps in existing processes instead of trying to rebuild everything at once.

Encourage juniors to use AI as a non-judgemental mentor and build psychological safety around experimentation.

Track usage and outcomes and use them as coaching tools rather than policing tools.



M2 MAGAZINE PRESENTS

M2

AI SUMMIT



29 APRIL 2026
AUCKLAND

The M2 Summit is on a mission to accelerate your business success by connecting you with industry leaders in AI & technology to show you where to start & what works.

Throughout a day of keynotes, case studies, panel discussions & interactive exhibits we aim to give you the toolkit to understand and apply the best technology to grow and succeed.

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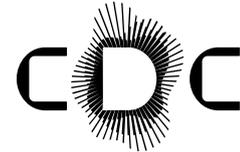
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A BUNDLE OF FUN

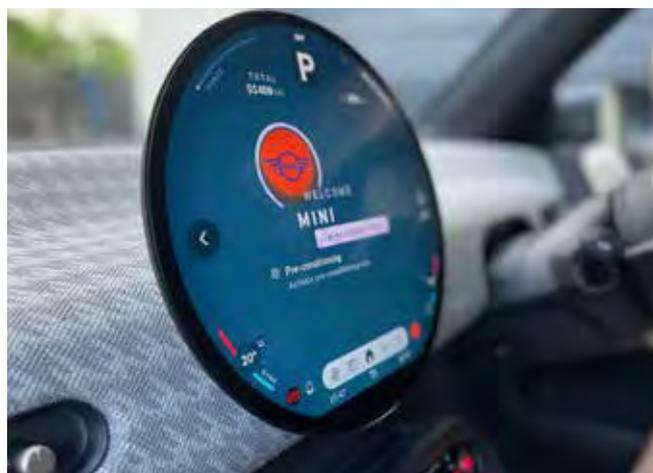
The 2025 Mini Cooper S Electric

The Mini Cooper S Electric is a tiny car that's a ton of fun. Not as small as the original Mini, yet just as much fun and still one of the smallest cars that you can buy. An icon of the 60s, Mini survived many changes of ownership until it found a home with BMW. Cooper is the name synonymous with any fast Mini from the days when John Cooper built Formula One cars and tuned Minis. This latest Cooper keeps the design cues of the original with lots of round bits and rounded corners while also being dramatically modern, with LED ring headlights and large rims and tyres. It's low, it's lively, and it's speedy and easy to manoeuvre outside. My parents definitely approved, as young adults in the 60s they owned many a Mini - and a yellow Mini is the first car I remember.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY TIM WARREN

Inside the Cooper is very much updated from the original yet has lashings of legacy with a large, round display that is a pleasant relief from the standard 'mine is bigger than yours' rectangles that we see in a lot of electric cars. I'd go as far as saying the display on the Mini is just about the best I've seen. Internal materials are a mix of recycled and environmentally low impact selections that give the Cooper a modern and brisk feel. While the car is small, the passenger compartment leaves you with a pleasing sense of space. Playful touches abound, with the Mini badge turning up occasionally, a fabric swatch as part of the steering wheel, and projections that light up selectively based on the drive mode that you're in. The interior upholstery was a pleasing blue, and while not leather, it felt appropriate. It had more of the refreshing good looks that this car exudes, and it's definitely a bit of a TARDIS - bigger on the inside than on the outs.

I've been loaned this lovely little hyperactive car for a week, and I cannot get enough of it. I look for reasons to drive it. Drive modes



are called experiences, with everything from Vivid to Eco. Change the experience and the car does a little shimmy and reconfigures itself with new colors and a few sound effects. My favourite is the whoopin' and hollerin' Go-Kart mode. Although mechanically similar to some of the BMW one series from whom it receives a drivetrain control, gear, and driver assistance package, it's got its own distinct character, the fun and zippy feel amplified by the wheels at the corners approach of the layout.

At 160KW/330Nm, the front wheel drive takes 6.7 seconds to get to 100, which doesn't sound fast these days, but it's actually fabulous and just right in this car. It puts a big smile on your face every time

you use that electric torque. It's got a good traction control system, and if you accelerate fast, you can hear the wheels scrabbling for grip as it propels you. For a small car, it's a marvel. It's a marvel of a driving experience, and it's a pleasure as an EV because somehow everything about it is easy. This Mini's main job is getting you around town with fun and flair - yet of course it can go further. The 50 kilowatt-hour battery, which gave me somewhat over 300 kilometers of range in my normal driving, but in the right mode will give more. The 10% to 80% fast charge time of 30 minutes means if you did have to charge away from home it wouldn't take you long to top up.

The boot space is small, yet pack it well and you can do a week's shopping for a family of four with this car, just tuck a few things on the parcel tray. If you buy enough for a party you can always put the seats down. You'll want to shop more often than that because with this car, you look for excuses to go driving. It's that much fun in any mode.

Ultimately, the Mini Cooper S Electric delivers an undeniably enjoyable experience. Its ease of use as an EV, combined with its inherently fun and zippy nature, makes it a serious compact contender, especially if you're considering your first electric car. It's a surprisingly practical package wrapped in charisma and fun.



The 2025 Volkswagen Tayron

The Volkswagen Tayron is a new entrant into the market, occupying the space formerly held by the Tiguan Allspace seven-seater. At the launch, Volkswagen explained how they are positioning themselves as the entry-level to the premium segment, and for the most part it shows.

WORDS BY TIM WARREN

All Tayrons are seven-seaters, and it's a cleverly worked-out package; the vehicle seems to be no bigger than a mid-sized SUV despite boasting three rows of quality seating. It exudes practicality and functionality without eschewing design. Aesthetics are slightly subjective, yet I do like it. It is restrained and sophisticated, particularly with the thin blue line running around this R-Line version, extending across the doors and through the matching seats. It has a distinct identity while being an obvious part of the VW range.

The Tayron comes in two distinct specifications. Elegance is well equipped with technology like keyless access, 19" rims and real wood interior finishes. The R-Line targets a more sporting aesthetic, replacing the wood with unique design elements and sports seats, while riding on 20-inch alloy wheels to complete a slightly more purposeful look.

Inside, the generous screen is functional, while the steering wheel is given many buttons to help you stay focused on the road. On this higher-spec model, options like ventilated front seats and a head-up display come standard. It's no surprise that there is a ton of room here: with up to 850 litres of luggage capacity with the third row folded or 1,905 litres with both the second and third seat rows folded.

Tayron sports a driving experience control from comfort to sport. Multiple settings can be set at the same time with the 'Atmospheres' function: from background lighting to custom layouts of the dash.

Driver assistance functions are plentiful with lane keeping, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise control and electronic stability control. Thankfully these are well integrated into the driving experience and warnings are only sounded when essential.

The handling is well-tuned for both around town and longer trips, where it sails along beautifully. The drivetrain options are the 150kW and 195kW 2.0-litre turbocharged petrol engines, which both deliver reasonable fuel economy. The 320 to 400 Nm torque makes for an impressive towing capacity of up to 2,500 kg when braked.

I used the vehicle for a range of duties in the time I had it. On the out of town drive it was quiet, comfortable and simply easy to drive. It didn't miss a beat when we hit 10K of gravel, it just continued to express quiet control over it's surroundings. City driving and there's no hiding that it's a large vehicle, yet with good visibility thanks to the camera package, there's no space we couldn't tackle.

There is a lot of competition between manufacturers in the warranty space and we applaud this! VW offers a 5-Year / 150,000km warranty standard across the range, and the first 3 services are included in the price and roadside assistance should you need it. It also comes with a 5-star ANCAP safety rating. We think Tayron is a very strong offering that ticks all the boxes for Kiwi families. This looks like it will be a strong seller!

Tayron is priced from \$78,990.





The A-Z of Packing for a Work Trip



A Modern Woman's Guide.

WORDS BY PHILLIPPA HIBBS



Acceptance. You're going to mess this up. Make peace with that.

Chaos. The only way to achieve greatness is through pure, unbridled chaos. Empty your wardrobe onto your bed. Upend your drawers. Pour the contents of your make-up bag into another, fancier make-up bag. Through the swirling madness, the truth will reveal itself.

Doubt. Is this outfit professional enough? Will three pairs of trousers be enough for a week? Does this blazer make me look like a tosser? Doubt your outfit choices. Doubt the weather. Doubt the amount of underwear you will need. Nothing is certain.

Eleven. This is the appropriate amount of underwear, no matter how long the trip.

Fear. Whatever you choose to shove into this suitcase will be your entire identity for the next week. It will be all you have to rely on. There is no going back once you're 5 hours from home and realise you forgot to pack any tops. Understand this, and let the fear galvanize you.

Glasses. Professionals don't squint.

Hope. Packing lists are the crutch of the coward. Throw ten to fifteen random garments into your suitcase and hope that coherent outfits will magically crystalize from the chaos.

Ironing. You don't own an iron, but the hotel does. This is a great chance to get all your ironing done, so pack your most hideously crumpled clothes. Giving yourself chores whilst on the road will keep you grounded and make sure your mornings are even more panicked than usual.

Jacket. Yes, it's dry and sunny right now, but you understand how the weather works, right?

Keep Cup. Soothe your concerns about the carbon footprint of your trip by demurely telling your barista 'I've brought my own cup.' They might even knock 30c off your drink.

Laptop. Dear god, don't forget your laptop. Sure, you need it for work, but it'll also be the only source of decent entertainment once you realise that the motel TV only shows *The Chase*.

Mess. Don't worry too much about this one, it'll happen naturally. I know, I know, your finally packed suitcase is a work of art with lovingly rolled bundles of clothes. I can guarantee, though, that 5 minutes after arriving at your destination, your opened suitcase will morph into a chaotic, sprawling mess that will slowly choke the floor space of your hotel room.

Bath Bomb. Your home doesn't have a bath, but your hotel does. Even if it's only 3 feet long, you are obliged to take full advantage of this rare treat.

Name badge. Yes, you will forget to take it off and end up browsing K-Mart with your name emblazoned on your tits.

Only eleven pairs of pants? Are you sure? Throw in another 5 pairs just in case.

Pants. You have 16 pairs of pants now. That's probably plenty

Hmmmm, maybe just 2 more.

Quit. Ok, that's an overreaction. Keep packing.

Reading Material. For some reason, you think

that you'll have a lot of down time and that you'll want to spend that down time reading. Pack five to ten books, all of which will remain in your suitcase while you scroll your phone, or discover a love of *The Chase*.

Speaker. Morning news podcast. Music. White noise to sleep. God forbid you be left alone with your own thoughts.

Tampons. Joking, there's no way you'll remember these. Don't worry, you can buy them while you're on the road, thus adding another packet to the dozen or so half-empty packets you have at home.

Underwear. Ok, so you've packed 18 pairs now, but you can never be too safe. Pack all remaining pairs of underwear that you own.

Vibrator. Let's be honest, you'll be too tired to use it, but it's nice to know it's there.

Weight of Society's Expectations of Women to be Put Together and Stylish, Whilst Also Demonising Them For Being 'High Maintenance' if They Give The Slightest Shit About How They Look, and Mocking Them When They Need Big Suitcases to Carry the Equipment Required to Achieve Said Stylishness. Try to fit this into a shoulder bag, if poss.

Xenophobia. You will be in a strange place with strange people. Be alert.

Your General Anxiety. The most trusty of travel companions.

Zero. The number of times you will nail this process.

Read more at: ladyshambles.substack.com

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