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Don't Waste Time With False Hope

INVEST IN YOURSELF
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EDITOR'S *letter*

I suspect that billions of dollars and a lot of Tuesday afternoons have gone into countless therapy sessions around the world to offer up the same great revelation. That a lot of people have unresolved father or mother or sometimes both issues. There's probably a lot in it. We are probably to some extent walking around carrying somebody else's unfinished business, dreams and aspirations thrust onto us by people who were themselves carrying somebody else's, all the way back up the generational line to some dude who really wanted to take down the biggest wooly mammoth in the tribe but never got quite there, so he put a lot of transference pressure onto his offspring who secretly disappointed him because they just wanted to be cave painters and not hunters. I digress.

But this does lead me to Jacqlin Richards, whose book is called F*ck Up Your Kids with Grace & Humour. I like the title because not only does it stand out in an otherwise pastel parental help section but my read on it is that, look, chances are you are going to pass on some quirks to your kids but don't stress. And this is a really key point. At the office, in our businesses, we get promotions and accolades if we are always kind of on edge, anticipating problems, putting out bush fires, go, go, go. But those things that make us great in the boardroom don't make us great parents at the dinner table.

"We've been taught behaviour. Strategies. Consequences. Rewards. Sticker charts. But very few of us were taught that the greatest influence we have on our children isn't what we say - it's the state we bring into the room. Children borrow our nervous system long before they borrow our advice," she writes in this issue.

One woman who I presume has made her parents extremely proud is Catherine Goodwin who took over the family real estate business her parents built, which meant deciding, one standard at a time, which parts of the inheritance to carry forward and which to challenge. She was 28 and building a legal career in England when she came home to be a property manager. "Most people, politely, said, have you lost your f**king mind?" When she started out, she took the hardest portfolio she could find so nobody could say she got the job because of nepotism. Two decades on, we interview her in what used to be her father's office.

Bindi Norwell, meanwhile, decided early on what kind of boss she was never going to be, having worked for that kind in the years when you stayed at your desk until 11 at night to prove you were working. She now runs a healthcare network looking after 800,000 people with a team that will tell its own chief executive to slow down.

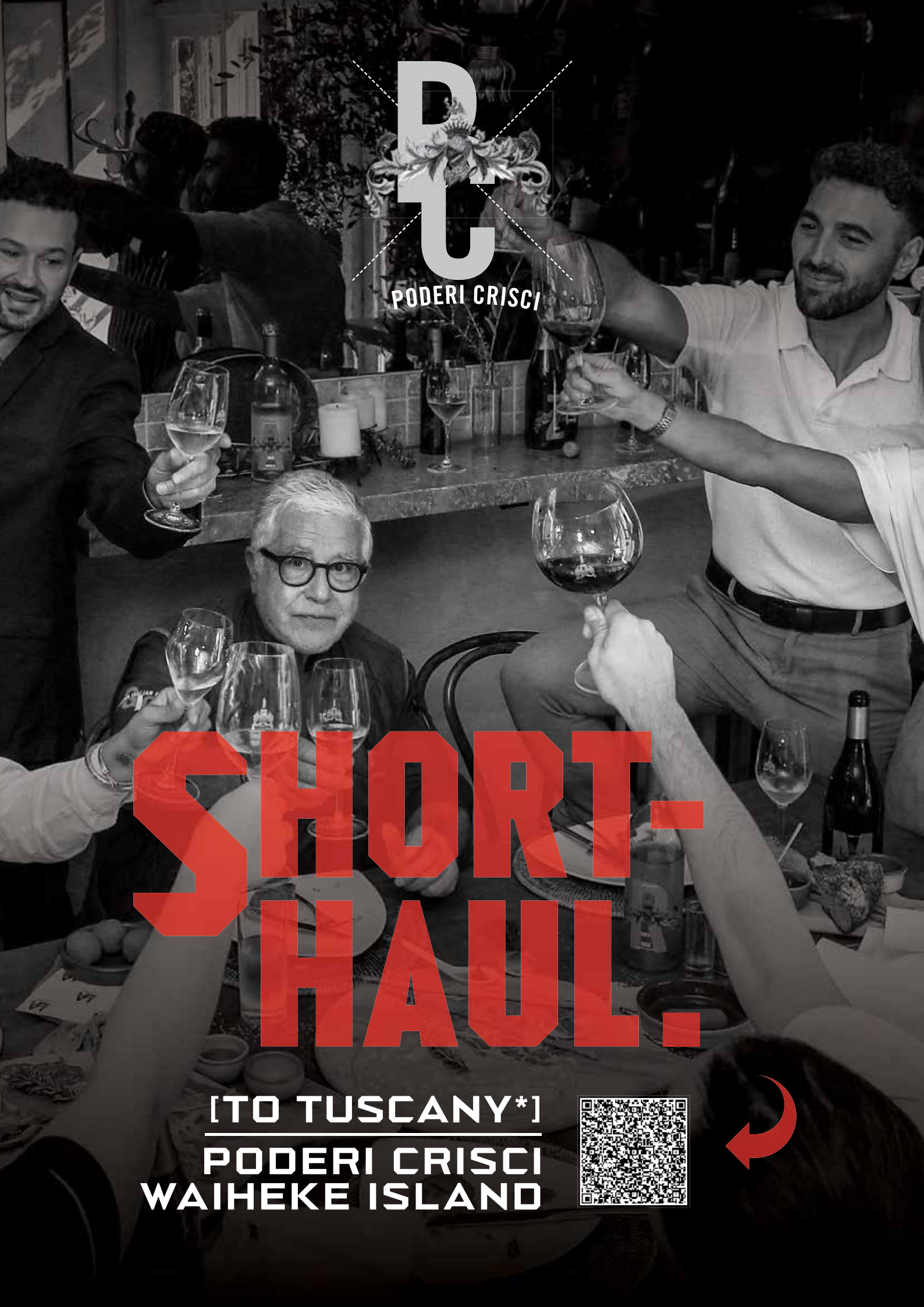
CTO, COO and now CEO, Jo Stansfield spent years hiding behind a curated professional persona, which is probably what most of us are doing really. But when she let it drop, she found her team did the same, on the theory that if she was brave enough to be her whole self, they might feel safe enough to be theirs. "If you're the brightest person with the best degree, but you can't interact as a human being, then it doesn't really matter." She has no degree, incidentally.

Samantha Stewart used to answer everybody. "At the start, I enjoyed giving solutions. I thought I was helping the team by giving answers immediately." Now when someone brings her a problem, she asks them what they want to do, and has found that people usually already know but need the permission to say it out loud.

There is a common thread amongst our profiles in this issue. Some of the things that they thought made them successful are some of the things they eventually had to stop doing. Being the expert in the room, having the answer first, holding it all together. Go easy on yourself first. The rest of it follows... at work and at home.



Héloïse Garrity, Editor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UP TO DATE



In the first few days of the local release of The Odyssey the film became New Zealand's biggest opening of the year. It's earned rave reviews both here at the M2 offices and across the board among critics and general audience. The women of The Odyssey all contributed magnificently.

Zendaya is at the peak of her career being in multiple films in the box office right now, doing back to back press tours. Not far behind her is Anne Hathaway who thought she had hit a quiet patch in her career, but instead has been blowing up bigger than ever.

That isn't just a pun about her latest pregnancy which she hid excellently during the Devil Wears Prada 2 tour earlier this year either. "I'm so shocked by it. I thought that I was in the small, weird indie section of my career." she told NYT in relation to her reviving her two biggest early films, Devil Wears Prada and The Princess Diaries. "I thought that was where I was going to live. And so I'm actually pretty delighted that somebody's asked me to come back and basically do the equivalent of a stadium tour."

Forget those, in The Odyssey she's incredible as Penelope. She provides the emotional heart of the movie waiting at home, the ever-loyal wife to a husband who's spent seven years floozing with Charlize Theron's Calypso on a beach. "We think about Penelope as a model of patience," Hathaway explained to Elle. "But I was interested in the raw edge of her... It made me understand why she waits. She's not waiting because she has to - she's waiting because she wants him."

This raw passion worked, it made her a person with needs, rather than a figure or idol of an unobtainable virtue, and in a way, that brought her full circle. We should all want to want someone as passionately as Hathaway's Penelope.

PARIS, FRANCE – JULY 07: Anne Hathaway attends Universal Pictures THE ODYSSEY Paris Photocall at Trocadero Square on July 07, 2026 in Paris, France. (Photo by Pierre Mouton/Getty Images for Universal Pictures)



This Phone Signed Me Up

I recently got my hands on the new Motorola Signature and I have to say it's a powerhouse and feels great to boot. If you wanted a no-expense-spared experience, then the Signature is the no-nonsense best option available, in either PANTONE Martini Olive (Gold) or Carbon (Dark Blue), and weighing a nice 186 g.

I've become a full convert to wireless charging, and the Signature is more than happy to fast-charge via this method. If you don't have a charging pad at your desk, I seriously recommend picking one up. The Signature can take up to 50 W of TurboPower wireless charging or 90 W wired via USB-C.

Packed in the box with the phone is a clear phone case to protect it from bumps and scratches. I wish the world was a softer place because this robs you of the back of the phone, which has been textured with a premium, luxury-feeling, linen-inspired finish. Most phones keep the aluminium wrapped the whole way around, so they always feel slick to the touch. In comparison, this warm, textured approach makes the phone feel like it was made for a human.

While we're looking at the back of the phone, it has a main 50 MP Sony LYTIA 828 camera, as well as a 50 MP Ultrawide for 122-degree photography, and a 50 MP Periscope Telephoto with a 100x Super Zoom Pro for gorgeous macro photography. For video, you can capture up to 8K at 30 fps Dolby Vision or 4K at 120 fps slow motion.

The cameras on the back are quite bulky and stick out significantly. Placing the phone flat will always have it on a slope if you don't put it face down, although this isn't uncommon with phones these days. In several instances, I'd place my non-review phone on top of it, and five minutes later it would crash onto the floor as it slid gently off the Motorola Signature. It looked like the Signature was trying to murder my other phone. "There can be only one."

Sound is delivered by the best-in-class Bose via Dual Speaker Audio and Dolby Atmos.

For the gaming stress test, I put all my phones through Genshin Impact. Keeping performance in the green to keep the phone unstressed and comfortable, I could set the render resolution to High, with all the other settings set to Medium, so I could get a comfortable 45 fps. Pushing the settings higher is possible, but things already look gorgeous on the Super HD 2780 x 1264 screen.

For more granular specs of what you're working with, it has 256 GB of storage and runs a Snapdragon 8 Gen 5 with 12 GB of RAM.

The 5200 mAh battery seems to just go and go, with about 41 hours of battery life, or 28 if you're doing continuous video playback. That's a hospitalisation amount of TikTok.

Apart from the nitpick about the bulk of the cameras, the Signature is a beautiful device with nice textures and the grunt required to deal with pretty much anything you're going to throw at it in 2026.









FIRE IN THE JUNGLE

If you were after a more tropical stay why not make it in a five-star jungle estate. One incredible stay you won't forget in a hurry is the Springs Resort & Spa at Arenal in the jungles of Costa Rica.

The resort is hidden within the 30,000-acre expanse of Arenal Volcano National Park, home to 2 volcanoes, Jaguars, and hot springs to soften you up first. Don't worry, Jaguars are pretty shy. They live on site but you'll be lucky to spot one.

In fact the surrounding area has 28 natural hot springs for you to settle down in and the hotel itself offers an incredible view of the 5357-foot Arenal Volcano looming out of the rainforest. During the day you can see it billowing smoke and in the evening see the glow of lava seeping out. Its sister volcano, the Chato Volcano (sometimes called Cerro Chato, Spanish for Flat Hill) is nothing more than a turquoise lagoon since it collapsed a couple of thousand years ago.

The 165-acre property has room enough for family stays but there's also plenty of room for a more intimate romantic experience among the villas. If it was good enough to host "The Bachelor" and other TV shows then it's good enough for me. While you are out in a rainforest there are five unique dining experiences on site, a full service spa, the works. They can also take guests rafting, rock climbing and river fishing, who knows what there's to catch in the Rio Arenal.









Essence, Queenstown

NZ'S FOODIE CAPITAL HAS BEEN FOUND

Queenstown is setting itself up as the foodie capital of New Zealand as it secures the only two-star Michelin restaurant in the country. 110 restaurants were recognised by Michelin on our fair shores with 15 of them receiving stars, 35 Bib Gourmands and the rest recognised for their excellence, so shouldn't be written off either.


Amisfield






Sherwood


Kika



Queenstown and Wānaka scooped up a good selection of stars. Five restaurants across the two destinations received coveted MICHELIN Stars, including two stars for Queenstown's Essence. Led by Executive Chef Paul Froggatt it is the only restaurant in New Zealand to receive the prestigious two-star rating.

Queenstown restaurants Rātā, Sherwood and Amisfield each received one MICHELIN Star, while Wānaka's Kika also earned a one-star distinction.

A further seven local restaurants were recognised with Bib Gourmand awards for offering exceptional quality at good value. Wānaka's Paloma Taqueria, Bombay Palace, Francesca and Muttonbird were recognised, along with Queenstown's Aosta, Sundays, and The Cow.

Perched on a hillside above Lake Wakatipu Essence is enjoying ruling the roost with its two Michelin Stars. You may think a dining experience that has achieved this pinnacle may be overwrought, but its understated dining room ensures the focus remains on the cuisine. Two tasting menus showcase premium seasonal New Zealand produce, combining refined technique with creativity and a modern sensibility. Each dish expresses clarity and balance, while the wine list offers a strong selection, particularly for Pinot Noir enthusiasts.

There were plenty of critiques over the selection, what do a bunch of anonymous interlocutors know about our food scene anyway? So while this list should be celebrated, let's not forget that local knowledge and word of mouth can let us know about the truly hidden gems.





QUEENSTOWN & WĀNAKA MICHELIN GUIDE RECIPIENTS

TWO MICHELIN STARS

Essence, Queenstown

ONE MICHELIN STAR

Amisfield, Queenstown

Set beside its own vineyard, Amisfield offers bold and creative dishes using seasonal ingredients from Central Otago, paired with wines from its estate.

Kika, Wānaka

A modern New Zealand restaurant with global influences, Kika focuses on bold flavours and premium local produce in a sharing-style format.

Rātā, Queenstown

Named after a native tree, Rātā showcases modern New Zealand cuisine using ingredients sourced locally from Central Otago, reflecting a strong connection to the land.

Sherwood, Queenstown

Overlooking Lake Wakatipu, Sherwood follows a "garden-to-table" philosophy, with most ingredients sourced from its own garden or foraged locally, resulting in a hyper-seasonal and expressive menu.

BIB GOURMAND

Aosta, Queenstown

Bombay Palace, Wānaka

Francesca, Wānaka

Muttonbird, Wānaka

Paloma Taqueria, Wānaka

Sundays, Queenstown

The Cow, Queenstown

Treehouse, Wānaka

THE GIN CORNER

New Zealand has a bountiful gin scene. Here are a few of our favourites this season.



NATIONAL DISTILLERY COMPANY: GRASS AND LEAF GIN

The NDC Grass and Leaf focuses on kaffir lime leaf and lemongrass. The pour shows a distinct viscosity, a sign of botanical density. On the nose, the profile remains complex and leafy. The palate reveals juniper foundations supported by subtle citrus notes. There is more of a honeyed warmth in place of sharp brightness. This gin favours balance over punch. Adding soda amplifies the rounded character. It suits regular refreshment or cocktails. Skip the lime garnish; a lemongrass stalk highlights craft in this bottle. This drop grew to be a favourite very quickly!

nationaldistillery.nz





CARBON SIX: BUTTERSCOTCH GIN LIQUEUR

This Gin Liqueur is a decadent departure from traditional botanical spirits. At 20% ABV, it masks its alcoholic strength with the nostalgic, sugary charm of butterscotch confectionery. On the palate, it is pure liquid dessert. Rich, robust, and unapologetically sweet. The gin base provides a subtle anchor, the butterscotch takes centre stage. It is an essential winter companion, perfect for elevating an Espresso Martini or drizzling over warm apple crumble, vanilla ice cream and more. Sophisticated, indulgent, and versatile.

carbonsix.co.nz



FIRSTCLASS: PINK PORNSTAR MARTINI

This pre-made Pink Pornstar Martini is an instant party pleaser. The recipe features passion fruit purée mixed with vodka, rosé prosecco and a little vanilla syrup - all up a lush, thick texture. This is fresh made so once it's open, it's up for grabs. Just serve straight over ice - it delivers bar quality sweetness without the fuss that suits a festive occasion.

firstclasscocktails.com



DR BEAK: NZ GARDEN GIN

This high quality spirit arrives in a charming bottle reminiscent of old medicine. Its restrained nose shows a fine character. A complex blend of New Zealand botanicals creates a seamless profile and while individual flavours remain a mystery, juniper anchors the spirit. The robust 45.5% alcohol still allows for a smooth sip. This gin shines in a dry Martini and it offers a balanced body that rewards a patient, sophisticated, discerning palate.

drbeak.nz

GOOD SPIRITS: LYCHEE MARTINI

Martini in a batched format? You bet. This cocktail presents fruit notes of summer with the pink hue and sensuous aroma of lychee. Serve in a chilled glass over ice and you are good to go. The drink balances sweetness with strength. The silky texture shows balance and overall the mix tastes of fun and quality. Guests at a pool party will enjoy the bottle. One serving feels small. This drink rivals any homemade creation.

goodspirits.co.nz





PREMIUM LIQUOR: STIL VODKA

STIL Vodka comes from New Zealand's Kaimai ranges. Triple distillation and charcoal filtration produce a spirit of absolute clarity. The nose offers medium brightness. On the palate, the liquid feels sheer, gliding past the tongue until a warmth blooms during the exhale. At 37 per cent strength, the profile stays lean. This vodka acts as a silent foundation for cocktails. A touch of soda water reveals a fine essence within the source water. It is a premium choice for refined drinkers who seek purity for any vodka cocktail.

premiumliquor.co.nz/stil

ESPRESSO WITH LEOPARD PRINT. GRAZIE

The Italians have never really treated coffee as a casual affair. It is ritual, performance, social glue, mild personality test and, always, an acceptable reason to stop everything you are doing. So it makes perfect sense that Bialetti and Dolce&Gabbana have looked at the humble morning brew and thought, "Yes, but what if it had more leopard print?"



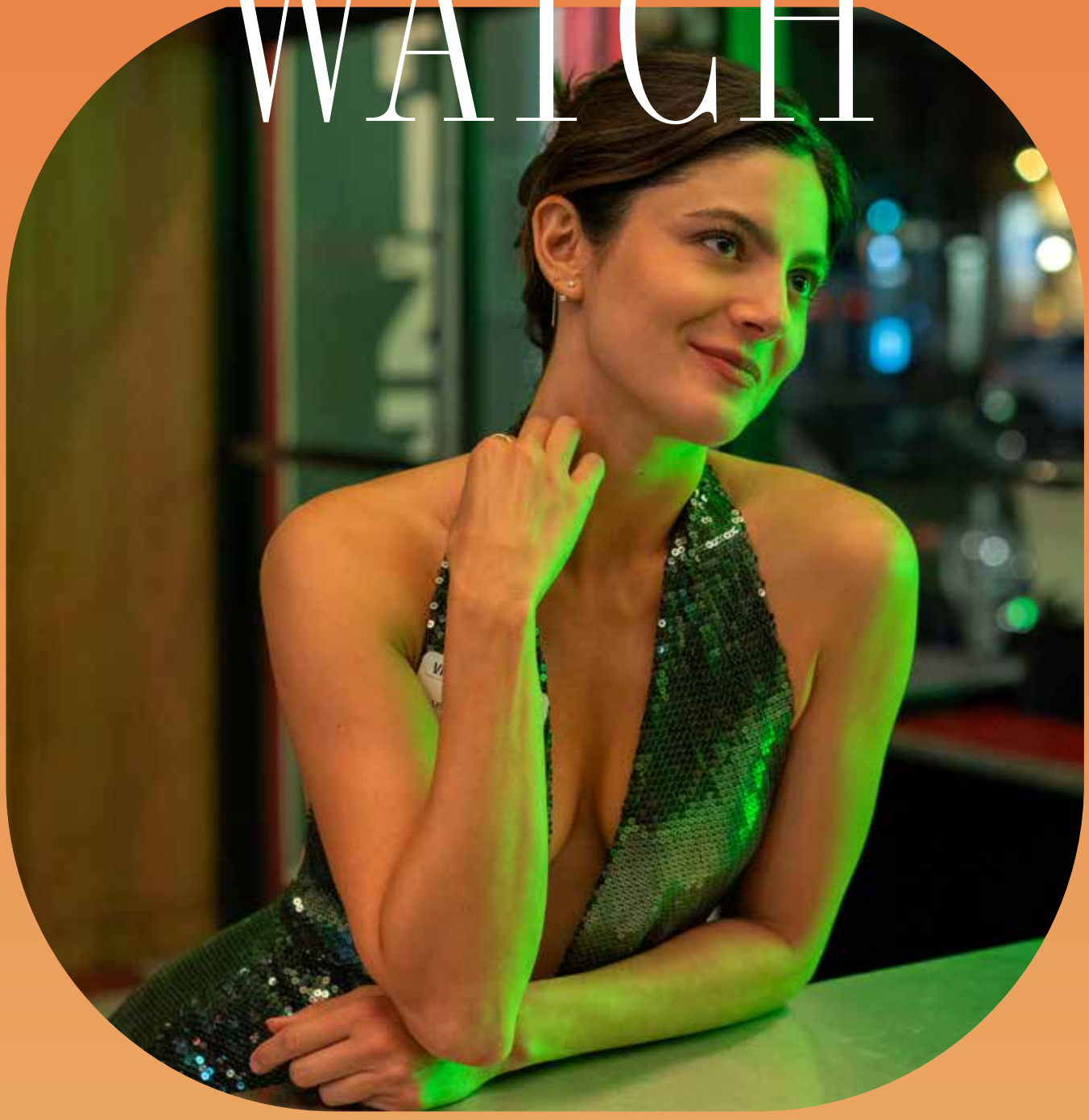
The Bialetti x Dolce&Gabbana Leopardo Collection has answered the call. This is the legendary Bialetti Moka Express, the stovetop coffee maker that has been bubbling away in Italian homes since 1933, dressed head to toe in Dolce&Gabbana leopard print.

And the Moka Express itself is no design lightweight. It is a symbol of Italian coffee culture and design, earning places in collections including MoMA in New York and the Triennale Design Museum in Milan. So yes, technically this is a coffee maker. But it is also a design icon, and a countertop conversation starter if that's the type of person you are.

The Leopardo Collection brings together Bialetti's engineering heritage with Dolce&Gabbana's talent for turning everyday objects into maximalist declarations. Available in classic Moka Express 3-cup and 6-cup sizes, plus Moka Induction 4-cup and 6-cup versions, each piece is crafted in Italy and individually decorated with the exclusive Leopardo motif. There is also Perfetto Moka Audace ground coffee in a matching tin, because why not?

The collection launches in New Zealand from 15 September 2026, available at bialetti.co.nz, Milly's Kitchen, Ballantynes, The Homestore and selected homewares stores nationwide. Prices start from $39.99, with the Moka Express from $215 and Moka Induction from $249.

WATCH



ONE NIGHT ONLY

Imagine The Purge but it was about getting laid. That's my elevator pitch for One Night Only. This is a romantic comedy directed by Will Gluck (Anyone but You, Easy A, Friends With Benefits) where single people are only allowed to have pre-marital sex once a year. How are you supposed to find genuine connection with someone on this one night? Sure you can get your rocks off but genuine love is much harder to come by. Starring Monica Barbaro and Callum Turner as the awkward hot will they won't they couple. The pair felt happy with the chemistry they struck on set. "I think the gentle ribbing that these two characters get into felt second nature." Barbaro told Extra.

Callum added, "That's kind of how they fall for each other, right? That ribbing each other and taking the mick and the banter because they don't think they're going to end up together or they don't want to be together, so they're on their side quest for other people and that allows them to do the banter and explore each other that way."

In Cinemas 13 Aug



THE DOG STARS

Based on the best-selling book, The Dog Stars follows the newest Hollywood heartthrob Jacob Elordi as Hig who's the last pilot on earth looking for human connection in the post-apocalypse. Risking his life he meets Margaret Qualley's character Cima. The book is a love letter to nature and the beauty of life as it struggles on with moments of explosive action and horror. I suspect the movie will be much the same, with perhaps a lot more on the action side of things.

In Cinemas 27 Aug



SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

The 1995 version is hard to beat but here goes another shot at Austen's classic tale of love and sisterhood. Starring Daisy Edgar-Jones and Esmé Creed-Miles as the sisters with George MacKay playing The Guy. Edgar-Jones gravitated toward Elinor telling Vogue "because I relate to her, and I love characters who navigate the world like I do. But I've also played a lot of introverted, soulful people. I'm very interested in playing someone big, arch and villainous as well. I would rather, as I'm getting older, take a really bold swing in the wrong direction than play it too safe."

The film is directed by Georgia Oakley, whose one credit is Blue Jean which won her Best Debut Screenwriter.

In Cinemas 15 Oct



KLARA & THE SUN

Jenna Ortega has been typecast for so long as a scream queen not smiling sort that seeing her play a robot who plasters on the biggest fake smile you have ever seen is even more disquieting than it would be normally. The film is based on the best selling book of the same name written by Nobel Prize-winner Kazuo Ishiguro. Personally I'm more interested that it's directed by Taika Waititi. Big Hollywood blockbusters aside I personally think smaller, weirder character driven films set in the middle of nowhere like this are where Taika's strength lies. The movie was shot around Auckland and Wānaka in early 2024.

Klara and the Sun centres on an artificial friend Klara (Jenna Ortega), who wants nothing more than to find the perfect home since she's destined for the scrapheap. When Klara meets Josie (Mia Tharia), each immediately senses a kindred spirit in the other. Josie has a fraught relationship with her mother (Amy Adams) and they've suffered great loss, but Klara's innocent wonder and unwavering loyalty begin to heal the family and bring light to Josie's complicated world.

In Cinemas 22 Oct



THE WOMAN BEHIND THE NAME

WORDS AND INTERVIEW BY JAMIE TROWER

Few artists capture the heart of a story quite like New Zealand musician, Lee Martin. With a voice that blends warmth, strength, and vulnerability, Martin has built a reputation as one of Aotearoa's most authentic musical storytellers.



Born in South Africa and now based in Ōtautahi, she began studying classical guitar at the age of nine and developed a lifelong passion for songwriting and performance. Influenced by legendary artists such as Van Morrison, Leonard Cohen, Dire Straits, and Emmylou Harris, her music effortlessly weaves together elements of folk, country, rock, and blues.

Martin's highly-acclaimed past releases, including the Lost Girl EP which came out in 2019, or Gypsy Soul and Dreamers Dawn, have earned chart success, international airplay, and a devoted following drawn to her honest lyrics and emotional depth. Known for her captivating live performances and genuine connection with audiences, Lee Martin continues to create music that inspires, comforts, and resonates long after the final note has faded.

Her latest album Marlene is more than a title—it is a homecoming. Across this raw and deeply introspective collection, Martin opens the door to the woman behind the stage name, tracing the seasons of her life from childhood memories to the person she is now.

How'd you first get into music?

My first memory was as a little girl seeing a video of someone performing live on stage (I think I was 4 or 5.) I immediately asked my mum to buy me a guitar and enrol me into lessons. Someone told my parents that you should only take up guitar when you are nine years old. So the long wait began! On my ninth birthday we went to a pawn shop and I got my first steel string guitar, and then, ironically, I was enrolled into classical guitar! NOT what I had in mind but I have waited so long that I didn't dare complain. I loved it, despite the bleeding fingers from my high fretted, rusty steel string guitar. My guitar teacher soon intervened and told my mum to invest in a Nylon string guitar for me. So I got my first proper Yamaha and I was away! I was attached to that guitar, always practising and singing whenever I could. When I finally went to University, I met a girl in my hall of residence who also played guitar and sang so we started our first band called Southern Soul. Very 'Wilson Phillips' vibes. That's how it all started, I just never stopped.

Who inspires your songwriting and creativity the most?

This is a tough one. I wouldn't say anyone in particular, it is more where I'm at in my life and what I am going through. It is like an outlet for me. But it also always feels like the songs just use me as a vessel to travel though, like I have no say in the matter. I would sit down with my guitar and a song would just pour out of me. I can't force it.

Tell me about Marlene. What inspired the overall theme and sound of this album?

My birth name is Marlene. I was named after the singer and actress Marlene Dietrich. No one really knows this. Because the songs on the album are so incredibly personal and follow themes from my childhood through to now, it just felt like the obvious choice to call it Marlene. The themes of the album stretch through from my childhood memories, major life events, my family and home town, trauma, addiction, heartbreak, pretty much every aspect up until the current day. I also really wanted to record 'Nikita' by Elton John. This is one of the songs that defines my childhood, hours spent falling asleep to that song as a child, mesmerised by the way music could make me feel. Everything just fell into place once I decided to call the album Marlene, almost like it was always meant to be this way. I've always really struggled with album artwork ideas (I always design my own covers), but this time it was as if it all just magically came together and made sense. The concept being seeing life through my eyes, as each person's own life view is really the way it was seen through their own eyes. The cover consists of repetitive copies of my eye in different sizes. Inside the eyes you will find different images from my life, spanning from childhood up until now. Each image holds some relevance to one of the songs. The vinyl comes with a little magnifying glass so you can look for these little images. There are also a couple of hidden messages for those with exceptional eyesight.

How does this album differ from your previous work, both musically and personally?

This album has more of a country vibe, think Zach Bryan vibes. It is quite stripped back. I have different musicians playing on this album and I can't be happier with the result. It is definitely a raw emotional album and we allowed the songs to become what they needed to be instead of forcing it into a specific direction. Personally, I am most proud of this body of work.

Was there a particular song on the album that was especially challenging or rewarding to create?

A challenging one for me was 'might as well dance'. It just didn't want to groove...we nearly cut it, to be honest. The song is about me literally dying. I got pneumonia which turned into sepsis while we were in Rarotonga performing at the different resorts. I got so sick and had to be hospitalised, I nearly died! The song is about what it feels like to feel the life drain out of you, your body shutting down and feeling like you are actually dying and how I had a new lease on life after surviving that! Might as well dance while I'm still alive!

I really wanted this song to work, but to be honest, Henare Kaa (the producer) had to work his magic to make this song what it ended up being on the album. I love it now, but it was a massive challenge sonically to start off with.

Were there any artists, experiences, or events that influenced the direction of the album?

I think it is mainly my life experiences that influences my music. I try not to be influenced by other people and maybe that is why my songs never really quite fit into a specific genre, and I like that!

Do you have a favourite track on the album, and if so, why does it stand out to you?

My favourite track on the album is "I'd change it all". I think that everyone really felt the emotion behind it so recording this track in studio was magical. I think it is the type of song that will be touching people deeply. Hopefully anyway.

What has been the best musical experience you've had, on or off the stage?

There are so many. I love when a new song comes to me, and I perform a brand new song for the first time after writing it.

I also love love love it when we are in-studio recording an album. I love everyone's creative input and there is nothing quite like listening to the finished product!

Being on stage, my previous album launch at the Piano, being in that flow state and singing to an attentive audience that is there for the music! I live for these moments!

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

A friend advised me after I confided in her about being worried about starting again with my music career after moving, that I would not get booked, and even if I did, I didn't have a sound system. She told me to go straight to the music shop, buy a sound system and that is the first step. After that the gigs will come because I will make it happen. And it did.









THE LUMINOUS ELLE FANNING

Emerging from childhood roles with remarkable poise, Elle Fanning has grown into one of her generation's most versatile performers, balancing blockbuster spectacle with intimate, character-driven acting. At just a glance, Elle seems effortlessly luminous. Her talent runs far deeper than just her natural beauty though with her remarkable kindness and intelligence during interviews for her next big role in film or TV, her modelling or her work with Lewellen Pictures, and her own production company. Whether inhabiting wild dreamers, important historical figures, or modern young women, Fanning brings a rare blend of vulnerability, intelligence, and quiet strength to every role she plays.

WORDS BY JAMIE TROWER

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Born in the quaint Southern town of Conyers, Georgia, long before she dreamed of making it to Hollywood, Elle was simply Mary Elle—a bright-eyed, blonde-haired little girl whose mind and imagination stretched far beyond her surroundings. Sport, and athletic discipline, runs deep in her family, even today. Elle's grandfather, Rick Arrington, was a celebrated American football player; her mum, Heather, was a former tennis player; her dad, Steven, played minor league baseball for St. Louis Cardinals affiliates.

It was her older sister, Dakota, though, who was the first in the family to stray away from sports and dip her toes into the arts. Heather had been taking Dakota to acting workshops in Conyers at the little local theatre and, after being booked to a local agent, went to LA for a short trial period. Elle, of course, was taken along too with mum, grandma, Dakota and the family's elderly pet schnoodle (a mini-schnauzer-poodle), Lewellen, in tow. What an adventure for the young girl. A ride, it turned out, of a lifetime.

'I was probably about two when I came [to Los Angeles],' Elle told Interview magazine (at age 12) in 2010, on the press junket for the Sofia Coppola drama film, Somewhere (for which Elle won Actress of the Year Award at the 13th Annual Young Hollywood Awards.) 'My sister came out first to see if the whole acting thing would work out, and then we all moved out here. I don't really remember Georgia that much, but we go back if we can.'

It was whilst spending time in LA and playing the acting circuit alongside her sister, young Elle (only a toddler) landed her first ever acting job in the Jessie Nelson-directed I Am Sam, starring Sean Penn as an intellectually disabled man who raises his young daughter, Lucy (played by Dakota) on his own. Elle appears in the film briefly, only in a flashback, but the role was substantial enough to be marked as her first film credit. This would have been such a big new world for the young actress.

The small role is what led to her next role as Jamie, one of the little attendees of Eddie Murphy's Daddy Day Care. If you can think back to the early-2000s kids movie, Jamie was the one who called 911 because a boy broke her doll. Hilarious and adorable. Unlike many child actors who are limited to lighthearted roles, Fanning quickly demonstrated an ability to handle emotionally complex acting, even at that age.

Throughout the 2000s, her roles expanded her range as an actress in films such as legendary 'Amigo of Mexican Cinema' Alejandro González Iñárritu's psychological drama, Babel, alongside the likes of Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett.

'Elle is just very present,' Iñárritu said to Vanity Fair in 2020. 'She's not like the classic nervous-bullshitting-constantly-looking-around-"Who is looking at me" type of person. When she laughs, she really laughs. You know? When she is listening, she's really listening. Most people pretend that they're listening to you....'

It was with this sense of wonder and curiosity that Elle was able to land roles in David Fincher's The Curious Case of Benjamin Button and Daniel Barnz's Phoebe in Wonderland, both in 2008. It's important to note that, around this time, as she was growing up in Hollywood, her parents deliberately succeeded in keeping both Elle and Dakota stable and structured. Whilst they were both working in their separate roles in film and TV (Elle had tiny roles on CSI: Miami and CSI: NY too), both Fanning sisters weren't raised in the Hollywood bubble at all. School, routine and family time were non-negotiable for both girls. Their grandmother was a big influence on their schooling.

'I was homeschooled up until third grade,' she told a reporter in 2014, 'and I liked it because my grandma taught me, and I loved being with my grandma. But then I didn't really have any friends, none my own age. So my mum put me in school in fourth grade. It's cool because I've realized things about myself that I wouldn't have if I weren't in school.'

As she approached her teenage years, Elle chose a different path to her fellow child actors, gravitating toward indie films and artistic collaborations, offering quite bold and varied performances. She noted to Teen Vogue (with a trademark grin, of course, and a shrug) that 'Some people do piano lessons after school; I do movies.'

At age 12, Elle landed her next role as Cleo in Sofia Coppola's 2010 drama film, Somewhere, alongside Stephen Dorff and Michelle Monaghan. The film follows a nomadic actor whose lifestyle is interrupted by the arrival of Cleo, his young daughter, who turns up to live with him. Fanning had built a reputation, reportedly, for her acting in Phoebe in Wonderland, where her ability to convey depth with minimal dialogue made her stand out. It is with her subtle gestures, silence and understated warmth that shaped the Somewhere's tone. It's fun to note, that before filming began, Fanning and the other cast members improvised meals together, so as to ease the young star into a more authentic role. They actually made a little family, so Elle could feel more comfortable. The film marked a very important step in her transition from Elle as a child actor to more mature character-driven roles. The film itself went on to win the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

'Elle is a true artist,' Sofia had told reporters. 'She's not just interested in acting; she's interested in all aspects of filmmaking. She's always asking questions and wanting to learn more.'



Tim P. Whitby; 2025 Getty Images





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That evolution paid off in the 2011 sci-fi thriller, Super 8. Directed by J. J. Abrams and produced by Steven Spielberg, Elle earned widespread acclaim for her emotionally mature performance as Alice Dainard, at just 13. The movie saw Elle nominated for multiple awards, including for Best Young Actor at the 2012 Critics Choice Awards and Breakthrough Performance at the MTV Movie Awards.

'One of the harder parts,' she said to GamesRadar whilst promoting the film, 'was reacting to stuff that wasn't actually happening.' Super 8 was filmed primarily using green screen, so the teenage cast were set to engage more with their imagination. Critics had spotted the teenage girl's talents for sure and offers for roles flooded in.

'I was 13 and a teenager, as well,' Elle told Christina Radish from online movie hub, Collider in 2013. 'When you're that age, you want to be an adult, in a way, but you don't want to have the responsibilities of an adult. You still want to have the freedom.'

As she embraced her teenage years, her focus on style and fashion was opened up to her during her 2011 cover shoot for Teen Vogue and attending her first ever Met Gala (in which, reportedly, she got particularly star-struck by Beyoncé), which both showed off her fashion flair and her confidence.

'I think [my style] would be quirky, sort of offbeat. I love the '70s. I'm very into that right now … I like to be very girly with bows and ruffles on the red carpet.'

The following year, Elle experienced a particularly nerve-wracking milestone for any young actress—kissing on screen. The star admitted on The Late Late Show with James Corden that the kissing scene in the Sally Potter coming-of-age film, Ginger & Rosa, 'My first kiss is on screen for eternity. I can watch my first kiss happen! It's sweet, a bit embarrassing, but sweet.'

In the same year, Elle balanced these edgier roles with mainstream appeal, playing Aurora in Robert Stromberg's Maleficent alongside Angelina Jolie. This role introduced her to a global audience and showcased her ability to lead a major fantasy film.

'What's so beautiful is that these Disney films have such strong messages,' Fanning said to Harper's Bazaar. "And we're not talking down to children, which is important. The youth of today have a very strong voice and can make so much change. Our film is set in this fantastical world, and it is a fairy tale, but it's very much grounded in the reality of serious issues going on today." For her portrayal as Aurora, Fanning was nominated for a Saturn Award, a Teen Choice Award and a Kids' Choice Award.

Her next big role was different from Disney, alright. So different it really proved she had what it took to thrive in the industry. It was in the art-house horror film, The Neon Demon, directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, Fanning played an aspiring model navigating the dark side of the fashion world—a daring and stylistically bold role that cemented her reputation as a risk-taker.

'Nic [Winding Refn] and I were trying to figure that out during filming,' Fanning told Yasmeen Gharnit from Nylon. 'The way he shoots is in chronological order—which I've never done before—is so helpful with this character. We got to the runway show, when my character gets to close the show, and that's where she transforms. We shot that in two days, and it felt weirdly like a music video because Nic played music during filming. There's also no dialogue. It's like a free fall; you can kind of do whatever you want.'

Unlike many traditional coming-of-age performances, Fanning's portrayal of Jesse was deliberately restrained, and unsettlingly detached from the hyper-stylized world around her. Funnily enough, 2016 was also the year Fanning graduated from Campbell Hall School, an independent co-ed school located in Studio City. It's quite a wild thought that in the same year as graduating high school, she was playing such a bold character in her spare time. Also, it started her passion for fashion, making her debut as a runway model and attending fashion events (usually with her sister.) She later walked the runway in 2018 for Paris Fashion Week as part of Miu Miu's Fall/Winter collection and then Paris the following December for L'Oréal Paris. Elle has also appeared at events like L'Oréal's Women of Worth Dinner, which honors women making a difference in their communities—showing her support for girl-power and women's leadership.

From the striking performance in The Neon Demon, her résumé grew tenfold. She portrayed the titular role in the 2017 Haifaa al-Mansour romantic period drama, Mary Shelley in which she portrayed the iconic Frankenstein author, who showed solid understanding of the role rooted within literary history. And in that same year, Fanning appeared as Alicia (alongside Kirsten Dunst, Nicole Kidman and Colin Farrell) in the award-winning American Southern Gothic film, The Beguiled, directed by old friend Sofia Coppola. The Beguiled marked a continued collaboration between the director and the actress.

'I felt like I had never played a character that was also kind of so comedic,' Elle told Eat Play Rock, as she sat alongside Coppola and Dunst. 'Because I got to say a lot of funny lines and [Sofia] allowed me to kind of be playful with her. I had a good time with that.'

Fanning's career reached new heights with her portrayal of Catherine the Great in the satirical series The Great, which hit Hulu during the lockdowns, so became a popular binge-watch.



Her performance blended sharp comedic timing with dramatic nuance, earning critical acclaim and solidifying her reputation as a leading talent. Acting opposite Nicholas Hoult, she carried the series with charisma and confidence, proving her ability to anchor a major production.

"I will say, the show that I did, The Great—I really felt like I broke out of that mold a little bit," Fanning said to Los Angeles Times this year. "I had done so many things, but people probably knew me most for Maleficent but it was then fun to be in The Great and I'm playing an empress, but she's not the Disney version. I felt like I came into my own a little bit, and so just to find those meaty roles—but they don't always come along."

If that isn't enough, the hard-working actress launched an exciting project alongside her sister, Dakota, at the end of 2021. The Fanning sisters together announced their own production company, Lewellen Pictures (named, adorably, after their family dog.) Focused on developing feature films, TV and podcasts, the girls tried their hand at producing The Great until its final episode. Their upcoming projects include the film adaptation of Kristin Hannah's bestselling The Nightingale, with Reese Witherspoon.

The Great went on to win a raft of awards, with Fanning being awarded a Satellite Award for Best Actress in a Musical or Comedy Series and Best Actress at the Seoul Drama Awards. Over its three seasons, ending in 2023, Elle was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series, three Golden Globe Awards for Best Actress, and a Screen Actors Guild Award.

During the 2024 PlayStation State of Play, acclaimed video game designer, director and writer, Hideo Kojima announced (in a 10-minute trailer), his next project, Death Stranding 2: On the Beach. A sequel to his widely-acclaimed action-adventure video game, Death Stranding, the story follows courier Sam Porter Bridges, as he traverses across a barren America after a cataclysmic event.

In the trailer, it was announced that Elle Fanning would step into the enigmatic world of Death Stranding 2: On the Beach with a role that has sparked widespread intrigue. Fanning's character—named Tomorrow—appears central to the game's evolving narrative about connection, isolation, and humanity's fragile future.

'It's all mocap [motion capture],' she told Josh Horowitz on Happy Sad Confused. 'I worked with the same people who did Avatar, all those guys [...] When I signed up for it, I wasn't sure what it would entail, like 'true acting in scenes' and stuff. There are emotional scenes, and Hideo would be like, 'okay...now you cry' and I'm standing there all "Oh my God!" and I had to get in the mood quick, in full mocap suit.' Fanning also sang beautifully on the soundtrack too, alongside French composer and singer-songwriter, Woodkid.

In 2024, as Elle was wrapping the Bob Dylan biopic, A Complete Unknown, alongside Timothée Chalamet, in which she played Sylvie Russo, Fanning was signed to play lead Thia in the multi-million dollar action movie, Predator: Badlands. The seventh instalment in the Predator franchise, directed by Dan



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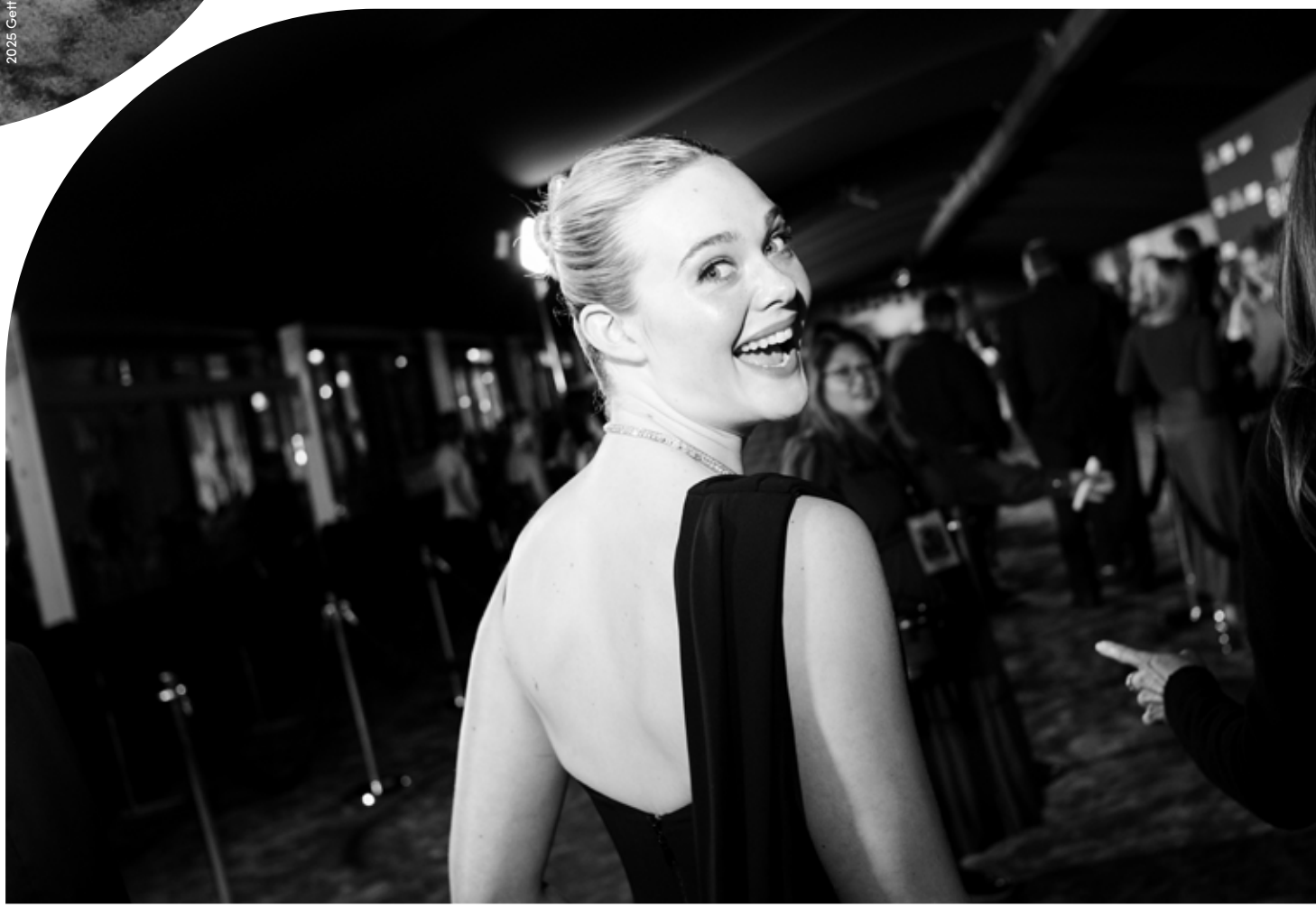
Trachtenberg, filming was set to start in New Zealand when she was offered a part in Joachim Trier's Sentimental Value.

In true Elle Fanning-fashion, she took the bull by the horns and decided to do both of them. What would seem to many as being a logistical nightmare, Fanning was able to fly to Oslo for a week and then hightail it down to Aotearoa for Predator, and then fly straight back to Oslo to film Sentimental Value.

It was her role in Sentimental Value, in which she played Rachel Kemp, a famous American actor who accepts a part in a Norwegian film, that she earned her first ever Oscar nod, being nominated for this year's Best Supporting Actress.

'What an honour to have my first Academy Award nomination be for a film that acknowledges the power of moviemaking and family,' she posted on Instagram when she heard the news. 'My Mom, Grandma, Sister, and Aunt were here with me this morning to scream and hug and cry. Thank you, thank you, thank you!'

Elle Fanning's career is still unfolding, but several patterns are already clear. She represents a generation of actors who grew up inside the entertainment industry yet managed to retain a sense of artistic independence. Next up for her are plans to star in the Apple TV series, Margo's Got Money Troubles, play Effie Trinket in The Hunger Games: Sunrise on the Reaping, and really sink her teeth into The Nightingale with her sister, Dakota. And there'll be more runway shows, surely, and charity work too. Unlike the traditional child-star narrative that often leads to burnout or reinvention, Fanning's path has been marked by continuity and evolution. With each project, Elle Fanning redefines expectations, proving that her career is not just enduring—it's only just beginning.





Leading Change

Bindi Norwell runs New Zealand's largest primary healthcare network with an innovator's impatience and an operator's discipline. A profile of a leader who decided early what kind of boss she'd never be.

"Early on, I felt like I had to be the expert in the room, I needed to be leading everything. But the more responsibility I've taken on, the more I've realised it's actually more about empowering the team. We've got great people around us. My job is to support them, give clear direction on where we're going, and let them get on with it."

The ambition to lead came early, and it was further defined by some bad workplace experiences. "I remember the days where you had to sit at your desk until 11 at night to show that you're working. It was ticking this box of being in the workplace, showing you were doing the hours." That era, she believes, is over. "Work is part of life now. The more we can invest in people, the more productive they are, the happier they are. You still need to deliver, you still need to get the outcomes, but it's the way you do it."

The organisation she now leads is a serious test of that philosophy. ProCare is a co-operative network of GPs, nurses and healthcare professionals serving more than 800,000 people across greater Auckland, focused, in her words, on "preventative health, keeping people well and out of hospital", closing the equity gap for Māori and Pacific communities, and doing it all in a stretched economy. Bindi took up the mantle at ProCare in 2021 coming in from

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANILOPHOTO



four years as CEO of REINZ and a career in strategy across telecommunications, aviation and consulting.

Healthcare is, by necessity, one of the most conservative sectors there is, and Bindi arrived from industries that had already seen massive gains from digital innovation. “Clinicians and healthcare professionals are very open to doing things in different ways, particularly if it frees up time to spend with patients. But that takes time, the habitual change that’s needed in the way you work.” So ProCare builds its tools with clinicians rather than for them, co-creating everything from AI-assisted workflows to robotics that quietly strip repetitive tasks out of a practice’s day. “It’s just the little things that take the pain away.”

The idea is that every hour of paperwork removed is an hour returned to patients, and in a system betting on prevention, those hours compound. “AI will be a big player in the insights, the data, being able to detect problems before they even show up. It’s a world where we’re empowered with devices to monitor our own healthcare, but there’s always a place for a clinician and a doctor.” The ambition scales well beyond Auckland. “I’d love New Zealand to be a leading nation in AI and technology in healthcare, the place that globally is seen as innovative.”

So how does an innovator move fast in a sector where getting it wrong costs a whole lot more than money? Bindi’s answer is to separate, very deliberately, the things that can fail from the things that never can. “There are absolute boundaries, things we need to make sure are absolutely protected. Patient data, for instance. Cyber security. Those are non-negotiables. Trust is important so people feel safe to do things differently, but there are non-negotiables that you just don’t muck around with.” Inside those guardrails, speed is welcome. “We do a lot of trials, a lot of co-creation. When it’s right, then we can scale up across the region, and then potentially across the country. It’s that kind of fail fast, get it right, but then scale.”

The same approach shapes how Bindi builds her team. Recently ProCare’s executive team reviewed their individual leadership styles. “Some people are operational, they’ll just get the job done, that’s what they love. But thinking of new ideas and strategy doesn’t float their boat. If you can recognise the people within your team, their styles and what drives them, people understand each other and you can get amazing outcomes, because you’re doing it with intention. You’re leveraging the best of diversity in thinking. Being very intentional about your team dynamics is a real superpower of leaders if they can tap into it.”

Bindi also explains her own profile within that mix. “I’m a driver. I’m an innovator. I love progress, I love moving forward. I’m ultimately impatient, but I like things moving. New ideas, new ways of doing things, growth. And then I’ve got great people in the team that fine-tune and deliver. I need to learn to be patient, because if we’re going to do things new, we need to do them well and well-tested before we scale up. They’ll push back on me if I’m pushing too hard.” A team confident enough to slow down its own CEO is not an accident. It’s the high-trust culture doing exactly what it was designed to do.

That trust is earned most in the hard moments. “The toughest calls are the people decisions, ultimately, that impact their life. We’re in a changing environment, we’ve all got to be more efficient, reduce costs, that’s the reality we’re in. But I’ve learned that as long as we’re transparent, we’re mana enhancing as much as possible, we’re honest, and we take people through that process in the best way we can. It’s the way you execute on those decisions that’s key.” It’s also earned in the unremarkable ones. “People do a lot of work under the radar. They’re just ultimately wanting to help, and you need to recognise it, because they may not shout about it themselves.”

Before Bindi could empower anyone else, she had to back herself first. “I had to get as much experience as I could, and that means putting your hand up for things that you might be a bit scared about. You think, I might not have the skills to do it. But you learn along the way that you don’t need all the answers. It’s being confident in yourself that you can work it out.” She kept growing by inviting the thing most people try and insulate themselves from. “Feedback is probably one of the biggest things I sought. Early on I was a bit more uncomfortable with it. You go, wow, really? Gosh, don’t hold back. But I’ve had the best nuggets of improvement from it. You don’t take it all on board, it’s not always right, but have that continuous learning mindset. We are human, we’re not perfect.”

Human is a word she comes back to. In a business whose entire product is human wellbeing, she is also conscious of her own. “I’m always on, always available. The buck stops with me if anything’s happening, any kind of crisis, a measles outbreak, you name it.” She will still make time for her family though, most recently three weeks in Europe supporting her son competing in the World Water Polo Championships, plus a growing habit of digital detox weekends. “Somewhere remote with a fire pit, sit outside under the stars, go for a big walk, read a book. No WiFi.” Does switching off make her better at the job? “It does. It makes me more human as well.”

Her advice to the next generation of leaders is the summary of everything above. “Have ambitions. Be bold. Put your hand up for the challenging opportunities. Ask for help. Life can be a bit of a squiggly line, but if you know where you want to get to, things kind of work out. And make sure you’re putting the ladder down for others along the way.”

The Standards We Keep



For Catherine Goodwin, leadership is not about preserving a family legacy unchanged. It is about earning the right to carry it forward - knowing which standards should endure, having the courage to challenge those that should not, and creating enough space for the next generation to do things differently and build something of their own.

In 2005, Catherine Goodwin was 28, engaged, living in England and building a legal career. Then she came home to Auckland and became a property manager. "Most people, politely, said, have you lost your f**king mind? Who would leave law to become a real estate agent?"

But Catherine's decision was as much about what she was being pulled towards as what she was leaving behind. London had allowed her to develop through law while exploring property, and she began to recognise how transferable those skills could be.

"I had this intrinsic pull to come back to New Zealand and stand beside Dad and help rebuild the business that my parents, Ashley and Raewyn Goodwin, had founded, and which at that time was traversing tumultuous change."

Law never really left her. "Some days I wonder how people do the job I do without a law degree because of the complexity of what we deal with," she says. "I'm just utilising those skills in a different way."

Coming home to a family company did not mean being installed at the top. "I started at the coal face. I took a role as a property manager. I managed a large portfolio in Waitakere. I was very mindful that no one at Goodwins would ever be able to say I only had a role because I was Ashley's daughter."

Catherine's family has been associated with Auckland real estate across four generations. Today Goodwins remains family owned, with Catherine, her brother Brendan, sister Sophia, husband Dave, and sister-in-law Aleina all involved.

The business itself has continued to evolve alongside the family. From its established residential property management and sales services, Goodwins has expanded into professionally managed, flexible accommodation through Goodwins Executive Stays and, more recently, established a presence on Waiheke Island. For Catherine, that growth is less about expansion for its own sake and more about responding thoughtfully to where and how clients increasingly need support.

The focus now is not simply to preserve what her parents built, but to keep those family standards relevant for the future: the professionalism, client relationships and service that became part of the company's DNA.

"When I came into real estate and sat around leadership tables as a 28-year-old female, I was one of few females, and I was certainly the youngest." But Catherine had grown up knowing women could earn that authority. Her mother, Raewyn Goodwin, was among the early New Zealand women to hold the AREINZ professional designation.

Property management led to operations, then general management. "It was often unscripted that people would simply say, when are you going to step up and do a bit more? And that to me felt right."

By 2018 she was Chief Executive, and in 2021 she was named REINZ Manager of the Year across all real estate disciplines.

Those same years built the other half of the picture. She and Dave have three children, Oliver, Emily and Charlotte, and Catherine has never treated the two as competing achievements. "I feel extremely blessed by the family that Dave and I have created together, whilst also achieving the successes we have in business."

There is a principle Catherine comes back to repeatedly: "The standard you walk past is the standard you accept."

For Catherine, standards are expressed in what a business rewards, what leaders notice, what teams challenge and what people tolerate. That extends to how women lead other women. Whilst careful to acknowledge that many of those women may have faced an even harder road themselves, "it felt to me like, okay, they had their success, so they ripped the ladder up".

The lesson she drew from it was not simply about gender. It was about responsibility. If you have managed to reach a position where you can influence someone else's experience, what do you do with that influence?

The Senior Leadership Team at Goodwins has tried to answer that question by building a culture around a deceptively simple principle: "We are good humans."

"We've built our business around the fact that everyone has lives outside of these four walls. And if we can help them positively improve those lives, that's our first 'why'. We are enabling lifestyles."

If someone has a child's sporting or school event, or an important family or personal commitment, Catherine does not regard being physically present at a desk as the ultimate measure of contribution.

"We're not clock watching anyone. We all know what we need to achieve."

She is particularly passionate about a section of the workforce she believes businesses have historically underestimated. "The most underutilised part of our workforce is mums," she says. "A parent can come in and get done between 9.30 and 2.30 what someone else might get done in a day." Her point is not that expectations should be lower. It is almost the reverse. "You're focused; you get it done."

Flexibility, in Catherine's version of leadership, sits beside accountability. Goodwins places significant value on people working alongside one another because collaboration matters. But she has little patience for confusing visibility with performance.

During the Covid lockdowns, Catherine was on a call with other business owners when someone asked how they could know whether staff at home were actually working. Another participant suggested monitoring employees through their computers.

"My blood started to boil," Catherine recalls. These were people homeschooling children, caring for elderly relatives and still keeping businesses functioning. "Work is getting done. Just say thank you."

For Catherine, one of the clearest measures of culture is what happens when the leader is not in the room. "If something goes wrong in a colleague's life, our people are the first to wrap around them. When I see that happening without any prompting from leadership, I know the culture we are working so hard to build has taken on a life of its own."

Retention is another measure. Several team members have remained with Goodwins for close to two decades, in an industry often described as "churn and burn". Expertise, relationships and judgement take time.

Catherine has seen what happens when poor behaviour is allowed to exist inside otherwise professional organisations. It is why the distinction between stated values and lived values matters so much to her. It is one thing to have values written on a wall, another to live them. "If your values don't align, walk away."

"Values need to exist behind the gloss - they need to genuinely underpin how a professional business operates."

The same philosophy shapes Catherine's views on the industry.

"Values need to exist behind the gloss - they need to genuinely underpin how a professional business operates."



Goodwins has continued to operate professional trust accounts, undertake voluntary audits and invest in continuing professional development, even when lower-cost competitors sought to win business primarily on price. For Catherine, these were never optional extras; they were part of the Goodwins standard. She has spent much of her career advocating for stronger regulation of the property management industry.

"We have always stood behind the principle that value will trump cheap." For her, pricing is not simply a commercial question. Eventually, it becomes a people question.

"The reality is you can't run a good business on that model. You end up putting your staff under enormous pressure because, when the fees are too low, they're simply having to do more. Ultimately, you can't attract or retain the best people."

Real leadership, in her view, is about being brave enough to ask the tough stuff: Are we actually doing what we say we believe in? Are our people genuinely thriving, not just working? Is the value we give our clients real, or just talk? And most importantly, are we leaving things better than we found them for the next person in line?

That last part is something Catherine's thinking about more and more these days. The family business Catherine returned to more than two decades ago is changing again. Goodwins continues to evolve. UNIQ (uniq.nz) takes the family's emphasis on trusted relationships, judgement and quality into the premium property market through high-end residential sales, buyer representation and curated stays.

It is the next generation's interpretation of the business, extended to families and investors arriving from overseas.

More than 20 years after leaving London, Catherine is sitting in what used to be her father's office. It is a meeting room now. The 28-year-old who came home determined that nobody would ever be able to say she was there simply because she was Ashley Goodwin's daughter, is now leading the business her parents built. Yet perhaps the most important part of the legacy is not the business itself. It is the standard attached to it.

Asked whether she ever looks back at the legal career she might have had as the sliding door in her life, Catherine does not sound particularly interested in the life that did not happen.

"I'm more grateful for the doors that opened that brought me where I am today."

Leading in the Light

Jo Stansfield has the kind of CV that could make even the most accomplished leaders blush. Spark, PwC, Vodafone, Kiwibank, Auckland Transport, and Fortysouth, where, as Chief Operating Officer, she sits inside one of New Zealand's most important behind-the-scenes infrastructure businesses. But the story behind it is not one of neat progression or carefully curated credentials. It is a journey of building skills, backing experience and the profound power of authenticity. And to add to her CV, just before going to print Jo was appointed as Chief Executive Officer of Tū Ātea Network Services, a Māori-led organisation providing technology solutions across Aotearoa.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANILOPHOTO

Jo's trajectory is an exercise in what she calls her "toolkit of skills" strategy. Unlike many who narrow their focus early to climb a specific ladder, Jo's approach has been one of a kind of expansive curiosity. "I've never really said no to anything, I've never narrowed myself to a certain industry or a certain role, and I've never really worried too much about hierarchy," she explains. "Wherever the opportunity has come up, and it's been interesting, and it has felt like something that resonates with me, I've just gone and done it – the more complex the better" she says, noting that this often involved "stepping sideways, or taking a pay cut, and making a few mistakes along the way." For Jo, the goal was less about the next rung and more about the next opportunity. "I've always just thought of it as, 'How do I build this toolkit of skills that will be interesting for people and valuable to an organisation?" And valuable they have been. From leading justice reforms, customer and digital strategies, large organisational transformations, to playing a key role in the recent One New Zealand brand change, Jo is an expert in strategy execution. This mindset led her to her current role at Fortysouth.

The scale of Fortysouth is difficult to overstate. Established in late 2022 following a landmark $1.7 billion deal when a consortium acquired Vodafone New Zealand's passive mobile tower infrastructure, the company manages a network of 1700 sites across the country. Steering the operations of a digital infrastructure giant owned by a global investment consortium is testament to Jo's business capability. "I never went to university, and so I don't have a degree," Jo admits, recalling how this was "confronting" and caused insecurity early in her career. While her peers touted degrees, she was "Just Jo Stansfield" with a practical pathway. A recruiter once told her she would hit a ceiling without further qualifications. "You're competing against people who have got MBAs," they told her. Jo figured, "Am I going to go and get that? Or actually, am I just going to get on and own it?"

She chose to own it. And choosing to own her story meant recognising that the very things she lacked were actually her points of difference. "If you're the brightest person with the best degree, but you can't interact as a human being, then it doesn't really matter," she says. This realisation led to a shift from task-driven management to what she calls "human-connection-led" leadership. It was during a transformative leadership course that she began to dismantle her "mask" and ego. She realised she had been hiding behind a professional persona to protect herself from a past that included surviving sexual harm and later, six years in a violent relationship. "I'd been through all these challenges in my life, and I thought maybe it's time to use those experiences to help others," she reflects. She chose to lead with vulnerability, understanding that if she was brave enough to be her whole self, her team would hopefully feel safe enough to be theirs. And they were.

This philosophy was put to the test when she took on a team of 200 at Auckland Transport and developed a grassroots wellbeing programme. This included an initiative for the team to donate goods for hampers that she personally hand-delivered one weekend to over 30 staff members who had told her they were struggling, ensuring they remained anonymous to the wider team whilst feeling a profound sense that they mattered. "I just had this core belief that if I looked after our people, they would look after our customers." While many firms claim to be "customer obsessed," Jo argues that true excellence "has to start with empowering and trusting your people. Of course, like all leaders, I'm human and I don't always get it right."

One of her proudest leadership moments involved employing Tamati, a blind man who had been rejected by the job market but who she could see something special in. Rather than asking Tamati to conform to a sighted world, Jo challenged her entire organisation to change. "I thought, you know what, I can teach my group how to adapt to the unsighted world rather than making Tamati adapt to our sighted world," she says. From installing voice announcements in lifts to the entire floor learning to think about Tamati before themselves, the adaptation was a masterclass in inclusive leadership. "For me, it wasn't about let's be charitable to Tamati," she notes. "It was about - actually, what can we learn from him?" He is still there today.

That same instinct has shaped the culture she is helping build at Fortysouth. "We're a multi-billion dollar organisation, but we're only a team of 50," she says. "And we've been very deliberate about staying small and keeping our 'start up' culture." Of course, performance matters, but people give more when they have a sense of belonging. "If you only come to do a job, you never get the best out of people."

But she doesn't just talk about culture - Jo wears her openness on her sleeve in the form of a tattoo on her arm. She describes it as coming from the same period in which she was ready to "be vulnerable and share my story openly so that other people would share their story with me". It was designed to remind her that she has survived sexual harm and domestic violence. "It's the colours representing both of those intertwined as a ribbon," She says she wears it "proudly" because "if I cover it up, I'm contributing to leaving the conversation in the shadows" noting "it doesn't discriminate". It is wrapped in Mānuka flowers that "speak about new growth."

> "If you're the brightest person with the best degree, but you can't interact as a human being, then it doesn't really matter"

Another demonstration of this openness was Jo's previous board role with Tika, the charitable trust focused on helping survivors of sexual harm access justice. "Tika is a way to report online and find out if the person that has harmed you has also harmed others, as well as a free legal service to support you through the justice process you choose". Their vision is a "world where taking legal action against sexual harm is accessible, supported, and transformative, reducing reoffending rates and creating safer communities." Unfortunately, Tika faces a perpetual funding hurdle due to lack of government support and the fact that many traditional donors and corporate partners still find the subject matter uncomfortable to engage with.

But for Jo it is vital that attitudes around this change. "Sexual harm and domestic violence live in the shadow, and the quieter and darker that shadow is, the more they live." This commitment to transparency, to bringing the most difficult parts of her story out into the light, is a powerful reminder that the past does not define the limits of a person's potential.





Business Is Better Because of People

Samantha Stewart runs a 45-year-old import and distribution business with a philosophy borrowed from the sports field, a bell named Tinker, and a firm belief that the art of leadership is to let others shine.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANILOPHOTO

"People are quick to say business would be easier without people," says Samantha Stewart, General Manager of Electrical Supply Corp. "You don't often hear someone say the opposite; business is better because of people, and I would love to hear more people say that."

Stewart has spent three years at the helm of ESC, a business now into its forty-fifth year, after more than a decade working her way through the electrical industry, an industry she describes as feeling at home in. Her route in, however, was anything but planned. She studied physical education and commerce at Otago, spent an exchange year at Dublin's Quinn Business School, and assumed her career would sit somewhere between business and sport, most likely with the Special Olympics or the Halberg Foundation, where she'd done adaptive mentoring through university.

Then she went to Russia.

"I was in Russia, and on that trip I met the general manager of Philips New Zealand. He said to me, when you finish studying, come see me back in New Zealand. I did, and he offered me a role."

By 24, she was Philips' national field sales manager, running six reps and, indirectly, fifty merchandisers, having never been a rep herself. What she remembers most is how her direct boss treated her. "He always made me feel on his level. He made me feel that we were one team." When she eventually left to travel the world, that same general manager wrote something on her leaving card that she's only recently come to appreciate. "He wrote, all the best for your travel, Sam, hope to see you back here in my seat one day. I thought it was a bit of a joke. That was 10 years ago. But now I look at where I'm at in the industry and I think oh, wow, maybe he did really mean that."

Her family business, Globelink, came next, though not by entitlement. "Dad had always said to me, there's a door here, but it's up to you to knock on it. You need to be the one that walks through it." She knocked, started as national sales manager, and was general manager within eighteen months. Then came the opportunity to lead ESC, a bigger business again. "It felt like a big step up and a chance to grow as a leader, I went for it and have not looked back since."

Ask Stewart to describe her leadership style and she sums it up in three words. "Authenticity is number one. Approachability, number two, and adaptability, number three." But given how often she talks about listening, she might well add that to the list too. "At the start I enjoyed giving solutions. I thought I was helping the team by giving answers immediately, but I've come to see the value in just stopping to listen.

When someone comes to me asking what to do in a situation, I try to ask, what do you want to do? It's shown me that people often have the answer but need the encouragement and confidence to share it."

She is a vocal proponent about what she calls decentralised decision making. "When decisions are decentralised, you've got more people taking ownership. You've got people coming up with better ideas, because in their role they are seeing things that I wouldn't see. It allows things to move faster. They make a decision, and whatever the results, they get either the confidence to do it again or the lesson through the experience, and they make another decision. And through that, they will grow as a person."

The theory gets tested every week. Stewart has recently moved to Papamoa while ESC's head office is in Hamilton, so when she's in the building she wants to be engaged with the team. One way of doing this is "Tuesday Chats", an open calendar where anyone in the 45-person business can book time with her, agenda optional. "Within the first week there were five people. The most amazing ideas and conversations have come out of this." One team member arrived with a list of bullet points for improvements in their department. She also started an "ideas" email address where anyone in the team can send their idea through. "Most of them have actually been executed. It's shown the team that they all have the opportunity to shape and grow the business."

Stewart says that fostering a close-knit team and strong culture within ESC's business is one of her most satisfying achievements to date. "Seeing people from across the business collaborating, engaging and working together is very rewarding, both from an enjoyment and performance perspective. By including everyone across the business in our end of year conference and ensuring that every team member is not only informed but knows their opinions and ideas are welcomed has really delivered. And at the end of the day, every one of us plays a part in the customer's experience."

The evidence, she notes, was at last year's Christmas Party. "The tables were filled with people from all different departments, some people with tears of laughter and enjoying being amongst their colleagues. I took a moment to step back and take it in. I was so proud to see that our business is a place where people enjoy what they do and who they are doing it with. There's no greater feeling than feeling like you are on one team."

At the heart of ESC's culture is something Stewart inherited rather than invented, and is quick to say so. The business has employed a team from IHC NZ since 1988, currently the team consists of eight people she calls "the heartbeat of our business". One team member, 25 years in, hands out nicknames as a rite of passage. "You know you've made it when you get a nickname from her." Stewart's is Sammy, a name otherwise reserved for family. When ESC installed a bell to ring for larger orders, the same woman named it Tinker (Tinker-bell) and it's stuck. "These moments create our culture. It's not forced. It's just part of who we are."

"The art of leadership is to let others shine."



The thread runs right back through her life. At 11, she was one of only a few kids who turned up to a classmate's birthday party, a boy with down syndrome. At university she coached a team of kids with disabilities "The Wildcats" into a social basketball league they'd originally been told they couldn't join, and watched them make the final. Last month, the boy from that birthday party walked up to her in a customer's branch. "He came beelining towards me and gave me the biggest hug. He's got a job, he's doing his thing, and now he's a customer of mine. That was 25 years ago and it feels like its come full circle which is pretty cool." She's now helping establish the Bay of Plenty Disabled Surfers Association, because apparently running a national electrical supplier leaves gaps in the calendar!

Those gaps also contain surfing, snowboarding, padel and, lately, wing foiling lessons, chosen precisely because she's always wanting to try new things. "It's pretty humbling when you turn up and find something you're not very good at. As business leaders we can become masters in our own skill and get quite comfortable. So where do we find those areas that keep us grounded?"

Her advice to her younger self comes straight from an 80-plus-year Harvard study she quotes from memory. "The strongest predictor of long-term health and happiness is the quality of your relationships. Not your wealth or your social status or your IQ. So invest in the relationships with the people in your life. And say yes to opportunity."









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HIGHLIGHTS FROM JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE, AUCKLAND, 8 MAY 2026.

This year's May Auckland Journey To Excellence was a jam-packed afternoon of leadership, resilience and personal growth, and delivered it at pace: lunch at noon, four keynotes and a panel by mid-afternoon, and everyone released to cocktails and nibbles by 3:30pm.

Miraka Davies, pulling double duty as MC and opening keynote, set the terms with a talk arguing that resilience is not composure but recovery. Sita Proud followed with thirty years of sales wisdom compressed into a single proposition: negotiation is a mindset, and women arrive better equipped for it than they believe. Andrew Nicol then turned the fire hydrant on, delivering a rapid tour of AI, from custom instructions to autonomous agents, built around the idea that the tools are not the problem, our instructions are. Rosanne Graham, CEO of Skills Consulting Group, rounded out the keynotes on the many paths to C-suite leadership before joining Proud on the closing panel, where the conversation turned to truth-tellers, imposter syndrome and the feedback worth ignoring.

If the day had a common thread, it was this: know who you are, say it without apology, and keep people around you who will tell you the truth. The articles that follow cover each session in the order the room heard them.

Building & Maintaining Resilience

Miraka Davies opened the Journey To Excellence stage with a waiata and a rebrand, then spent half an hour demonstrating that resilience has nothing to do with keeping it together.



The first thing Miraka Davies did as keynote speaker was introduce herself, which was awkward, because she was also the MC. "This is the weirdest thing ever to do, you guys, introduce yourself on stage," she admitted, before taking a breath, switching hats and doing what she does: singing a waiata, then explaining why.

The song, she told the room, was written by a grandfather searching for his mokopuna, a grandchild who, we can infer, had died. The grandfather finds a way to be okay by keeping his mokopuna close: in sleep, in dreams. It was a deliberate place to start. "Resilience doesn't mean I've always got everything under control," she said. "Resilience is in being able to bounce back when we're not okay. Resilience means knowing that it's okay to not be okay, and to sit in that when we need to. That is true resilience, in my opinion."

Davies, billed in the programme as the "Deadpool of Keynotes", proceeded to make the case with her own biography. She is from Aotea Great Barrier Island and lives in Rotorua. She is 52, has ADHD, three children, eight mokopuna and a name she claimed only four years ago. Born Rochelle Anne Davies and known for most of her life as Shelley, she took the name Miraka after a year of total immersion te reo Māori study. "It's not personal. It's not multiple personalities. It's just a rebrand."

The name is not random. Miraka means milk, and it belonged to her ancestor Raihi Miraka, the last tūpuna in her whānau to wear a moko kauae, known by that name because of her very pale skin. Davies, who has spent her life "feeling not Māori enough" on two counts, being "super white" and not having her reo, found the symmetry irresistible. "I cannot tell you how powerful I feel in and of myself, knowing that now I have the way to articulate who I am using the language of who I am."

Much of the talk was about reframing. She grew up believing she was overly sensitive; she now understands she is highly empathetic. She thought she was flighty; she is adaptable. This is not spin, she argued, it is working self-knowledge. When a copywriting client hires her (she wrote the current Māori electoral roll campaign, and she is "not cheap, just saying"), she can tell them exactly how to get the best out of her: collaboratively, in the moment, and not buried under background noise before being left alone for a week. She once turned up to therapy asking her psychologist to help her feel her emotions less. What she learned instead was the opposite. "Emotions are data sets. They're giving us information. They're neither good nor bad."

There was plenty here that the average keynote speaker would leave out. Raised in a conservative Christian religion, she had never tasted alcohol or coffee, or sworn out loud, until she was 38. She has been married twice, divorced twice and widowed once ("do the maths, doesn't work out"): her first husband died during their divorce proceedings. Her partner of 14 years, a Māori carver, began as a friends-with-benefits arrangement that contradicted everything her upbringing had taught her. When he eventually suggested they stop before it ruined the friendship, she declined. "I know I've got a heart that is big and strong and can handle breaking. I'm going to be all in." They now share a mortgage, which she rates as rather more of a commitment than a marriage.

The through-line was vulnerability, which she framed as a structural property rather than a soft one. "Vulnerability makes us flexible. It helps us move with the wind and the tides. When we're not flexible, we are breakable." Learning her reo, having her culture inked into her skin, leaving the church her whānau had known for five generations: all vulnerable, all acts of strength.

She closed with an admission. Preparing for the day, she had felt like a fraud, because the past few weeks had been rough. "There hasn't been a single day that I haven't cried, probably multiple times." She is a mother of adult children, she explained, which means living with the fallout of choices you no longer get to make. But she decided the tears disqualified nothing. Resilience, she reminded the room, is knowing that not being okay "is a moment and it will pass". Knowing who you are is where the power comes from.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Resilience is recovery, not composure. Being resilient does not mean always coping. It means being able to come back, and giving yourself permission to not be okay in the meantime.

2. Know your own operating manual. Davies tells clients exactly how she works best. Understanding what makes you powerful, and what challenges you, turns self-awareness into a professional asset.

3. Interrogate your labels. "Overly sensitive" became highly empathetic; "flighty" became adaptable. The traits you have been criticised for may be strengths wearing bad PR.

4. Treat emotions as data. They are neither good nor bad. Ask what you are feeling, why, and what meaning you are giving it, then decide what to do with the information.

5. Vulnerability is flexibility. Rigid things break. Doing the exposed, uncomfortable thing, whether learning a language, claiming a name or standing on a stage, is what builds the capacity to bend.

How To Become A Better Negotiator

Thirty years in technology sales have taught Sita Proud that negotiation is not a boardroom event. It is a mindset, and women are better equipped for it than they think.



Sita Proud learned to negotiate at about ten years old, in a saree shop in India, watching her mother commit what felt at the time like a public act of madness. The shopkeeper asked for 500 rupees. Her mother offered 100. "I was like, what's that? What are you doing, mum? Did you fall down the stairs?" The shopkeeper came down to 400; her mother countered at 50. They settled on 200. "What I did learn is that in that culture, it was okay. It wasn't as okay when she came back home to the UK and did it in the supermarket."

The story got the laugh, but it also set up her thesis. "Negotiating is actually a mindset. It's not really a moment. It is absolutely how you think about yourself."

Proud, Head of Sales at 3Plus Consulting, did not start out thinking of herself as boardroom material. She grew up in a single-parent household in the UK after her father left when she was four and a half, raised by a mother whose English was limited and whose definition of success for her daughters was simple: "marrying a nice Indian man, cooking, cleaning, and being a great wife." She can do all of that, she noted, "apart from I married a Kiwi, which is why I'm here." Nobody talked to her about confidence, business or her own value.

Then, at 19, having fallen into a technology sales role in London, something unexpected happened: a boss saw something in her that she could not see herself. He pushed her to speak up in rooms, lead people older than her, and take opportunities she was not ready for. "He trusted me before I'd actually proven anything. He backed me long before I backed myself." Her reaction at the time was bafflement: "Why are you investing in me? I've got things to do. I've got to find a husband." Three decades on, she is clear about what it was. "That one moment, I realised, wasn't luck. It actually was intention. Someone choosing to see potential in someone is a decision that they made."

The practical heart of the talk was a rejection of negotiation as combat. In loud, competitive, male-dominated industries, the received wisdom is that winning means "pushing harder, talking faster, and controlling the room". Her experience says otherwise. She described a competitive sales process against far larger firms with bigger teams, bigger brands and more resources, one that on paper she should have lost. Instead of out-pitching them, she slowed down and asked questions: what would make the buyer successful in their role, what did success look like for them personally, what were they worried about if something went wrong. "This wasn't about technology. It was about trust, risk, and people." Her team won. "Not because we were the loudest, the cheapest, or anything else, but the fact that we understood them better."

That, she argued, is where women hold an advantage they routinely undervalue: empathy, emotional intelligence, reading the room, listening, relationship building. "All these years, they've been called soft skills. But in reality, they are power skills." Women negotiate constantly, at work, at home, in parenting, in managing expectations, and are conditioned to minimise it: "to be grateful instead of being visible. To work harder instead of asking for more. And to prove value instead of actually owning it." Her definition cuts through the discomfort many women feel about asking: "Negotiation is not arrogance, it's clarity."

The talk turned personal with the brain injury she suffered five years ago, which moved negotiation out of her job description and into daily life. "Suddenly negotiation for me stopped being something I did at work and it became really personal. I had to renegotiate my relationship with energy, time, ambition, and expectations, both my own and other people's." Recovery, she said, teaches one lesson very quickly: "Energy becomes currency. Every yes will cost something." For a self-described go-getter, working out what deserved her energy and what no longer did was the hardest negotiation of her life. "Protecting your energy is not a weakness, ladies. It's actual wisdom."

Her closing challenge had nothing to do with contracts. What would change, she asked the room, if you stopped waiting until you felt ready, trusted your instincts, and "walked into rooms already believing that you belong there"? Because in the end, "negotiation isn't about deals or outcomes. It's about changing the conversation you have with yourself."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Lead with curiosity, not assertion. Before any negotiation, ask questions and uncover what the other party actually needs rather than what they say they want. Understanding wins deals that pitching loses.

2. Stop negotiating against yourself. Many women shrink before they speak, discounting their position before anyone else has had the chance to. State your value without apology.

3. Use silence as a tool. Say your point and pause. Let it land. You do not need to fill every space with words, however uncomfortable the quiet feels.

4. Relationships outperform transactions. Trust, not logic, is often the reason a decision goes your way. You do not need to know everything; you need people to believe you are on their side.

5. Protect your energy like it matters. After her brain injury, Proud learned that every yes costs something. Boundaries are not weakness; they are how you stay valuable for the long haul.

Using AI To Make Yourself Irreplaceable

Andrew Nicol has interviewed 100 New Zealand leaders about AI. His verdict: most of us are strumming a guitar we have never practised, then blaming the guitar.

Andrew Nicol opened with a confession from a Fiji sailing holiday. He wore his prescription sunglasses onto the boat, knowing better. He ducked under the boom, clipped them, and watched them sink. He then dived in wearing a life jacket, knowing better, without first turning the boat into the wind, also knowing better, and spent 15 minutes chasing his own drifting boat. “I knew all of those things because I had experience in them, but I ignored them and it cost me a whole lot of hard work.”

Those little moments of hesitation before a mistake, he calls blinks. “My goal today is to basically give you a bunch of blinks around AI,” he told the room, “so that when you’re about to do hard work, you can think to yourself, maybe AI could do this for me.”

What followed was, by his own warning, a fire hydrant. Nicol, founder and CEO of Preductive, spent last year interviewing 100 senior New Zealand leaders to benchmark AI adoption, and his first finding is blunt: nearly everyone is underusing the tools they already have. The large language models are trained on roughly 200 billion texts, entire books, websites and journals, and run to about a trillion parameters. To make that number mean something: counting to a million takes about 11.4 days; counting to a trillion takes 36,000 years. Yet Gallup reports that seven out of eight people are not getting a significant uplift from AI.

His diagnosis is that people blame the instrument. If he picked up a guitar for the first time, played terribly, then declared “the guitar is broken and stupid”, the audience would rightly point out that the problem was him. Hence his 10-80-10 rule: put 10 per cent of your time into writing good instructions and you get an 80 per cent result, with the final 10 per cent spent tidying up. Skip that first step and the arithmetic inverts. “The time that I put 1 per cent of the time into the instructions is the time that I fight with it for 60 per cent of the time.”

From there the ideas escalated. Custom instructions that teach the model your values, your organisation and your team. Personal shortcuts like TLDR, which converts any wall of text into seven bullet points. Then agents: he has one that drafts emails in his voice, and his firm built a chain of agents that reads the accounts payable inbox, decides whether an email is an invoice, works out which of three companies it belongs to, codes it against historical patterns and lands it in Xero ready for review. He and a developer built a recruitment agent in 15 minutes, and they tell applicants plainly that it is AI. “We actually want to remember that there’s a human being applying for a job on the other side of that.”

He also warned against trusting your own certainty about what AI cannot do. Asked recently whether it could produce documents in a company’s brand, he confidently said no. “I can tell you categorically, three weeks ago, it didn’t do that.” Then he tried it, and found it 80 per cent of the way there. The habit he wants the room to build: “Just because it couldn’t do it three weeks ago doesn’t mean that it can’t do it now.”

Panel Discussion

The day closed with Miraka Davies back in the MC chair, steering Sita Proud and Rosanne Graham through a conversation ranging from feedback and imposter syndrome to mothers, motorbikes and steak.

Asked what had stuck with her from the day, Proud pointed to Andrew Nicol’s letter to his children. “I’m gonna write my boys, all three of them, they’re 15, 12, and seven. I’ve gotta bring good men into this world to support the cause.” Graham’s answer was the room itself: “The generosity of women to share their stories. There’s a real power in being authentic and being yourself. We’re not robots, we’re people.” She also admitted the AI session had left her “a bit intimidated. I’m down in the low curve. Got a bit of work to do.”

On standing at the edge of something scary, Proud, a brain injury survivor, wished someone had told her “that I was still going to be alive, and that I’m going to be okay, and I could still be who I am today. Slightly different version.” Davies added the process she raised her daughters on: ask what the worst that could happen is, whether you could live with it and come back from it. If so, “there’s no reason not to go ahead and do the brave and scary thing.”

Graham brought in a story about truth-telling, from her days in Parliament’s opposition research unit when National was led by Jim Bolger. On the campaign trail, Bolger gave a speech so off-piste that “he ended up talking about communists and all sorts of really nutty stuff”. Back in his office, surrounded by senior staff, he asked how the speech went. Everyone told him he was really good. Graham, about to say otherwise, received a warning elbow from her boss. “All the media the next day said he was terrible. But nobody in the room wanted to tell him.” Nobody needed to be brutal; a gentle steer would have done. The lesson has stayed with her. “You are not better when people tell you you are good when you are not. The more senior you get, the more at risk you are of thinking that you know it all and you just don’t.”

Both panellists endorsed feedback as fuel, with caveats. “That’s the only way you’re going to ever grow,” Proud said, though she stressed weighing the giver’s intent and building “a good group of women, a diverse group of people that have different backgrounds” as “a safe psychological environment to be vulnerable and learn”. Davies added the filter she teaches as a plain language trainer: ask who the critic is and whether you respect them, because too many people carry one throwaway comment as truth forever, softening their writing because someone once called them blunt. “If it’s someone you respect 100 per cent, go home, cry. And then think about where it’s coming from and take it on board, because that’s how we grow.”

Then there was the feedback worth binning. Davies offered being called intimidating: “That is a you problem, that you feel intimidated by me, and I am not going to make myself smaller to make you comfortable.” Proud has been told she is too loud “and that I need to calm down a bit because people think I’m always drunk”. At 9am. Her verdict: “This is me, tough.” Graham said the only advice she reliably rejects is being told to stop worrying about people and move

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Follow the 10-80-10 rule. Spend 10 per cent of your time writing good instructions and AI will deliver an 80 per cent result every time. Lame outputs are usually a prompting problem, not a tool problem.

2. Retest your assumptions constantly. Capability that did not exist three weeks ago may exist today. Deciding "it can't do that" after one failed attempt is how you fall behind.

3. Build agents for repeat work. Anything you do the same way every week, from invoice coding to email drafting, can be taught once and delegated forever. Start small and stay transparent about what is AI.

4. Experiment like WD-40. The name commemorates 39 failures. Play, fail, swear at it occasionally, and push for a premium subscription: on Nicol's maths it pays for itself in 12 minutes a week.

5. Keep a human on the other side. Every automation touches a real person. The irreplaceable skill is genuine connection: asking questions, listening intently and helping others use AI for good.

Then there is vibe coding, building software with plain language and no code at all. His coffee buddy Ben built 52 prototype apps in a week, including the Nah app: photograph a doughnut, decline it, and it tallies the calories saved and messages your family to applaud your restraint. Nicol himself built a course-scheduling app on the couch, on his phone, in 15 minutes.

His model for all of it is WD-40: water displacement, formula 40, named for the 39 failed attempts that preceded it. "You have to start experimenting. You just have to play. You have to fail. I would say if you're not cussing at it every now and then, you're probably not experimenting enough."

The ending was more sober. Nicol expects unemployment to reach 10 per cent over the next decade, with 15 to 25 year olds hit hardest, and he does not expect the largely white, male AI industry to fix it. He cited a 2024 study spanning 50 years of leadership data that found women leaders more relational, more ethical and more transformational, and challenged the room to lead the way. He recently posted his three adult children a letter with two wishes: be lifelong learners, and love people. "The future needs human beings who provide genuine, authentic connection." His parting instructions doubled as the letter's: ask questions continuously, listen intently, hold your beliefs loosely, share your knowledge generously, be authentic, bring joy, laugh a lot.





on. "I'd rather be in an organisation where the leaders did care and did worry and did fret at times about things."

Imposter syndrome got an airing. Graham confessed to feeling it that very week ("Who's going to care?") and recalled a man who ran Europe's largest public relations firm telling her he would look in the bathroom mirror and think, this is a joke, how am I doing this? Her conclusion: "It doesn't mean because you think it, that it's true." Proud revealed the keynote she had just delivered was her first, prepared in a week. Davies supplied the reframe: she once read that imposter syndrome correlates with high achievement and intelligence, "so every time I feel it, I go, oh look, there is the confirmation of how smart I am."

The final question, a woman who shaped you, drew the warmest answers. Proud chose her mother, "a bit nuts, but I love her", who learned English and put herself through college while raising two girls alone. Graham declined to nominate anyone: "I don't put anybody on a pedestal, really, but I put some of the things they do on a pedestal." She admires traits, drawn from grandmothers, girlfriends and male mentors alike, because "we're all very human, we're all fallible, and none of us have got it all together."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Keep truth-tellers close. Graham's Bolger story is a warning: seniority attracts flattery. You are not better when people tell you you are good when you are not, so build a circle that will say so.

2. Filter feedback by source. Ask who this person is in your world and whether you respect them before you carry their opinion for the rest of your career. Weigh the intent behind it, then decide how much power it gets.

3. A thought is not a truth. Imposter syndrome visits everyone, including people running Europe's largest firms. Feeling like a fraud is not evidence that you are one; take a breath and push on through.

4. Some feedback is a you problem. Too loud, too intimidating, too much: sometimes the critique says more about the critic. You are not obliged to make yourself smaller for anyone's comfort.

5. Run the worst-case process. Before the brave and scary thing, ask what the worst outcome is and whether you could live with it. If you can come back from it, there is no reason not to go ahead.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE, CHRISTCHURCH, 19 JUNE 2026.

Journey To Excellence brought its afternoon of leadership, resilience and personal growth south on Friday 19 June 2026, hosted by former TVNZ journalist Joy Reid, founder of the One Mother to Another charity. The format ran to the series' now-familiar clock: lunch at noon, keynotes from 1:10pm, a closing panel, a table discussion with a bouquet riding on the best takeaway, and cocktails from 3:30pm.

The local line-up gave the day a distinctly Cantabrian flavour. Di Foster opened with a resilience keynote built on the worst day of her life, a terminal diagnosis she has now outlived by 16 years. Robyn Galloway, who founded Innovative Travel in this city in 1990 and steered it through the earthquakes and a seven-year insurance battle, reframed negotiation as relationships built before you need them. Andrew Nicol reprised his fire-hydrant tour of practical AI under the title How To Make Yourself Irreplaceable With AI, and Rosanne Graham closed the keynotes with an unvarnished account of the road to the C-suite, ten lessons included. All four then joined Reid on the couch for a panel that ranged from imposter syndrome to fruit salad.
































Building and Maintaining Resilience

Sixteen years ago Di Foster was given twelve months to live and told to put her affairs in order. She declined, had a chat with Death over green tea, and built a framework for living intentionally instead.

Di Foster opened by admitting that the six-year-old inside her, the one who loved planning her whole life out, "is mortified that her 55-year-old version of herself gets to do this": stand on a stage and talk about the worst day of her life. Before she did, she made the whole room stand up. Anyone who had ever felt lonely, found work or family hard, or woken up wondering if the world had gone mad, on their feet. Nobody stayed seated. "And yet you've kept going anyway."

Then, the worst day. Terminal secondary breast cancer, metastasised in her lungs, one lung collapsed, 25 per cent of lung capacity the only thing keeping her alive, and a prognosis with no wriggle room: "There's a zero chance that you'll last beyond 12 months." She was told to go home and put her affairs in order, which struck her as a poor use of the time. "My affairs are not that far out of order that they're going to take 12 months to get put into something that's acceptable to die."

She also has a rule that if the universe wants her to listen, the message should arrive with some style, Karen Walker being the standard. The oncologist delivering her death sentence was wearing Roman sandals, long beige walking socks and short shorts, which she deemed unacceptable. So instead of his verdict, she listened to what she calls "the whispers of my own heart", which sent three messages. Be happy, which she translated into be present. Go natural, which saw her leave a medical system offering only palliative chemotherapy, treatment that might ease symptoms but "would give me no more days". And be grateful, at which she snorted out loud: she was 38, newly moved to Christchurch for the love of her life, childless, and apparently dying.

Grateful arrived anyway, about five days later. It looked like waking up each morning and asking, "Am I going to die today? Because if I am, I'm not getting out of bed to do my hair." Then, quietly, gratitude for the 25 per cent of her lungs still working, for her partner, and for that one day.

The black cloud took about four weeks to shift. Sitting in the sun with an empty pot of green tea, she reached a hand over her right shoulder and said, "Hello, Death. It's time you and I had a chat." She will not disclose the conversation, but since that day she has not spent one moment worrying about dying. "Instead, I'm absolutely obsessed with living." The days she will not have, she says, are none of her business.

Then came the cranes. A karate mate, Glenn, and his wife Tanya, who had lived a decade in Japan, arrived for afternoon tea carrying a white rectangular box. Ninety minutes later Glenn finally stood and explained the myth: fold a thousand origami cranes and you earn a wish, and if four people fold them together, they can gift that wish to someone. He lifted her thousand cranes from the box by a single strand. Hung outside, the cranes deteriorate through the seasons, and when you find one loose in the garden, or in her case floating down the Avon, your wish is coming true. Hers was precise. "I didn't wish not to have cancer. I simply wished that with every day I was given, I would do the very best I could with it."

Fourteen months after diagnosis, her famously deadpan husband ("the man we check for a pulse") observed that she seemed well and asked what they were going to do with the rest of their lives. Her answer: a baby, before her self-imposed deadline of 40, giving him six weeks. His objection, that they had been through five and a half thousand earthquakes, relocated two businesses and were living at her sister's, did not survive a weekend she booked in Akaroa. Jackson James Foster arrived three weeks before her 40th birthday and turned 14 in December. Sixteen years and three months on from the diagnosis, she describes what happened as radical remission.

The worst day of her life, she says, became the best year, and out of it came the model she now applies to everything. Events happen and we tell ourselves a story about them; keep the story and you land somewhere accidental, when most of us would rather land somewhere intentional. Her husband says she never lets the facts get in the way of a good story. Her defence: "All my stories benefit the future version of myself." The engine of the model is radical responsibility. "It might not be your fault. I get it. But 100 per cent it will always be your responsibility. Your ability to respond."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Rewrite the story. Events are fixed but the story you tell about them is a choice, and the story determines where you end up. Reframe the past so it works for the future version of you.

2. Take radical responsibility. Fault and responsibility are different things. Whatever happens, your ability to respond is always yours, and blaming circumstances hands your future to them.

3. Prepare before things go wrong. Responsibility has two parts: responding when trouble arrives, and what you are doing today so you are in a better place to respond when it inevitably does.

4. Embrace the joy of missing out. You can do almost anything, but not everything. Strategic non-action makes the hell yeses better; Foster wants a life of "hell yes and no thank you".

5. Stay obsessed with living. The days you will not have are none of your business. Being present in the days you do have is the whole game, and gratitude is how you get there.



How To Become A Better Negotiator

From down to the wire phone calls to opera at the pyramids, Innovative Travel founder Robyn Galloway has spent 35 years proving that the strongest negotiating position is a relationship you built before you needed it.

Robyn Galloway's first recorded negotiation was a failure, and it was with her mother. When she announced in 1990 that she was starting a travel company specialising in the Middle East, her farming parents gasped in horror, and a few days later her mother delivered a cautionary tale about another farmer's daughter who started a company and came asking for $50,000 within six months. The message: "Just want to let you know, not happening."

She started anyway, with a phone, a fax and a typewriter, and a founding goal: to make it safe, especially for women, to travel through the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the more exotic corners of the world, "and just keep everybody safe, 100 per cent". The Middle East she had visited in the 1980s was nothing like its negative PR, and she has spent three decades negotiating the gap between the two.

The early tests came fast. In 1991 the wholesale travel companies were all owned by men, and one of them decided a small operation run by a single blonde woman was not to be tolerated. Their rep began spreading stories about her prices and her mistakes. She laughed at first, then realised her business could be destroyed. Her lawyer confirmed she had a case for libel and a bill she could not afford, so she took matters into her own hands. "One Friday afternoon, and this is probably not a good thing to do if you're going to do a negotiation, I took a couple of gins, picked up the phone, and rang him." Rather than threaten, she offered the man a way out: "I know that you don't always know what your reps are saying. Sometimes they can get a bit out of control." Terrified, broke, and giving the other side room to retreat with dignity: a template she would use for decades.

The relationship at the heart of the talk was with Elhamy El Zayat, her Cairo-based business partner. When he proposed the partnership during a visit to Queenstown, she did not simply say yes to a man with several hundred staff and seven offices across Egypt. She had spent enough time in the region to know some businesses begin with a family cheque, and told him plainly: "If that's how your business started, I'm not interested." It had not. His family lost their lands in Egypt's nationalisation, he built the company from two people, and he had worked for Pan Am in the 1980s when that made him something of a rebel. Values aligned, he became a shareholder and later a director.

Together their negotiations became more exotic. With no budget for PR, she persuaded Dame Malvina Major to sing opera, first at Jerash in Jordan and then, after El Zayat shrugged that he had once organised Frank Sinatra, at the pyramids, an event 60 Minutes filmed in the late 1990s. When MFAT needed help in Egypt, she brokered El Zayat's appointment as honorary consul, which included subtly conveying that his building's entrance needed work, and fielding the official verdict that "we've checked him out and he's squeaky clean". Her summary to him: "Not only are you a nice guy, but officially you're a nice guy."

Then there were the negotiations nobody chooses. In 2011 the Tahrir Square revolution and the Christchurch earthquake arrived within weeks of each other. When Mubarak's government cut Egypt's internet and phone lines, she stayed calm knowing staff from those seven offices would visit every client personally. When her own office on the corner of Cashel and Barbadoes Streets was red-zoned, the company survived on business interruption and relocation insurance that many firms discovered too late they lacked, though extracting the money took three years and one crucial habit: minuting every crisis meeting, "because your mind becomes a blur". The building claim took seven years and ended with her telling her lawyer she was going to chain herself outside the insurer's Auckland office. During COVID, the industry's pleas to government went nowhere until they reframed the problem around the $2 billion of client funds stranded offshore and the $300 million of GST attached to it. "We were finding a solution that was resonating with them." The industry got a $50 million allocation.

Her most instructive win may be the quietest. In 2018, with clients keen to return to Türkiye, she challenged MFAT on why one policeman shot in Istanbul 18 months earlier justified a travel warning while 100 police shot in America that year attracted none. "What is your matrix? Is there a bias here?" They admitted there was, re-evaluated through both ambassadors, and lifted the warning within three months. Zoom out, build relationships in peacetime, and never rely on a single contact: since 1990, her clients' safety record stands at 100 per cent.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Build relationships in peacetime. The contacts that rescue you in a crisis are the ones you invested in when nothing was wrong. By the time trouble starts, it is too late to begin.

2. Give the other side a way out. Galloway could not afford a libel case, so she offered her adversary a dignified retreat instead of an ultimatum. Face-saving exits end conflicts that threats prolong.

3. Find the argument that resonates with them. The travel industry's COVID case went nowhere until it was reframed around the government's own interests. Keep reframing until something sticks.

4. Never rely on one person. Broaden every critical relationship to at least two on two, because if a single contact leaves either company, the whole connection walks out the door with them.

5. Question inherited perceptions, including official ones. From the Middle East's reputation to a biased travel advisory, the received view is negotiable. Ask for the matrix behind the judgement.

How To Become A C-Suite Leader



Redundancies at 28, a $60 million lawsuit at 29, and a home baking roster she is not on: Skills Consulting Group CEO Rosanne Graham on what the path to the top actually looks like.

Before the career history came the baking story. Graham is a single parent of five children, and one of her 15-year-old sons had recently complained at afternoon tea that "there's never any baking in this house". Feeling the steam rising, she chose a different approach: she pointed out that nobody had been arrested, everyone still spoke to each other, and they lived safe, warm and more spoilt than they should be. Then the kicker. "I want you to think about if I was a single dad. Everyone would go, oh my God, he's amazing. Do you think anyone would go, but does he bake?" The boys looked suitably embarrassed, and there is now a baking roster in the household. She is not on it. The point beneath the punchline: women wear so many hats that trying to be the best at all of them is a trap. Decide what you will not do, "because if you burn yourself out or if you run out of energy, then you are of no value to anyone, let alone yourself."

She left Otago with a political studies degree, no clue, 50 job applications and two interviews, and landed at the Ministry of Education. By 28 she was head of strategy at CLEAR Communications when the company had to remove 800 people, and because the executive team was itself at risk, the job of running the process fell to her. She ended up agreeing that friends would leave the organisation, and made her own boss redundant. What got her through was a distinction she has carried ever since: she had no choice about doing it, but she could choose how. Integrity, transparency, "trying to be as human as possible around all of it". Her conclusion: "How you do things ends up being more important quite often than what you end up doing."

A year later, at 29, she was handed interconnection, more than half the company's cost base, along with a live $60 million lawsuit against Telecom. "I did that very female thing. I'm not a lawyer. How could I possibly do that?" Her chief executive proposed they do it together, attended the first meeting with the QC, then missed the second, third and fourth. When she stomped into his office to complain, he simply asked how it was going. It was going fine. "He snookered me somewhat," she admitted, and the lesson stuck: "Don't take yourself out of the running just because you think, I'm not experienced enough."

She resigned from a job she loved to start a family, moved into consulting for flexibility, and got "a little bit carried away", ending up with five boys and one girl, the last two identical twins. A board role led to the CEO seat at a private tertiary education business when its retiring chief executive, the same man from CLEAR, suggested they do the transition together. "I'm embarrassed to admit that I actually fell for it again." It became one of the best decisions of her life, made possible by a structured support base including a nanny who stayed 17 years. Then, two years into the role, her son died unexpectedly. She returned to work about six weeks later and taught herself to compartmentalise, allowing grief its place in the car each morning and setting it down at the car park. She shared it not for sympathy but for realism: scratch the surface of any room and few have escaped tragedy, "and frankly, the older you get, the less likely you are to escape it".

The address closed with her ten lessons. Among them: be noticeable by being fantastic at your craft, which unfashionably requires hard work. Make the transition from I to we, because "the thing that got you to that senior role is not the thing that will keep you there". Surround yourself with truth-tellers, since seniority attracts flattery. Aim to be respected rather than always liked. Be yourself, per the Oscar Wilde line a headhunter once gave her, because everyone else is taken. And her final word to anyone eyeing a C-suite role: give it a go. "What's the worst that can happen? You stop the bus, get off it, think about what you learnt from it, and you try another route."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. How beats what. The hardest decisions usually involve people you like. You often cannot avoid them, but you can always choose to act with integrity, transparency and humanity, and that is what people remember.

2. Don't take yourself out of the running. If someone credible sees the ability in you, back yourself to learn the rest rather than waiting until you feel fully prepared. Graham was snookered into her biggest growth twice.

3. Make the shift from I to we. What gets you to a senior role is personal excellence; what keeps you there is building teams that win. Turning up as the saviour will not take you far.

4. Build your support structure before you leap. Graham took the CEO role because the scaffolding was in place at home. Set yourself up to succeed rather than proving you can carry everything alone.

5. You can have it all, just not all at once. Pick what matters in each season of life, let the rest go without guilt, and revisit the choices as your circumstances change. Baking is optional.

Panel Discussion

Host Joy Reid gathered Di Foster, Robyn Galloway, Andrew Nicol and Rosanne Graham for a closing kōrero on apologies, imposter syndrome, fruit salad, and why nobody should aim to win 100 per cent of a negotiation.

Joy Reid opened by confessing she had scribbled Rosanne Graham's ten lessons "on scraps of paper", there being no PowerPoint, and turned the theme over to the couch: what is your top practical tip for someone eyeing their next move?

Di Foster went first, with a report from the afternoon tea break. Someone had approached her with a compliment and opened with sorry. "Why would we start with sorry? As women we quite often apologise for taking up space. Just drop it." Excuses got the same treatment: "They're really cute and they're so boring." Then she quoted Yoda on trying versus doing.

Robyn Galloway picked up on inherited voices. Her mother had a proverb for every occasion, including "better to be thoughtful than open your mouth and prove it", and those inherited views, she argued, quietly sabotage people for decades. Her advice was to interrogate the voice on your shoulder. "Once you know where that imposter syndrome is coming from, you can identify it. I was about 50 when I started. I'm not listening to that voice anymore." Her verdict on the room: "Women don't back themselves enough." Andrew Nicol's contribution was blunter. "Once you're in over your head, it doesn't matter how deep it is." He throws his team in the deep end, with notice; one of his general managers responded with a calendar invitation reading, "I need floaties." Graham's version: shut the doubting voice down, go and do your service, and see what happens. "Be courageous."

Reid then asked Galloway what destroys trust fastest in a negotiation. Bad faith, essentially: "You've got to start from a place of integrity on both sides. If people are in the room not for the right reasons, it's already sabotaged." So does greed. "A negotiation's actually a negotiation, so you're not going to expect to achieve 100 per cent of your goal, and neither should they." She nominated current geopolitics as "the worst negotiation you've ever seen", and shared her method: small talk first, read the room, and never get to the main point in two minutes. Reid asked whether it works on children. "Time out. I'll let you know."

Nicol was asked to place AI in a camp: tool, threat or teammate. "All of the above, definitely some big threat. Very, very useful tool, less teammate. It's not human, it's literally electrodes running in computers." Pressed on staying human in a world moving that fast, he cited the UK finance team who transferred more than $20 million on the instruction of a fake CFO on a video call. "There's a point coming where we're not going to know whether we're watching the real person or the avatar, and so I think we're going to crave human to human connection." His prescription: presence, devices away, and eye contact, "eyes are the window to the soul". Foster answered the same question with fruit. She is a banana, delighted with her big yellowness, and the only mistake available to her is trying to be an orange, which would confuse the apples ("apples are easily confused"). A workplace, she said, is "a really amazing fruit salad", and there is not a right way to be in it.

Asked what they wish they had known ten years earlier, Graham chose perspective. "If you let your worries and your concerns lead you around by the nose, you will follow that drama." The moment you have a plan, the world settles back into a pattern, so trust that "you've got the inner strength and the inner resources to work your way through it". Galloway noted that Christchurch entered COVID battle-ready after the earthquakes while Aucklanders were "in La La Land", and passed on hard-won advice: watch out for leases, which can bankrupt you, so negotiate CPI-only increases and short flexible terms. Nicol described hitting decision fatigue in a senior corporate role and resolving, somewhere in Spaghetti Junction, to make any call within 24 hours given enough information. He was later called the most decisive manager his team had known. Very few decisions lock the door behind you, and in a crisis, "when you get into paralysis, that's when you get locked down". A reframe offered from the couch, that a choice feels easier to revisit than a decision, visibly hit home with the host.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Drop the sorry. Apologising for taking up space is a habit, not a courtesy. If you want the seat at the table, take it without a preamble of excuses, however cute they sound.

2. Ask where the voice comes from. Imposter syndrome is often an inherited script rather than an assessment of your ability. Trace it to its source and it loses most of its authority.

3. Nobody wins 100 per cent. A negotiation in which one side expects everything is already sabotaged. Start with integrity, read the room slowly, and leave the other side something worth having.

4. Decide within 24 hours. Most decisions are reversible, and paralysis is more dangerous than a wrong call. If you have enough information, decide; if not, ask for more, then decide.

5. Build tiny daily rituals. A photo a day, exercise in any form, rubbish books before bed: the panel's coping mechanisms were small, repeatable and non-negotiable, which is precisely why they work.

The last question asked for one tip for doing life well. One answer: six hours of good sleep, achieved exclusively through rubbish books, harrowing prizewinners being useless for the purpose. Nicol offered a 15 year habit: one photo every day, rolling across his work screen, his son growing from five to 20 one frame at a time, plus daily exercise in some form. Reid declared she was keeping the question in her panel repertoire. "Always gets the gold."



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FAS ON



Office Chic

For Spring/ Summer 2026, CAMILLA AND MARC explores the quiet power of presence... to slay in the boardroom.



I would never have guessed that their latest line was inspired by the contemplative traditions of Shinto purity rituals, Komuso monks and the architectural interplay of concealment and reveal. But I could definitely tell you the collection reflects a sense of calm and clarity.

In and by this quality, Spring / Summer explores this power of presence. In a world where constant motion replaces the beauty and importance of repose, the collection is an invitation to slow down and find true meaning in the everyday.

Tailoring is elongated and precise. Outerwear envelops the body with ease. Fluid dresses balance sculptural forms, while layering creates depth without excess. New proportions emerge through bracelet-length sleeves, collarless tailoring and outerwear, draped hip panels and softly wrapped stoles in faux fur. Symmetry and considered proportions create a balance between structure and softness.

Materiality remains central to the collection. Australian wool, silk, lamb leather and





laser-cut goat leather among other premium fabrics are explored. Alongside this, textural elements like European floral jacquard, tactile faux fur and considered fringe embellishments feature in the collection. A restrained palette of cream, stone, chocolate, burgundy and black allows texture, silhouette and craftsmanship to remain the focus.















What's *ON*



At the 2026 Met Gala Joey King wore a custom Miu Miu tulle column dress embellished with cascading silver crystals, featuring a pink leather halter neckline and pink georgette train inspired by the iconic Miu Miu Spring/Summer 2010 collection. She finished the look with light pink satin mules.





At Australian Fashion Week in Sydney Elle Ferguson wears a pair of Chocolate Brown Croc Emboss Leather Pandion by Bared Footwear. If you're after a similar look with a roomier calf fit, try Cacique in Mahogany.



Gigi Hadid wore a custom Miu Miu black hotfix gown featuring crystal flame and floral embroideries inspired by the Spring/ Summer 2011 collection. The look is finished with black patent pumps.



(Photo by BACKGRID)

For the first evening of her wedding celebrations, Dua Lipa chose a Serpenti High Jewellery necklace in rose gold with a tanzanite, onyx and diamonds, a Serpenti Secret watch and a High Jewellery Bulgari Tubogas watch, finishing the look with a pair of High Jewellery Serpenti earrings with rubies.



276239

High Jewellery Serpenti necklace



104026

Serpenti Secret Watch with case in white gold 18kt



104093

Bvlgari Tubogas Watch in Gold 18kt with diamonds and peridot



104093

Bvlgari Tubogas Watch in Gold 18kt with diamonds and peridot



BELLA INDEED

Bella Hadid wore a custom Prada double-layer slip dress in bronze silk satin and silk voile, embroidered with degradé micro-crystals and paired with a matching stole while attending the 79th Cannes Film Festival.

(Photo courtesy of Tiziano Raw)



Lucky Lucky

Sylvester's High Winter '26 collection is out and this season is themed around luck. Primarily because this marks the fashion house's first full year of running. So far they've released eight collections and they have no intention of slowing down. I just want to know what the dog's name is.



Sophie wears a
Collegiate hoodie,
Collegiate jumper,
Collegiate pant



Right:
Fleece jumper,
Lingerie skirt



Opposite Page: Collegiate hoodie, Collegiate jumper, Collegiate pant

Below: Lucky jumper, Highland skirt



Above: Willow top, Stripey skirt



Right: Lingerie cami, Shutters trouser, Wings necklace

Below: Fur jacket, Lingerie cami, Collegiate pant





Above: A good boy

Opposite Page: Fur jacket, Lingerie skirt


Barbour
Barbour



Right: Highland shirt, Highland skirt





Above: Stripey dress, Willow shrug

Right: Willow cardigan, Lingerie cami, Denim low rise trouser







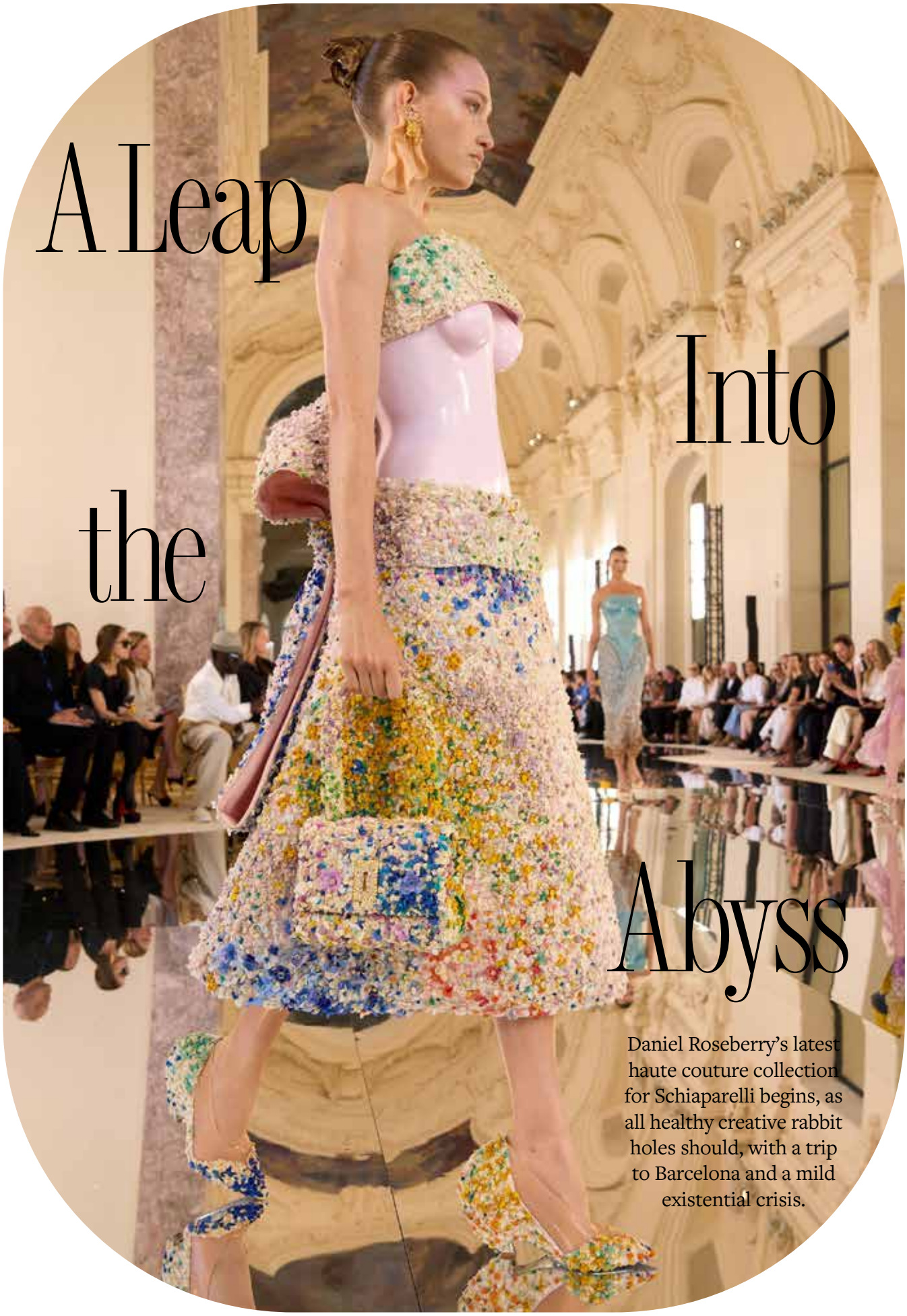
For 2026, Miu Miu Upcycled begins with the classic white cotton shirt and a pair of khaki cotton canvas chinos. These are two pieces beloved for their perfect fusion of form and function, sophistication and ease, both exemplifying a juxtaposition at the heart of the Miu Miu universe.

The selection of garments for the Miu Miu Upcycled collection was sourced, in limited numbers, from experts in vintage clothing across the world. Each piece is carefully restored, then refashioned. Silhouette is reinvented: exaggerated, abbreviated, oversized. Trousers become jackets, bustiers and skirts. Shirts are reiterated as dresses and apron tops. Sleeves are slashed, pockets are patched and finished with ribbons and bows. Collars are introduced in signature aged leather, buttons are removed and replaced, utilitarian surfaces are printed and embroidered with crystal flowers. Accessories are similarly reconsidered: a khaki pouch or backpack, printed, embroidered and with leather trim; the Plume sneaker in that same material, completed with personalised laces and charms.

Upcycling with Suki Waterhouse

Miu Miu has launched its new Upcycled collection. Any marks of ageing and the passing of time are celebrated. In this way the entire wardrobe is infused with the meaning and history of its past owners. Finished by hand, no two garments are the same in the collection. In the campaign's images the Miu Miu Upcycled collection is styled with selected pieces from the Spring/Summer 2026 collection.





A Leap Into the Abyss

Daniel Roseberry's latest haute couture collection for Schiaparelli begins, as all healthy creative rabbit holes should, with a trip to Barcelona and a mild existential crisis.

After last season's celebrated The Agony and the Ecstasy, Roseberry admits he thought he had cracked the code. The plan sounded simple enough: travel somewhere architecturally fabulous, be struck by genius, return to the atelier and produce another couture revelation. This time, the pilgrimage was to Antoni Gaudí's Barcelona, where buildings seem more grown than designed, curving and swelling like coral, bone, shell and a trippy fever dream. Which somehow Roseberry has translated into Schiaparelli's Fall/Winter 2026–2027 Haute Couture collection, The Call of the Void.

Schiaparelli has never been a house for polite frocks and sensible hemlines. Its DNA has always involved a bit of surrealism. Gaudí's architecture rejected rigid symmetry in favour of organic structure,





strange surfaces and materials doing unexpected things. Roseberry takes that spirit and runs it straight into the couture salon. Traditional silks, satins and wools are pushed aside for latex, silicone and sheets of baked paint sculpted into silhouettes.

The result is fashion that feels part garment and part organism. A hyper-realistic bustier is sculpted, cast in silicone and painted milky blue. Floral forms are made from hosiery stretched over metal wires and pearls. Jackets and leggings are encrusted with real flowers, fish scales and ribbon flowers, while latex tentacles curl from shoulders.





Nature appears everywhere, but not in a soft-focus, botanical-print way. This is nature as creature, armour and beautiful threat. Lobster pink, violet, tangerine, saffron and pale mint sit against gloss black, raw wax ecru and Schiaparelli gold. Accessories follow suit, with shell earrings lined in blush porcelain, octopus-inspired jewellery and silicone pieces that recall sea anemones.

It is strange, sensual, occasionally alarming and exactly the point. Roseberry has not just borrowed from Gaudí's buildings. He has borrowed from their beautiful insanity.























BEAUTY



SMART SKIN

From AI-powered styling to cellular-level skincare, the new era of beauty is a testament to technological advances.

BEAUTY BY SOPHIE CHUNG | **IMAGE BY** JO MALONE LONDON

BEAUTY HOTLIST

From cult reformulations to category-first innovations, these are the launches redefining what's worth your attention this season.

1

CULT CLASSIC

The evolution of the globally loved icon, **Bobbi Brown** Vitamin Enriched Face Base+, $130, has arrived with an enhanced SuperVitamin Blend featuring 5x the vitamins and 24-hour makeup wear while maintaining its signature cushion-soft texture for the ultimate canvas.

2

SWEET UMAMI

A contemporary reimagining of the classic gourmand fragrance, **Abel** Double Scoop, EDP, 50ml, $330, introduces the nutty warmth of toasted black sesame and an unexpected savoury lift of North African rosemary to a heart of butterscotch and a creamy, milky vanilla base.

3

MAKEUP MASTER

Thoughtfully curated for the face, cheeks, and eyes, the **Jane Iredale** Pro Series Essentials Brush Set, $336, features innovative, luxuriously soft synthetic fibres designed to perform with every formula.

4

ONE FELL SCOOP

A blueberry flavoured blend of muscle-sculpting creatine, collagen peptides, and gut-loving probiotics, a daily scoop of **The Beauty Chef** Body Tone & Glow, $54, nourishes your body and skin in one easy step.

5

CRYO CORRECTION

The first device to fuse deep-penetrating red, blue, and infrared iQLED technology with customisable under-eye cold pads, **Shark** CryoGlow Under-Eye Cooling + LED Mask, $849.99, minimises fine lines and targets blemishes while instantly tightening and depuffing tired eyes.

6

CULTURED RADIANCE

Bridging ancient Asian beauty rituals with modern innovation, **Augustinus Bader** The Rich Cream, $494, utilises bioavailable fermented rice extracts packed with natural prebiotics and enzymes to deliver a coveted glass-skin finish.

7

MIDNIGHT ALCHEMY

Synchronising with the skin's overnight circadian rhythm, **RAESO** Lunar Veil Chrono-Active Sleep Mask, $159, delivers a three-phase release of NAD+ boosters, native New Zealand botanicals, and barrier-restoring ceramides to deliver the ultimate "eight hours of sleep in a jar" by morning.

8

DESERT SANCTUARY

Rich and indulgent, **Glasshouse** Oasis Mirage Candle, $69.95, warms the air with a smooth leather heart with an aromatic burst of crushed cardamom, ginger, and glowing amber.

9

FIRMING VEIL

Targeting a vulnerable yet neglected part of our body, **Tronque** Neck & Décolletage Elixir, $130, uses a patented exosome mimetic active, Pentavitin, and Superoxide Dismutase to support cellular communication, lock in deep moisture, and restore tissue elasticity.

10

SATIN SMOOTH

Naturium Glow Getter Multi-Oil Body Scrub, $36, uses sugar crystals suspended in 20% glycerin, squalane, and linoleic-rich botanical oils to gently buff away dullness.

11

CELLULAR QUENCH

Infused with ultra-low molecular weight collagen and Galactomyces Ferment Filtrate, **Youth Lab** Overnight Bio-Masque 4-Pack, $20, hydrates, firms and revitalises the skin in 3–4 hours.

12

FLUSH FIX

Packed with skin-calming ingredients like rose, algae and mushroom, **Smashbox** Anti-Redness Correct + Soothe Primer, $77, relies on green pigments to balance a red complexion while creating a smooth, long-lasting canvas for makeup.

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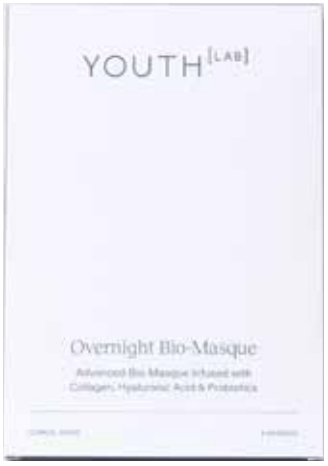

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BEAUTY SPOT



SMART STYLER

British hair titan **ghd** has entered its AI era. For its landmark 25th anniversary, they've rewritten the rulebook of hair styling with the new sculpt, $629, a revolutionary interactive styler that measures the temperature of your actual hair rather than the plates, tracking the hair density and speed of movement 2,900 times per second to adjust heat in real time. Delivering up to 90% more shine and zero damage to the hair's natural structure, it proves that uncompromising performance and optimal hair health can finally coexist.











FLUSH FOCUS

Solidifying itself as the undisputed hero of every modern makeup routine, the latest wave of blush focuses on multi-dimensional finishes and high-performance wearability that effortlessly elevate the complexion. Making a highly anticipated play for cult status, **NARS** Insatiable Liquid Blush, $71, is infused with a blend of ceramides and peptides to deliver a long-wearing second-skin flush that treats the barrier as it wears. For an instant, high-impact radiance, **Smashbox** Lit Stx Blushlighter, $39, effortlessly bridges the gap between colour and illumination in a portable, multi-dimensional stick format. Pushing the boundaries of tonal dimension, **Shiseido** Color & Glow Enhancer, $75, expertly sculpts and brightens the complexion by marrying customisable pigment with a soft-focus luminous finish. And paying homage to the brand's most iconic lip hues, **M.A.C** Skinfinish Colourstruck Blush, $58, offers a velvety, blurring powder formula that delivers 12 hours of colour-true, effortlessly blendable wear.

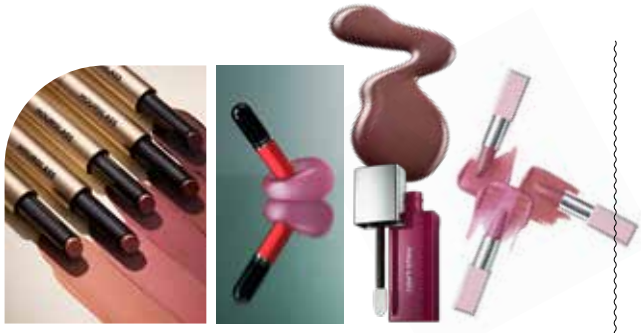


SOFT & SMOOTH

Glow Lab Creamy Body Wash is a rich, nourishing body wash that gently cleanses while leaving skin soft, smooth, and hydrated, available in four indulgent fragrances: Cashmere & White Blossom, Coconut & Vanilla Bean, Oat Milk & Mānuka Honey, and Salted Caramel & Pistachio.

HYBRID HUES

From blurring mattes to glassy stains, the new guard of lip launches offers a spectrum of finishes that all share one common ground: a featherlight texture that floods the lips with deep, continuous hydration. Transforming the traditional matte lip with a breakthrough hybrid formula, **Hourglass** Phantom Blur, $75, delivers a soft-focus cashmere-like finish to emulate an effortless lived-in effect. Infused with raspberry seed oil for lip barrier support, **M.A.C.** Lustreglass Stainglass Lip Tint, $46, cloaks the lips in a buildable stained-glass colour and a juicy shine for 12 hours without the sticky feel. Featuring three customisable base shades and two multi-dimensional finish changers, **Shiseido** TechnoSatin Gel Lipstick Limited Edition, $61, allows you to curate the perfect, universally flattering pink. At the other end of the spectrum for maximum visual impact, **Haus Labs** Atomic Shake Lip Lacquer, $56, combines high-octane shine with transfer-proof pigment in a long-wearing formula.





CAVIAR CLARITY

An advanced brightening ritual engineered to restore pristine clarity and unparalleled skin luminosity, **La Prairie** marries its legendary patented Cellular Complex with caviar micro-nutrients in its beloved White Caviar collection. Designed for the delicate eye area, the Light Infusion Eye Serum, $700, is a weightless oil-to-water formula that refreshes the contour and amplifies the skin's radiance while visibly diminishing the appearance of dark circles. To reveal tone harmony and target pigmentation, the Pearl Infusion, $1,240, improves the skin's firmness to dramatically optimise its natural ability to reflect light. The Light Infusion Cream, $1,160, is formulated with Thiamidol, a high-performance tyrosinase inhibitor, to regulate dark spot genesis at the root while adding a smooth, youthful bounce to the skin.





SOLAR WAVES

From sun-drenched coastlines to crisp, crystalline trails, the latest fragrances invite a sensory escape centred around luminous warmth and refined minerality. Capturing the radiant energy of the Mediterranean, **Dolce & Gabbana** Light Blue, EDP, 50ml, $199, opens with sun-ripened Sicilian lemon and zesty bergamot before settling into a creamy heart of frangipani and a lingering, ambery wood base. Enveloping the skin in a velvety warmth, **Aerin** Amber Musk, EDP, 50ml, $232.20, blends amber, benzoin and musk with feminine notes of rose centifolia absolute and a burst of coconut water. Exploring a more pristine purity, **Issey Miyake** L'Eau d'Issey Eau Essentielle, EDP, 50ml, $190, mirrors the sparkle of spring water by blending an aqueous pear accord with silken jasmine and a clean, structured cedarwood base. Finally, capturing the exhilarating rush of wild ocean waters, **Jo Malone London** Sea Salt & Bergamot, Cologne, 50ml, $206, delivers a bracing shot of coastal freshness, anchoring bright bergamot and crisp mineral sea salt with a deep driftwood accord.



FUTURE SKIN

Driven by the rise of biohacking and advanced cellular science, the latest skincare innovations treat the complexion as a dynamic living system, optimising natural repair pathways to build the skin's resilience. Harnessing the principles of longevity, **Dermalogica** FutureCode Booster, $185, blends a proprietary Longevity Renew Complex with biomimetic phospholipids to biohack the skin's self-defence mechanisms and visibly reverse daily DNA-related environmental damage. Working on architectural definition, **Estée Lauder** Supreme+ Sculpting Serum, $299, deploys a high-performance blend of advanced peptides to boost collagen production, visibly lifting and re-contouring the face and neck. For rapid cellular recovery, **Medik8** Exo-PDRN Prismatic+, $184, targets the skin's natural healing pathways with a hyper-concentrated triple exosome complex to clinically accelerate rejuvenation, calm redness, and refine texture. Maximising the body's nocturnal repair cycle, **Biossance** Squalane + Ectoin Overnight Rescue Ultra-Rich Cream, $139, fuses bio-fermented ectoin with stress-relieving magnesium to deeply reinforce the moisture barrier and erase fine lines while you sleep.





SILK SYSTEM

From root-stimulating botanicals to heat-protective tools, the new class of hair heroes prioritises the long-term integrity of your strands without compromising on a high-gloss finish. For an intense hit of structural restoration, **LUST** Repair Mask, $39, deeply nourishes and revives compromised strands to bring lacklustre hair back to optimal health and shine. Designed to achieve results at an affordable price point, **Essano** Growth & Volume Shampoo and Conditioner, $12.99 each, utilises a potent blend of caffeine and biotin tripeptide to strengthen, thicken, and weightlessly lift fine hair from root to tip. Streamlining the styling process, the **Shark** Glossi 2-in-1 Hot Tool and Air Glosser, $249.99, expertly bridges the gap between drying and styling, using advanced airflow to deliver a sleek, high-gloss finish without the heat damage.

BARRIER BALANCE

The new class of daily cleansers shifts the focus from stripping impurities to preserving cellular hydration and skin barrier integrity. Leaning on nutrient-rich plant lipids to work in affinity with our skin, **Aleph Beauty** Remove/Cleanse Balm, $72, lifts makeup and sebum while replenishing the skin with EFAs and antioxidants. Offering a hydration-first approach, **Medik8** Total Moisture Daily Cleansing Gel, $64.82, uses prebiotic inulin and proprietary Moisture Magnets to effortlessly melt away makeup and sunscreen while leaving the skin balanced. Infusing the wash cycle with high-performance barrier support, **Elizabeth Arden** Ceramide Renewing Cleanser, $82, deposits essential lipids to fortify the skin's defence systems and lock in moisture as it cleanses. Drawing on traditional brightening wisdom, **Laneige** Rice Foaming Deep Cleanser, $44, delivers a rich, purifying lather that gently refines texture and clarifies the complexion without disrupting its natural moisture levels.





living

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARCH

Arches are one of the most over-flogged design trends of the decade. So why does Melbourne's award-magnet Thomas Street Residence make them look like the future?

Oh the arch. Somewhere around 2019 it escaped from architecture school, got itself a TikTok account and has spent the years since flogging itself in every renovation reveal. Plaster an arch over the pantry, arch-shaped headboard or go with an arch decal if the landlord said no.

So when a Melbourne house built almost entirely around curved geometry starts hoovering up international awards, the reasonable response is suspicion. Is this "big arch" at play? Thomas Street Residence, by Embrace Architects, is a 2026 Architizer A+Awards Finalist for Residential Interior. The A+Awards is the largest and most international awards programme in architecture, now in its fourteenth year and judged by a jury drawn from the top tier of global practice, with winners published in the annual hardbound compendium The World's Best Architecture. The house has further recognition from the Architecture MasterPrize, the Interior Design Excellence Awards and the International Design Awards, which between them span Los Angeles, Australia and the international design circuit. That is a lot of judging panels, across four separate programmes, agreeing on a house whose signature move draws on one of the most exhausted gestures in contemporary design.





Embrace Architects is a boutique Melbourne studio of around a dozen designers, founded almost a decade ago by director Nicholas Sun, who trained at the University of Melbourne, and the practice works across residential, multi-residential, commercial, heritage and mixed-use projects. Its point of difference is integration: architecture, interiors, landscape and planning handled as one continuous discipline rather than handed between consultants, with an in-house team that spans architects and interior designers. Thomas Street Residence, a completed private home in Melbourne, is a manifestation of that philosophy. There is no visible seam where the architecture ends and the interior design begins, because the same hands drew both.

So back to that arch. The TikTok version is applied and sits on top of a house like a sticker, a curved shape cut into a wall that would have been perfectly happy staying rectangular. The Thomas Street arch is structural thinking though. Embrace starts with a rigorously classical framework, proportion, rhythm and the precision of well-executed linear elements, drawing from traditional architectural language deliberately and without imitation, which takes a



Together with the expressed geometry, “the structural forms also become atmospheric.” Flat walls take light in blocks, on, off, bright, shadow. A curved surface takes it as a gradient, a slow roll of tone that shifts as the sun tracks across the sky, so the same room can be crisp at seven in the morning and cinematic by dinner. It is a reminder that the cheapest material in any build is the one nobody specifies. Light arrives daily, costs nothing, and will do more for a curved plaster wall than anything you could hang on it.

New Zealand should be paying particular attention, because we share Melbourne’s low, hard southern light and we squander it with enthusiasm. The national renovation instinct is to fix a gloomy room with paint, when the actual problem is that nobody checked where the north sun lands in winter before locking in the floor plan.

The rest of the palette follows the same logic of doing less, harder. Opting for natural stone, warm timber, textured finishes, and that is roughly it, all carried through the whole house so that every space is recognisably the same building. The luxury is embedded in weight and detail rather than applied on top, and the effect is a home where, in the studio’s words, elegance and comfort “sit in quiet and total agreement.” Nothing is decorative for its own sake. Each surface is there to support the larger spatial idea, which sounds austere on paper and reads as calm in person.

The programme is generous. Beyond the living areas, kitchen, dining, bedrooms and bathrooms sits a full





certain nerve when every second new build is chasing novelty. Then the curve is released into that discipline as what the studio calls both “a formal device and a philosophical one,” softening the built elements and dissolving the line between inside and out.

While the trend arch asks where can I stick a curve, Thomas Street asks what is the curve for. Here it steers movement through the house and manages thresholds. It takes the formality of all those disciplined straight lines and relaxes the shoulders of the entire building. Remove the curves from Thomas Street and the house stops making sense. Remove the arch from most renovations and you save a tonne on plastering.

There is a second reason the arch earns its keep here. Light, too, is “treated as a material in its own right as it transitions in and out of spaces throughout the day,” the studio says.



private entertaining suite: cinema, bar, wine cellar and lounge. And even the toys, and there are toys, are threaded together as one continuous material sequence rather than displayed like a trophy cabinet. The spaces unfold in order, connected by consistent materials and measured transitions, built for hosting that reveals itself gradually across an evening. The same continuity runs out through the thresholds, with the interior materials carried through to the outside so the terrace becomes another room instead of the place the design gave up.

Underneath all of it is the studio's real thesis. Thomas Street Residence is, in Embrace's words, "detailed in craft, precise in detail, and deeply resolved in its relationship between form and feeling," a home that "holds its confidence quietly, and is built, above all else, to endure." Endurance is the unfashionable ambition here. In a market where homes are renovated to sell and style cycles run about five years, this is an exercise in designing for permanence, through proportion and rhythm rather than trend.

Thomas Street Residence is by Embrace Architects, Melbourne. Photography by Charlotte Jane.



LOVE AT FIRST LIGHT

We agonise over sofas, paint swatches and the perfect rug, then flick on a single ceiling light and wonder why the room falls flat. These four New Zealand projects, from a glittering Tauranga tower to a lovingly revived winery, prove that light is the ingredient that makes a space feel like somewhere you want to be. Even better, their tricks translate beautifully to home.

You know the feeling. You walk into a room and something about it just works. The light is golden, your shoulders drop, and suddenly you are ordering a second coffee or staying for one more glass. That feeling is rarely an accident. Behind it is someone who thought very carefully about where the light comes from, what colour it is, and, crucially, what stays in shadow.

Happily, the clever bods at Electrical Supply Corp have shared four of their favourite recent projects with us, and between them they show just how transformative that thinking can be. Consider this your permission slip to start taking light as seriously as the professionals do.



ELIZABETH TOWERS, TAURANGA

For half a century, the corner of Devonport Road and Elizabeth Street meant one thing to Tauranga: Farmers. Today that famous corner is home to Elizabeth Towers, the jewel of the $200 million-plus Thirty Eight Elizabeth development by Elizabeth Properties, part of the James Pascoe Group. With 96 apartments and 23 garden villas perched above a buzzing new retail and dining precinct, it has given locals a reason to fall back in love with their city centre.

And oh, does it glow. As dusk settles, warm light traces the building's stacked balconies like the layers of a cake, giving the towers a golden shimmer that feels glamorous without ever being showy. The magic is in the detail: linear luminaires graze the facade in one continuous sweep, built tough enough (IP67 and IK10 rated, in industry speak) to shrug off salty coastal air for decades. Floodlights are angled with surgical care so the light lands exactly where it should, on the architecture and the landscaping, and never in a neighbour's bedroom window.

It is a lovely lesson in generosity. The best lighting flatters everyone, residents, passers-by and the street itself.

Steal this: That golden quality comes down to colour temperature. Elizabeth Towers uses 3000K, which is warm white, and it is the reason the building feels welcoming rather than office-block cold. At home, keep living spaces and bedrooms at 3000K or the even cosier 2700K, and check the box before you buy a bulb. One rogue cool-white bulb in a warm room sticks out like fluorescent lighting at a dinner party.

THE VINES CLUBHOUSE, BETHLEHEM

Tauranga locals will remember this sweeping white art deco beauty as the Mills Reef winery. Rather than let it fade away, Classic Group gave it a $12 million second act as the clubhouse at The Vines at Bethlehem lifestyle village, and what a second act it is: 2000 square metres of theatre, library, heated pool, spa, gym and the much-loved Cafe 143, all wrapped in those glorious curves.

The exterior lighting is pure hospitality. Softly lit bollards line the way in, and light levels gently rise toward the porte cochere, so arriving guests are drawn to the front door without a single sign telling them where to go. It is the architectural equivalent of a host waiting on the doorstep with the porch light on. Recessed downlights warm the outdoor seating nooks and pick out the best of that curvaceous facade, and everything, everywhere, is warm white. For the residents who call The Vines home, it means every evening return feels like being welcomed back, not just let in.

Steal this: Light the journey to your door. Make the entrance the brightest point, then use low bollard or step lights to guide the way like breadcrumbs. A couple of downlights under the eaves washing your facade will do more for your home's evening charm than any floodlight, and warm white keeps things inviting. Nobody ever felt welcomed by a security light.





KRISTIN MUSIC

There is something quietly wonderful about a school deciding its music students deserve beautiful light. In Kristin School in Albany the new music and creative learning space's ceiling is the showstopper: a huge circular feature ringed with a soft halo, floating above curved timber seating like a full moon.

Look closer, though, and you will notice what you cannot see. There is barely a visible light fitting in the room. LEDs are tucked into the bespoke seating, coves wash the walls with a gentle glow, and nearly all the light arrives by bouncing off surfaces first. Nothing glares, nothing buzzes, nothing shines in anyone's eyes. The warm light makes the timber sing and the whole room feels calm in a way that invites you to pick up an instrument, sprawl on the seats with friends, or stay behind after class just because it is nice in there.

By day the lighting disappears entirely. By night the room becomes its own little performance venue. Clever, and rather sweet.

Steal this: Hidden light is the warmest light. A simple LED strip concealed above your kitchen kickboard, behind the bedhead or along the top of a bookshelf will bounce a soft glow around the room and instantly make it feel more expensive. The rule of thumb: if you can see the bulb, hide it. Show the glow, not the source.



MONK MACKENZIE, BRITOMART

When acclaimed architecture practice Monk Mackenzie went looking for a new studio, the partners, who between them have worked at some of the world's most storied firms in New York and Hong Kong, fell for a heritage building in Britomart with a century of stories in its walls. Peeling plaster, exposed timber ceilings, floorboards worn smooth by generations. The kind of texture money cannot fake.

So the lighting does something rather brave: almost nothing. No statement pendants, no decorative fittings jostling for attention. Just discreet track spots nestled into the old ceiling structure and a few perfectly aimed accents that wash the walls, catching every crack and layer of that gorgeous patina. Meeting tables get proper task light for working, while the lounge corners are left dimmer and moodier, all leather chairs and low conversation. The contrast between bright and soft is what gives the studio its atmosphere, somewhere between gallery and private club.

Steal this: Stop lighting your rooms evenly. A space that is uniformly bright feels like a waiting room, and no cushion can save it. Instead, pool light where life actually happens: over the dining table, beside the reading chair, on the painting you love. Let the corners soften into shadow. Three small lamps at different heights will beat one big ceiling light every single time.





VIETNAM IS THE PLACE

It's difficult to find five-star luxury experiences that include everything from a Michelin dining experience to a UNESCO heritage status wartime bunker. This is something you think you might be able to swing in Europe perhaps in some European village, but you can actually find it much closer to home in the Pacific. The Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi in the north of Vietnam is the perfect confluence of history, luxury, and leisure.



Nestled in the French Quarter of Hanoi, it recently marked its 125th anniversary, and in that time it has seen a lot. As part of its celebrations it curated a Michelin listed dining programme at its restaurant Le Beaulieu. It gained its Michelin Key last year in the guide's inaugural edition in Vietnam. It looks like New Zealand isn't the only place that has been waiting for Michelin to come around and recognise quality establishments. The hotel plays host to a range of gastronomic experiences. From the Paris-inspired La Terrasse, the airy all-day dining Le Club Bar or the bespoke bar-lounge-restaurant Angelina, there's something for everyone.

Outside of its culinary delights the Hotel also played host to Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump during their bilateral talks in 2019.

While the others have their own accolades, perhaps the most interesting is the humble but popular poolside Bamboo Bar. During its renovations in 2011 the hotel's engineering team re-discovered a wartime bunker complex underneath the hotel grounds. It served to protect hotel guests during the American War during the 60s and 70s. Locally they don't call it the Vietnam War. The bunker served guests such as singer Joan Baez and actress Jane Fonda. It's not exactly up to the same standards as the other 358 rooms the hotel offers in its historic Heritage Wing and newer Opera Wing but their preservation efforts have earned them a UNESCO

















Award for Cultural Heritage. Guests of the hotel are able to enter the shelters once a day alongside a helpful guide.

This year it was listed on several of the world's Best Hotel lists, and it's easy to see why. From its palatial swimming pool to its distinctive 1920s French and colonial Indochine interior decor, everything says care and luxury. Three suites are specially set apart based on their previous occupants. One for Graham Greene who stayed in 1951. He's the author of The Quiet American and the suite is located on the second floor of the Heritage Wing. It's a good book by the way, critical of America's involvement in Vietnam, and prescient of the outcomes of the war that would follow, and still relevant to American foreign policy today. Or if you don't have time the movie starring Michael Caine will do just fine. A floor up is the Charlie Chaplin Suite where the actor honeymooned in 1936. Another writer gets an honourable status at the hotel on the first floor of the Heritage Wing with the Somerset Maugham Suite. The novelist and playwright stayed in 1923 and wrote part of The Gentleman in the Parlour there. The book is a piece of non-fiction covering his trip from Burma to Haiphong, Vietnam, via horseback over mountains and then by boat over the sea.

Make it your mission to do something so great the next suite is named after you. But perhaps do it in the new Neo-classic wing where the new star power should be congregating.

QUEENSTOWN IS GETTING BETTER



Not to say that Queenstown isn't already great, in fact it was amazing before humans ever set eyes on The Remarkables mountain range and its pristine waters below. But this year marks the opening of Thermae by Aluume Wellness. First announced in 2025 it's a world-class luxury floating alpine sauna offering discerning travellers the perfect place to unwind, reset and restore after a day on the mountains.



The design of the floating structure draws inspiration from the surrounding landscape, its curved form reflecting the silhouette of The Remarkables mountain range. Drawing the outdoors in, carefully framed view apertures and sculptural forms have been incorporated throughout to emphasise moments of connection with the mountains ensuring it feels grounded in place and deeply connected to its alpine setting.

This is the second location opened by Aluume Wellness who last year opened Bathe by Aluume which is decidedly more inland on Brecon Street, at the base of Bob's Peak. Thermae on the other hand will be floated out from Queenstown Marina.

At the heart of the experience is a traditional hot and cold contrast circuit, a wellness ritual widely practised for supporting muscle recovery, circulation and mental clarity.

The floating structure will feature three electrically powered saunas - one private sauna accommodating six guests, alongside two communal saunas with capacities of ten and four.

Each sauna experience is paired with immediate cold immersion drawn directly from the alpine waters of Lake Wakatipu. The private sauna includes its own dedicated cold plunge, while communal guests move between the saunas and the lake for a true alpine contrast experience.

A steam room will also be available to all guests, adding another layer to the bathing and recovery circuit.

The venue should be welcoming guests by the time you read this in August.







NOSTOS, INTERRUPTED

Nolan's IMAX 70mm mind and time bending behemoth, The Odyssey has landed and inspired people to start rereading those Greek classics. But before we start getting all hero worshiping about Odysseus, the Matt Damon rendition or otherwise maybe we should remember that he is a man who kept finding excellent reasons to stay somewhere else for ten years. A sorceress here, a nymph there, a lot of very good wine, and a weak sense of urgency about his wife weaving at home.

If you are feeling all inspired for your own Greek Odyssey we might recommend the Acro Suites, perched on a headland above Mononaftis Bay on Crete's northern coast. It is 29 kilometres from Heraklion airport which is itself the far end of roughly a day and a half of travel from Auckland. Odysseus had a black ship and a following wind. You have a Doha or Dubai connection, an Athens leg, a short hop across to Heraklion, and probably someone in front of you who reclines during the meal service. Oh, it is worth the trip though.









Calypso kept Odysseus seven years in a cave and, according to Homer, he spent most of it sitting on the beach crying at the horizon. Having now seen a Cave Suite at Acro, we can only assume that Calypso's cave did not have a private infinity pool. The forty-seven suites and villas are built into the cliff rather than on it. Stone and poured concrete follow the contours of the headland, with the odd ancient olive tree and rock outcrop left exactly where it was found. The Cave Suites burrow inward and then open, onto the sea, while the Wave and Gaia Suites lean out over it.

The whole thing only runs to two floors, which is part of the charm. SLH describes the effect as a layered palace nodding to the island's Minoan past. Out past the terrace sits Dia, the low uninhabited island said to have been a giant lizard petrified by Zeus. It's also been attributed as the place Theseus escaped to after killing the Minotaur.

The lotus eaters gave Odysseus's men a fruit so pleasant they lost all interest in going home, and he had to drag them back to the ships in tears. Crete has since refined the technique and added some other temptations. The Bath House is a Byzantine hammam in polished stone and low light, with heated pool, sauna, acupuncture, shiatsu and Thai massage.

The food is also something you will find hard leaving behind. Cremnos handles the Cretan theme with a modern twist. Umi does a Japanese-Peruvian fusion which probably would have been quite alien to Bronze Age ship crew. Eleonas meanwhile features communal tables hidden in an olive grove at the centre of the resort, cooked over an open hearth. There is a pool bar for the in-between hours. Everything leans on the Cretan diet, routinely rated among the healthiest on earth, and on what the island calls liquid gold, olive oil.

Should you be tempted to actually leave the property, Agia Pelagia is five minutes down the hill with golden sand and tranquil coves. Knossos and the labyrinth are about forty minutes away. The Samaria Gorge is spectacular and also 130 kilometres west.

In reviews people tend to mention the staff before they mention the view, which given the view is quite a statement. Acro is adults only, so nobody's Telemachus is turning up to bother you. It closes November through March, which is the only reason anyone ever leaves, and which the ancients would have recognised as the end of the sailing season.









FARĪSĀT: GUNPOWDER'S DAUGHTERS

Ghita Jhiate manages her unruly stallion. Long forbidden by her father to participate in Tbourida, she finally realized her dream of riding alongside pioneer Zahia Aboulait in 2025. Sidi Rahal, Morocco, 6 August 2025.



A portrait of Bouchra Nabata's troupe. Her determination as one of Tbourida's first female riders helped pave the way for the seven all-female troupes that exist today. Rabat, Morocco, 13 August 2025.

© Chantal Pinzi, Panos Pictures

THE WORLD PRESS PHOTO EXHIBITION 2026

FINDING FAMILY

Seen by millions of people in more than 60 cities each year, the World Press Photo Exhibition 2026 invites viewers to step outside the news cycle and think critically about important topics in our world.

This year's curated selection we've brought you explores family, grief, and overcoming adversity. It can seem sort of trite in a magazine like this, but at all times we're overcoming our own challenges. It's a load that can be hard to bear. But with family the burden can be eased, even when the heartache comes from within the group.

The 2026 World Press Photo Contest winners have brought us stories from all over the world. 60-year-old new mothers who lost their allotted child during China's One-Child Policy.

These images show the realities we face globally; marked by fracture, urgency but also resilience. They reveal the global overreach of power, the escalating climate crisis, and the human cost of conflict, while also bringing into focus stories of resistance, rebuilding, recovery, and the dignity of those who persevere.





Left and Intro Page: Tbourida is a UNESCO-recognized Moroccan equestrian tradition dating back to the 16th century. Troupes gallop in unison, firing rifles in a choreographed performance of cavalry warfare. Historically excluded, female riders have fought for inclusion since Morocco's 2004 family code reforms strengthened women's legal rights. Today, seven all-female troupes now ride among some 300. These farīsāt (horsewomen) bear significant personal costs, funding their own horses, costumes, and gunpowder permits. Their perseverance stands as a powerful claim to women's rightful place in Moroccan cultural heritage.



JOBURG BALLET SCHOOL

Young dancers from the Joburg Ballet School backstage at the Soweto Theatre during their year-end performance. Soweto, South Africa, 7 December 2025.

© Ihsaan Haffejee, for GroundUp



DRONE WARS

Yulia Vasiakina embraces Kamelia, her 20-year-old horse, killed when Russian long-range drones struck their neighborhood and destroyed most of the surrounding city block. Odesa, Ukraine, 11 July 2025.

© David Guttenfelder, The New York Times



THE HUMAN COST OF AGROTOXINS

Anita Sosa, born with hydrocephalus and spina bifida, plays with her sister. Doctors attributed her condition to pesticides used in the soybean fields that surround her town of 3,000 inhabitants. Chaco, Argentina, 29 November 2014.

In 1996, Argentina approved genetically modified, herbicide-resistant soybeans paired with glyphosate-based herbicides, a policy adopted without independent research. In three decades, pesticide use skyrocketed from 40 million to 580 million liters annually. Today, 60% of Argentina's cultivated land is sprayed, affecting 14 million people. Despite independent studies linking exposure to increased risks of cancer and congenital malformations, regulations continue to loosen even as agrochemical usage moves closer to human settlements. This project documents the human cost of an economic model that prioritizes agro-industrial profit over the lives of its rural citizens.

© Pablo E. Piovano, Manuel Rivera-Ortiz Foundation, Philip Jones Griffiths Foundation, Lawen.doc



WEDDING IN THE FLOOD

Bride Jamaica Aguilar prepares to enter the flooded Barasoain Church for her wedding. The Barasoain Church, a national landmark, is situated in a region where nearly 75% of the population is exposed to flooding hazards. Malolos, Bulacan province, Philippines, 22 July 2025.

When Typhoon Wipha hit the Philippines and flooded Barasoain Church, Jade Rick Verdillo and Jamaica Aguilar faced a difficult decision: should they cancel their wedding or proceed with the marriage? The couple carried on despite high waters, a testament to love and resilience in the face of severe weather. Located on a delta, Bulacan province is vulnerable to more frequent and extreme floods caused by aging drainage systems, dredging projects, overextraction of groundwater, and climate change.

© Aaron Favila, Associated Press



The newlyweds share a kiss as guests cheer. The couple have been together for ten years. According to Verdillo, "This is just one of the struggles that we've overcome." Malolos, Bulacan province, Philippines, 22 July 2025.



Inside the church, young guests look on attentively. The intensity of tropical cyclones and associated rainfall that has hit the Philippines has significantly increased since 2012. Malolos, Bulacan province, Philippines, 22 July 2025.



ENGLA LOUISE

Engla Louise celebrates her 46th birthday on a day trip to Löfstad Castle with her father, Hans Ericsson. "Severely ill anorexia patients do not receive proper care in Sweden," he says.

Engla Louise, a former dancer, has lived with severe anorexia nervosa since she was ten years old. At 46, she weighs less than 25 kilograms and has been tube-fed since 2019. Researchers increasingly describe anorexia as a disease of both body and mind. Its causes – not fully understood – are thought to involve neurobiological, genetic, and environmental factors. After decades of treatment, Engla Louise is now considered therapy-resistant and receives palliative care at home. This project aims to broaden the discussion about care for people living with severe eating disorders.

© Sanna Sjöswärd, for Corren



Engla Louise gathers lilacs from the Linköping Garden Society park beside her home. Being surrounded by beauty is important to her. Linköping, Sweden, 14 May 2025.



MOTHERHOOD AT 60

After the death of her only child, retired doctor Sheng Hailin sought in vitro fertilization treatment (IVF) and gave birth to twin girls named Zhizhi and Huihui at the age of 60. This story follows Sheng Hailin's family over 15 years, offering a portrait that is both extraordinary and mundane, but always filled with enduring love. In China, Sheng Hailin is only one of many shīdú, parents who have lost their only child born during China's one-child policy era.



Zhizhi and Huihui celebrate their 15th birthday. Hefei, Anhui Province, China, 12 June 2025.

© Wu Fang

A Fast No Is Sometimes the Kindest Answer

If there were an Olympic sport for politely following up proposals, I'd quietly fancy my chances of making the podium.

WORDS BY ADAM BRAMI



One of the more unexpected lessons I've learnt since starting my own consultancy is that some of the biggest projects I've ever "won" have never actually begun.

Most new opportunities arrive the same way. Someone has read an article, heard me speak or been referred by a mutual connection. We grab a coffee or jump on a Google Meet and spend an hour unpacking the challenges they're facing, exploring ideas and imagining what success could look like. There's energy in the conversation. We discuss budgets, timing and priorities. More often than not, they ask me to put together a proposal.

So I do.

A few days later, we'll review the scope, make a couple of tweaks and agree on an investment. Occasionally, I'll even hear those reassuring words every consultant enjoys hearing: "Looks great. Let's do it."

Then everything goes quiet.

A week later, I'll send a friendly follow-up. Another fortnight passes and I'll check in again. Eventually, those emails become less about progressing the opportunity and more about acknowledging the reality of it. "Ready when you are" is a phrase I've typed more times than I care to remember.

Over the past year, since stepping out and building my own consultancy, I've stopped taking that silence personally. Most of the time, the project is no longer under active consideration. The decision has already been made. Nobody has simply found a comfortable way to say it.

Ironically, I've never found an honest "no" particularly difficult to receive. In fact, I'd argue it's one of the most respectful answers another business owner can give me. It's the long, well-intentioned "maybe" that quietly causes the damage.

The more I've reflected on this pattern, the

> "Every week spent waiting for a decision that's never coming is a week that could have been invested pursuing another client, another opportunity or another idea."

less I think it's a sales issue and the more I think it's a uniquely Kiwi one.

New Zealand has built a business culture that's admired around the world. We value relationships over transactions, collaboration over confrontation and we'd almost always rather preserve goodwill than create unnecessary friction. Those qualities make this a fantastic place to build a business, and I hope we never lose them.

Like most strengths, however, they come with a shadow.

Many of us are deeply uncomfortable disappointing other people. Rather than saying, "We've decided not to proceed," we soften the message into, "We're just having a think." Instead of explaining that priorities have changed, we promise to revisit the conversation next quarter. Sometimes we simply stop responding altogether, hoping the silence will communicate what we don't quite have the courage to say ourselves.

It feels considerate. It feels polite. But all we've really done is transfer the uncertainty to someone else.

That's the part I don't think we talk about enough.

Every proposal sitting unanswered in someone's inbox represents an investment that's already been made. Hours have been spent understanding the brief, developing ideas and preparing recommendations. Capacity has been created. Other opportunities may have been delayed because this one looked promising. By the time the proposal reaches the client, the supplier has already invested something they'll never recover: time.

We often think indecision is harmless because we're the one making it. But uncertainty isn't free. It simply transfers the cost to someone else.

The client still has complete flexibility. They can decide tomorrow, next month or not at all. Meanwhile, the small business on the other side continues carrying the opportunity in its pipeline, delaying other decisions, preserving capacity and wondering whether to keep waiting or move on. The silence feels almost weightless to one party, while quietly becoming increasingly expensive for the other.

In a country where around 97 per cent of businesses are small businesses, that cost matters. Small businesses don't have large sales teams replenishing the pipeline every morning or layers of management absorbing delays. Every week spent waiting for a decision that's never coming is a week that could have been invested pursuing another client, another opportunity or another idea.

The timing makes this even more relevant. Companies Office figures show there were 710 liquidator appointments in the June 2026 quarter, up nearly 5 per cent on the same quarter last year and almost 13 per cent on 2024. Company removals also remained elevated, with more than 9,600 businesses removed from the register over the same period. Businesses across New Zealand are working harder than ever for every dollar they earn. In an environment like this, certainty becomes a competitive advantage.

Interestingly, indecision is also one of business's least discussed productivity killers. Research referenced by Harvard Business Review found that between 40 and 60 per cent of sales opportunities aren't actually lost to competitors. They disappear because the customer never reaches a decision. Nobody wins. The supplier wastes valuable time pursuing work that will never happen, while the customer delays solving the very problem they were trying to fix in the first place.

I've often noticed the contrast after working on both sides of the Tasman. Australians can sometimes feel refreshingly direct. You generally know where you stand before you've finished your coffee. It isn't always wrapped in pleasantries, but it allows everyone to move forward.

New Zealanders, by comparison, have become remarkably good at preserving the relationship by delaying the conversation. A mate of mine has the perfect description for it: "All hui and no dui." It always makes me smile because we've all experienced it. Another meeting. Another coffee. Another follow-up. Plenty of activity, but very little progress.

This isn't an argument for becoming more abrupt, nor is it a suggestion that we import Australia's directness wholesale. Our warmth, humility and willingness to support one another remain some of our greatest strengths. But perhaps we've unintentionally confused kindness with ambiguity.

Real commercial kindness isn't protecting another business owner from disappointment. It's respecting their time enough to give them certainty.

A prompt "yes" allows someone to get started. A prompt "no" allows them to redirect their energy, pursue the next opportunity and keep building their business. Both outcomes create momentum. Only the endless "maybe" leaves everyone standing still.

We often talk about supporting small business by buying local, mentoring founders or celebrating entrepreneurship. All of those things matter. But there is another way every one of us can strengthen New Zealand's business community, and it doesn't cost a cent.

The next time a proposal lands in your inbox and you already know the answer, don't mistake ambiguity for kindness. Respect the time, effort and optimism someone else has already invested, and give them the certainty they deserve.

Because uncertainty isn't free. It simply transfers the cost to someone else.

And sometimes, the kindest thing you can say is simply, "No thanks."

Adam Brami is director of Art of the Possible Agency



The Loop Is You



Eighty-two per cent of New Zealand businesses now use AI. Almost none of them can feel it. Expert speakers at the M2 AI Summit in Auckland spent a day explaining why the missing ingredient is not the machine.

Here is the state of play, courtesy of the Productivity Propelled report from 2degrees and Deloitte Access Economics. Eighty-two per cent of New Zealand businesses use AI in some form. The average adopting SME is associated with $400,000 more revenue a year than an equivalent non-adopter, and the average large business with $59.1 million more. And yet, as Andrew Nicol of Preductive reported from a fresh Gallup survey, seven out of eight people do not believe AI is making them any more productive. Adoption is nearly universal. Returns are nearly invisible. Somewhere between the subscription and the payoff, something keeps going missing.

The M2 AI Summit, held in Auckland on 29 April 2026, spent a full day locating it. The missing ingredient is not the model, the vendor or the budget line. It is the human sitting in the middle of the loop.

Dr Kerry Spackman, the cognitive neuroscientist who has tuned drivers for four Formula 1 teams, set the framework in the opening session. A racing car and its driver are a single feedback system, and the performance you get is multiplicative, the car times the driver. Your business, he argued, works the same way, because "there's a human in the AI loop." He gave that human a metric, HALQ, the human in the AI loop quotient, and warned that when it goes negative, AI simply amplifies bad judgement at scale, producing what he called the fire hose of AI slop. His proof was a near-catastrophe, a C-suite decision built on polished AI analysis that would have been a $50 million mistake. Spackman fed the offending documents into four leading AI models with detailed instructions to hunt for hidden assumptions and faulty logic. "All four AIs gave it a completely clean bill of health," he said. He then found the errors himself, forensically, and fed his report back. "And they go, yeah, we missed all that." Asked for his single takeaway, he did not hedge. "Humans will always be in the loop until none of us go to work."



While Spackman brought in the physics, Korrin Balmain of Dynamo6 and Adam Courtier of 2degrees supplied the sociology. Asked how to fix New Zealand's productivity, Courtier deadpanned that the easy answer was to use





more AI, "but seriously, it's not the solution." The report's finding, a 1.5 per cent productivity uplift for every ten points of AI adoption, only materialises in firms that change how work is done rather than treating AI as a chatbot. Balmain suggested that "people move at the speed of trust." Organisations everywhere have switched on Copilot, Gemini or Claude and then watched almost nobody use them, because nobody feels safe to. Her remedy is deliberate, psychological safety, a culture of curiosity, and her me, we, them framework for deciding what you keep, what you share with your "AI collaborative partner", and what you hand over entirely. Courtier's version is the experiment. "We use the term experiments intentionally because that gives people safety around it."

The team from Rush Digital, founder Danu Abeysuriya, Head of AI and Engineering Hamish Friedlander and Director of Marketing Alaina Luxmoore, staged their session as a live edition of their podcast, which is called, Human in the Loop. Handed the question of whether AI actually makes teams great, Friedlander suggested that "AI is not a magical tool that will take something that's not working and make it work." It can cover the gaps holding a functional team back, "so, I guess, yes, it will take a good team and make it a great team." Abeysuriya's contribution was blunter, drawn from an underdog football season in which his coach made the team map out exactly how they would lose, then work backwards. The AI wave is coming regardless, he said. "You're either going to be a victim of it, or you're going to be surfing it."

The afternoon's practitioners showed what surfing looks like, and it turns out to be a management skill older than software. Delegation. Amir Mohammadi of Nodey drew the line most sharply. Most teams still use AI like a search engine, but the fast ones "are not asking for answers, they are delegating work," iterating and steering a collaborator rather than prompting once and moving on. His evidence was 472,000 lines of production code shipped in months by two developers, himself as a no-code orchestrator, and Claude."Everyone has the same tools. Not everyone has the same mindset". Jared Langguth showcased his journey of winning over the sceptics and the non-technical at his own firm, one workflow at a time, until a marketing pipeline built by two people who had never done marketing produced what he described as two days' work

> "AI is not a magical tool that will take something that's not working and make it work. So, I guess, yes, it will take a good team and make it a great team."



















in one hour. His advice was to start before you feel ready. "Don't wait for the big governance framework for the whole company to be settled before you start doing anything."

John-Daniel Trask of Autohive and Raygun has been leaning into that philosophy over the years, insisting AI is "an everybody technology" rather than a god project handed down from the top. His marketing team shrank from five to two through natural attrition, dropped its external agency, and grew its numbers across two brands, on the arithmetic that a $15,000 monthly retainer loses to $50 of tokens. Andrew Nicol, fuelled by 120 coffees with senior leaders, folded it all into an axiom worth stealing. Don't delegate what you can automate, and don't automate what you shouldn't be doing anymore, because most established businesses are riddled with process nobody would miss. His larger point was that "workflow thinking is back", and Kirsten Taylor of SleepDrops is its unlikeliest proof. A naturopath with no tech background, she was quoted $25,000 and three months for a basic MVP, built one herself in about five hours instead, and went on to construct a clinically validated sleep platform in months rather than years. Her verdict carried the day's whole argument in seven words. "AI doesn't replace expertise, it amplifies it." Though she added a duty of care, you must watch it "like it's a very clever four-year-old about to run both of you in front of a truck."

Which left Dr Alia Bojilova, psychologist and former NZSAS officer, to close the loop on the loop. The thing to evaluate right now is not AI but your stance toward it, and the stance that works is built on the same foundations she saw hold under fire, clarity, curiosity and, above all, trust. "Trust is the non-negotiable," she told the room, and low trust is the biggest interference in potential, in a soldier, a team or a company rolling out its first agent. Her closing prescription was characteristically unclinical. Be a good egg.

So the gap between eighty-two per cent adoption and seven-in-eight indifference is not a technology problem awaiting a better model. The machine's half of the multiplication is already extraordinary. The other half is you, and as Spackman promised at nine forty in the morning, that is where the competitive edge has been hiding all along.

9 TAKEAWAYS

1. The human is the multiplier. Dr Kerry Spackman's HALQ makes business AI performance multiplicative, machine times human, so a brilliant model in careless hands returns nothing, or worse.

2. Trust sets the speed limit. Korrin Balmain and Adam Courtier showed that adoption stalls not at the licence but at the person, because people move at the speed of trust and experiments create the safety to build it.

3. AI takes good teams to great. Hamish Friedlander's honest answer for Rush Digital is that AI fixes what is holding a capable team back; it will not rescue a dysfunctional one.

4. Surf the wave or be its victim. Danu Abeysuriya's counsel is to map out exactly how disruption could beat you, then work backwards on each problem, because taking action is the fastest cure for anxiety.

5. Start before the framework is finished. Jared Langguth's route past scepticism is one small, low-risk workflow at a time, compounding until two days' work fits in an hour.

6. Agents change the arithmetic. John-Daniel Trask treats AI as an everybody technology, and the sums are stark when a $15,000 monthly retainer competes with $50 of tokens.

7. Delegate like a leader again. Andrew Nicol's axiom, don't delegate what you can automate and don't automate what you shouldn't be doing anymore, makes workflow thinking the leadership skill of the moment.

8. Expertise is the moat. Kirsten Taylor proved that deep domain knowledge, properly structured, is what AI amplifies, compressing a $25,000 three-month build into five hours and years of development into months.

9. Mind your stance. Amir Mohammadi and Dr Alia Bojilova closed from opposite ends of the same truth: everyone has the tools, mindset and trust decide who wins, so commit to clarity, curiosity, and being a good egg.



Where is the AI ROI?

We are living through the oddest phase of the AI story so far: everyone is using it, almost nobody can prove it is working, and the technology itself has quietly changed underneath us. A day in Christchurch with nine speakers made sense of it.

There is a peculiar contradiction sitting at the heart of working life in 2026. More than 80 per cent of organisations say they have adopted AI. Productivity figures, stubbornly, refuse to move. Billions have been spent, yet when Mission Ready CEO Diana Sharma asked a room of business leaders to keep their hands up if they could put a hard number in front of their board for what AI had returned, nearly every hand dropped. Her framing was the most honest sentence of the day: "We're living through an era of extraordinary hype and a quiet crisis of actual results."

That crisis was a running thread at the M2 AI Summit, held in Christchurch on 18 June under the banner "How the Best Are Succeeding". Sharma cited research showing 95 per cent of enterprise AI pilots delivered no measurable return. Nineteen out of twenty. Nobody on stage blamed the technology; the consistent diagnosis was that AI is a people problem wearing a technology costume. Sharma described a former Google chief executive booed by university students, the most AI-native generation in history, because "they are afraid that the world is being written without them." That fear sits politely and silently inside organisations too, and people who feel the technology is being done to them do not lean into it.

Voice agent builder Owen Chau, who deploys AI into plumbing firms rather than theorising about it, put it operationally. The bottleneck is no longer whether a tool exists. "The higher ROI question is can we describe the workflow clearly enough for AI to help?" The scarce resource of this era is not computing power but clarity about how your own business actually works.

While businesses struggled to extract value from chatbots, the technology moved on beneath them. The second thing genuinely happening is the shift from AI you talk to, to AI that does things. Caelan Huntress of the AI Coaching Academy built agents live on stage, walking the audience through the "agentic loop" of observe, reason and act. Blake Harkness of Harkness AI made the point that the hard engineering has dissolved, and in 2026 anyone who

can clearly describe a problem, the steps involved and the result they want can set up powerful agents in a few clicks. The prerequisite skill is not coding but communication.

Huntress went furthest on managing this new workforce. His SAGE framework, scope, automate, generate, evaluate, starts with ruthless narrowing because "projects fail when they aim too wide", and ends with a twist: the best evaluator of an agent is another model, a sharper critic of content than we are. The economics have a hierarchy too: an expensive frontier model orchestrates the reasoning while cheap local models do the grunt work. He suggested that the age of AI rewards generalists and synthesisers, people who pull together disparate knowledge and choose wisely. An LLM can hand you a thousand ideas; organising and executing them "is your work, and it happens outside of the LLM window".







Chau added to this: "picture you have an apprentice that never sleeps, never forgets," then explain one workflow to it, step by step. The quality of the explanation determines the quality of the apprentice. It also explains why sceptics are converted by trivial personal wins rather than corporate mandates. Technology leader Jared Langguth described a non-technical colleague with no imaginable business use for AI until she used a research tool to buy running shoes. The exercise contributed nothing to the company and everything to her willingness to engage; adoption spreads sideways through small unlocks, not downwards through memos.

Avocado AI's Cowan Henderson highlighted that a year ago about 20 per cent of his firm's inquiries mentioned capability or embedding; now 81 per cent do. His formula for AI productivity is that "it's 10 per cent about the tool and 90 per cent about leadership, capability and culture", a lesson he learned a decade ago rolling iPads out to a paper-based construction firm, only to discover the hardware was the easy tenth and bringing people along was the rest. He was withering about the quick fix: a one-off workshop "can create some curiosity, but it doesn't create capability", which comes instead from repetition, real work and iteration over time. It needs psychological safety too: people are scared of getting it wrong and of not being "as cool as Dave three desks down that's steaming ahead with AI". The payoff: his own business development manager now runs his whole role by voice, no keyboard, no admin, just more meetings.

If agents are the mechanical change, the conceptual change is bigger. Atratus founding partner Amit Choudhary argued

9 FUTURE OF AI TAKEAWAYS

1. The returns crisis is real. Some 95 per cent of enterprise AI pilots show no measurable return. If you cannot put a number in front of your board, you are in the majority, and that should bother you.

2. Fear is the brake. People who feel the future is being written without them quietly resist it. Address the fear before the tooling.

3. Clarity is the new scarce resource. The question is no longer whether a tool exists but whether you can describe your workflow clearly enough for AI to help.

4. Agents have arrived. The shift from AI you talk to, to AI that acts, is the real technical story of 2026. Scope them tightly, evaluate them with another model, and put your generalists in charge.













that businesses are, at bottom, machines for managing scarcity of expertise, which is why we invented departments, org charts and ticketing systems in place of a friendly shoulder tap. AI dissolves the scarcity, along with constraints of language, distance and time, which means the prize is not doing the old thing faster. "Look at where a constraint can disappear," he told the room. "Because then you can make a business model available which didn't exist previously." Most organisations are using a constraint-removing technology as a time-saving one, which may be the politest available explanation for the 95 per cent.

While much of the day focused on the benefits of the AI there were also the warnings. Leadership researcher Nick Petrie, who has spent five years studying early corporate adopters, observed that people who hand the core of their craft to AI "don't just plateau, you get worse." Expertise is built by struggling with hard problems; outsource the struggle and it quietly drains away, most dangerously for junior staff who never build it at all. His prescription: automate the periphery, protect the essence, and spend the recovered hours in "grow mode", learning rather than repeating.

Harkness added that "AI is an amplifier, not a cost-cutter." Let the machines draft, chase and collate while people keep judgement, relationships and accountability. He was openly wary of the chatbot-answers-everything model of customer service: "We're just losing that human connection." And Emma Humphrey, closing the day after five years inside the UK Home Office building deepfake detection tools, widened the warning to society. "Technology is dual use. And like a hammer, it can be used to build things or to harm others." She described criminals harvesting personal data through fake apps installed by a million people in a single day, and offered the strange comfort that most defences are not technical at all: education, awareness, and a culture where mistakes are reported instantly rather than hidden.

So what is happening to AI at the moment? The hype phase is dying, unevenly and expensively. The agent phase is arriving faster than most organisations realise. And the differentiator between the 95 per cent and the 5 per cent is turning out to be all about the human: clarity, curiosity, judgement, and the courage to bring people along rather than around. As Sharma put it, that is not a technology advantage. That is a human advantage. The machines, for all their acceleration, have handed the decisive variables back to us.



5. Capability before licences. A one-off workshop creates curiosity, not capability. Capability comes from repetition on real work, psychological safety, and small personal wins like a colleague researching running shoes.

6. Hunt for disappearing constraints. AI removes limits of expertise, language, time and distance. New business models live where a constraint vanishes, not where a task gets faster.

7. Protect the core of your craft. Outsource the struggle that builds expertise and you do not plateau, you decline. Automate the periphery instead.

8. Amplify, don't just cut. Same team, dramatically more output beats fewer people doing the same work. Keep judgement, relationships and accountability human.

9. Practise AI self defence. The technology is dual use and criminals are early adopters too. Most protections are cultural, not technical: education, awareness and fast, blame-free reporting.

CHRISTINE KEARNEY ON RESILIENCE, LEADERSHIP AND FINDING OPPORTUNITY IN A TOUGH ECONOMY

The Art of Composure

Long before boardrooms, Christine Kearney trained in ballet: a discipline built entirely on making difficulty look effortless. It's a fitting origin story for a woman who has spent her career perfecting the same art in business. She cut her teeth in five-star hospitality, starting her hotel career at The Ritz in London and becoming one of the youngest female directors in Langham's history at just 27. She then took roles as Operations & Marketing Director, and later GM, at Webb's - New Zealand's storied auction house - where she sharpened her eye for value, provenance and presentation under pressure. Today she is Partner & CEO of PH Digital.

WORDS BY PAMELA MCINTOSH



On paper, it's an unlikely lineage: ballet barres, luxury hospitality, commercial strategy. In practice, it's precisely the alloy that makes her formidable - poise as something trained, not simply worn. "I'm a businesswoman first, then a marketer," she says. And the distinction isn't modesty, it's method.

THE UPSIDE OF DOWNTURNS

Ask her to describe the current marketing landscape and she doesn't reach for the language of trend reports. She reaches for something blunter: demanding. "Budgets are under the microscope and every marketing dollar has to prove itself," she says. "We've seen a real shift away from brand fluff towards performance and ROI."

It's the kind of climate Christine sees less as a threat than an opening. Right now, business confidence is low, and pressure is everywhere. But there's a truth few people say out loud: hard markets can be a good thing. They're painful, yes. But they force a kind of growth that boom times simply don't. "You can't rely on momentum," she says. "You have to earn every sale. You have to know your numbers inside and out. You have to truly understand your customer. You have to lead." The cracks that were easy to ignore in good years get exposed: in operations, in strategy, in teams. That can feel brutal. But it's also a gift, because fixing those cracks now is what builds something stronger for later.

The instinct in a tightening market is to hunker down, cut costs and wait it out. Christine sees that as the luxury of comfort, not the necessity of survival. "Pressure forces you to scrutinise every process, pivot to maximise efficiency, and refine your systems," she says. "You don't just survive. You position yourself to win."

READING THE ROOM

Where Christine distinguishes herself is in her refusal to be carried along by sentiment. Listen only to headlines right now, and you'd conclude Kiwis had stopped spending altogether. The data across PH Digital's own client book tells a subtler story: many categories are still growing year on year. What's changed isn't appetite, but discernment. The money hasn't vanished. It has simply grown more particular about where it lands.

"That's an important distinction," she says, "because it means the market hasn't closed. It's just stopped rewarding mediocrity." One client, a global lifestyle brand whose once-exceptional growth had plateaued, needed no reinvention, only rigour: "We audited everything, stopped the wasted spend, rebuilt the structure and realigned the messaging to what their customers actually cared about." Within four weeks, revenue was up 270% month on month.

COMPOSURE AND COMMS

Christine doesn't romanticise where her resilience comes from. Her family weathered real hardship when she was growing up, but she traces her steadiness directly to her mother's unshakeable optimism. "I was taught that nothing could hold me back. Not circumstance. Not pressure. Not fear."

That doesn't mean she mistakes resilience for stoicism. "Have a reaction. Feel the feelings, express the emotion," she says. "Resilience isn't the absence of a reaction. It's how fast you move through it, back to base level, so you can push forward." It's a philosophy she's had ample occasion to practise, multiple surgeries for endometriosis sit among the private battles she's moved through while building businesses. Optimism, in her framing, isn't a disposition but a decision. "Being positive without moving is just wishful thinking."



It's this same discipline she'd hand to any woman stepping into a CEO or leadership role in this climate. Know your numbers completely. "Nothing builds credibility and confidence in a boardroom faster than complete command of the numbers." Don't wait to feel ready; there is no perfect moment, only the discipline to move and refine as you go. Be exacting about transparency, too. Having led teams through both lockdowns and the current "downturn", she's learned that shielding people from the full picture is the more comfortable instinct, and the wrong one. "Over-communication becomes your greatest ally," she says. "Everyone needs to be crystal clear on where we're heading, what the priorities are, the challenges, and the opportunities."

As CEO, she is the emotional centre of the business, and culture is not something that can be delegated. Hers is shared closely with business partner Toss Grumley and PH Digital's senior team; no win, in her account, is ever singular.

And finally: guard your self-belief as the asset it is. "The leaders who go furthest aren't the ones who never wobble," she says. "They're the ones who recover fastest."

The Four Words That Are Quietly Bankrupting You

Nichole Lewis lost everything in the financial crisis - and found her way back by rewriting one sentence. Here's the phrase she says is holding women back from wealth, and the four-quadrant framework she built to escape it for good.

WORDS BY NICHOLE LEWIS



"I can't afford it."

It sounds harmless. Practical, even. But it might be one of the most damaging sentences we say to ourselves, because every time we say it, we feed a limiting belief straight into our subconscious. Tell yourself you can't afford something, and you're right! Not because it's true, but because you've just built the glass ceiling with your own words.

It rarely stops at one sentence. It's followed by a flurry of limitations: "It's too risky." "The timing isn't right." "I need more money first." "I don't know how to do this." "I'll start when things settle down."

Sound familiar? You're not alone. So many women have been handed this same script - one that quietly teaches us to play small, wait for permission, or put everyone else's needs ahead of our own financial growth. But none of that is really the problem. It's just a story. And stories can be rewritten.

Your financial possibilities are not fixed. They're not capped by your current bank balance, your job title, or what anyone else thinks you're capable of. The only real limit is you. And that's not your fault - nobody ever handed you the formula.

STARTING FROM ZERO

I know all this, because I lived it. In 2008, when the global financial crisis hit, my income stopped, my savings ran out, and I had no way to pay off the debt I'd built up through over-leveraged property, credit cards and personal loans. I remember feeling sick walking up to the ATM, working out how much I could afford to spend at the supermarket. I had two young children and my grandmother to look after, and debt collectors calling to grill me about my phone bill, my grocery bill, my petrol bill.

I had a choice: pick myself up, or live hand-to-mouth for the rest of my life. The first money I made after that was from selling eggs, fruit and horse manure at the front gate, and I still remember how excited I was to find a few dollars in the tin at the end of the driveway each week. That small win gave me the confidence to go back to property, starting with no-money deals and a network of investors around me. One deal led to a renovation, the renovation led to a rental, and the rental led to the next one, and the next.

I didn't get there because I was the smartest person in the room, the highest earner or the best connected. I found a formula that worked, believed I could follow it, and had the courage to act on it.

That formula became the Property Quadrants™ framework, which I now teach through my company, Q4 Property, and my book, Property Quadrants. It's about far more than property. It's a lens for understanding yourself, reclaiming your power, and building a life that supports not just you, but everyone you love.

THE MAP NOBODY SHOWED YOU

Whether you realise it or not, your financial life already moves through four quadrants.

Quadrant One: Your Home, Your Heart. This is your family home, your haven, the place filled with the people and things you love. It drives your emotions, but it's also your biggest expense, and a door that can lead towards financial doubt.

Quadrant Two: The Misunderstood Quadrant. This is where mistakes often live: an overpriced property, a purchase that leaves you cash poor and stretched thin, the finer things bought before their time. This quadrant should come last, only after your active and passive income are secure. Get the order right, and Q2 becomes a reward instead of a trap.



> "I didn't get there because I was the smartest person in the room, the highest earner or the best connected. I found a formula that worked, believed I could follow it, and had the courage to act on it."

Quadrant Three: Active Income. This is where you make things happen: a deal, a strategy, a flip, a development, a partnership that puts cash in your hands now.

Quadrant Four: Your Passive Income Destination. This is where your money works hard for you, growing your wealth hands-off. There's no ceiling here, only strategy and a long-term view.

Most high-achievers stay stuck circling Q1 and Q2, believing financial struggle is simply the price of getting ahead. It's not. You've just never been shown the map.

THREE MOVES TO REWRITE YOUR STORY

Start with the highlighter test. Write down everyone you currently talk to about money, the people whose opinions shape your decisions, whether you realise it or not. Now take a highlighter and mark only the names of people who are already where you want to be. Most people highlight no one, and that's the starting point. Stop taking financial direction from people who haven't achieved what you're aiming for. Go find your "who" - someone who's already living the life you're building towards - and start listening to them. Your super who.

From there, write your 10-year plan. Get a blank sheet of paper and dream without limits. Where do you want to be in 10 years, financially, personally, in every part of your life? Write it all down. Most people skip this step - ten years feels too far away, or the inner critic creeps in the moment you write something big, saying "you can't" or "that's unrealistic." Flip that voice. You're not wrong for dreaming big; you're right. This is your path, and once it's written, you can start working backward to build it, one action at a time.

Finally, learn to separate your actions from your emotions. In Q1, you feel everything - home is exactly where emotion belongs. But in Q2, Q3 and Q4, it's business. Practise using your business mind: does this decision serve your 10-year plan? Does it move you closer, or further away? Set aside how it feels, what others might think, how much you love it at the moment. Run the numbers. Check in with your super who. Then sleep on it - you don't owe anyone an instant decision, and no one gets to pressure you into one. Decide your strategy, then take the action like your super who would.

ENDLESS FINANCIAL POSSIBILITY

Property was the vehicle I chose, but what I found went far beyond property. I learned a formula for the very foundation of every financial decision I make - a foundation I've taught my own children, and one that I hope inspires other women to shift their realities too.

You don't need to be the smartest person in the room, the highest earner, or the most connected. You need belief in what you're capable of, the determination to forge your own pathway, and the courage to take the first step.

The blocks in your way aren't real - they're only figments of your imagination. So start rewriting your script towards endless financial possibility. I believe you can achieve anything you set your mind to.

For those who are serious about their financial possibilities: tell me what you uncover in your first steps, and go find your super who.



Undone by Bath Time

Jacqlin Richards on why you can hold a boardroom together, yet bath time still breaks you - and how to change that.

WORDS BY JACQLIN RICHARDS

Jacqlin Richards is a Parenting Alchemist and mother of two, who has been recognised as a Women Changing the World Gold Award recipient. Here, the founder of the Resourced Parenting Method™ shares a truth many high-achieving parents feel but rarely say out loud.

"If I can lead a team, manage a business, solve complex problems and hold everyone else together… Why does parenting bring me to my knees?"

It's a question I've heard from countless high-achieving women. Women who are exceptional leaders. Women who can navigate million-dollar decisions, manage teams, juggle impossible workloads, and somehow still remember to buy the birthday present. From the outside, they look like they have it all together. Yet many are drowning in guilt and shame as they discover that the qualities that make them highly effective at work don't always translate into the kind of connection they wish they had with their children.

The problem isn't that they're failing. The problem is that parenting asks us to use an entirely different set of muscles - ones that don't live in the boardroom.

Many of us have been rewarded for being capable. For anticipating problems before they happen. For fixing things quickly. For carrying everyone else's load. For pushing through exhaustion. For striving to get everything right. For holding it all together, even when everyone else is falling apart. Those qualities can absolutely help build successful careers. But when they're driven by an under-resourced nervous system rather than genuine choice, they come at a cost: burnout, anxiety, never feeling like you've done enough, never feeling like you are enough, constantly carrying the weight of everyone around you.

At the end of the day, that same nervous system comes home with us. Parenting doesn't happen in the team meeting. It doesn't happen during the 10am PowerPoint presentation. It happens in the middle of dinner, homework, sibling arguments, sleepless nights, and responding to children who have yet to develop the capacity to consistently regulate themselves. In those moments, our kids don't need another project manager. They don't need someone to optimise them. They need something far more powerful: a calm, resourced nervous system standing in front of them.

That's the part nobody teaches us. We've been taught behaviour. Strategies. Consequences. Rewards. Sticker charts. But very few of us were taught that the greatest influence we have on our children isn't what we say - it's the state we bring into the room. Children borrow our nervous system long before they borrow our advice.

Which is why so many parents know exactly what to do… and still find themselves unable to do it. Especially in the moments that matter most. They end up yelling. Or rescuing. Or controlling. Or collapsing under the overwhelm - and then punishing themselves for it. It's not because they lack information. It's because information can't override survival. When our nervous system is stuck in fight, flight, freeze, fawn or collapse, we don't suddenly become the parent we aspire to be simply because we know better.

This is why I believe parenting isn't about becoming more perfect. It's about becoming more resourced.

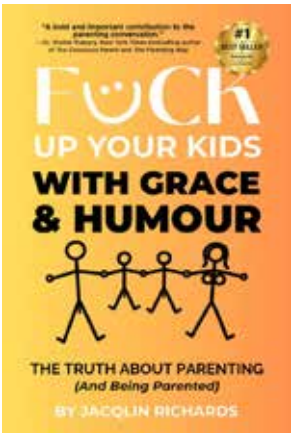
A resourced parent doesn't get it right all the time. They still lose their patience. They still get it wrong. They still have moments they'd love to rewind. The difference is they have the capacity to notice what's happening, take responsibility, repair the rupture, and return to connection. That doesn't just change our parenting, but it changes what our children learn about being human. Because children don't need parents who never make mistakes, rather, they need parents who show them what it looks like to recover from them.

> "Children borrow our nervous system long before they borrow our advice."

For years we've been asking parents to try harder. To do more. To get it right. Perhaps it's time we asked a different question: what if the greatest gift we could give our children isn't becoming more capable… it's becoming more resourced? Because the future doesn't need another generation raised by exhausted parents desperately trying to get it right. It needs children who grow up experiencing something many of us never did - a parent who can recognise when they are in survival, who can stop, take responsibility and find their way back. A parent who understands that strength isn't found in manically scrambling to hold everything together. It is found in having the capacity to come back to yourself, and then come back to your child.

Because that is what our children will carry forward. Not whether we got every decision right. Not whether we remained calm in every difficult moment. But whether they experienced a parent who was willing to look inward, repair the ruptures, and keep choosing connection.

Our children do not need us to be perfect. They need us resourced enough to break the patterns we inherited, repair the ones we repeat, and stop passing survival on as parenting.



F*ck Up Your Kids with Grace & Humour: The Truth About Parenting, WolfPack Publishing, is available now at jacqlinrichards.com, along with more information about Jacqlin's workshops.



What You Drive When You Are Lisa Carrington

New Zealand's most decorated Olympian on independence, gear, and the practical question of where the car seat goes.

WORDS BY TIM WARREN

Dame Lisa Carrington has eight Olympic gold medals and a handshake that suggests there is room for more. We meet the Toyota Brand Guardian, at the launch of the sixth-generation RAV4 and there is a lot to fit into a short window. Alongside the training and representative work, she has a new challenge booked in: motherhood.

I want to know what cars have meant to her because what somebody drives often describes how they live more honestly than anything they would put in a bio.

"My dad loved cars, so growing up we were always changing our cars," she says. "Every few years, new ones, good ones and that type of thing. A car provides a sense of independence, so as soon as I could get my licence, straight away."

Independence is the first thing she mentions. Not comfort or safety or anything to do with how a car looks.











And she was clearly keen to get started. She learned to drive in a Renault.

"The clutch was so tricky I just stalled all the time."

We all did that.

I ask what she drives now, on the assumption it is easier than the French car.

"I'm driving a Toyota bZ4X. I've had it for 18 months, and my parents love it so they just bought one."

There is no higher review than your parents copying you.

The RAV4 sitting behind us is aimed fairly squarely at the life Carrington is about to start. It has been the country's best-selling vehicle, the sort of position that might encourage a manufacturer to leave things as they are. Not Toyota though.

The sixth generation comes in three distinct styles and, importantly, they actually look different.

Core is the polished one. There is a honeycomb grille and, in Limited trim, 20-inch machined alloys, a panoramic roof, head-up display and nine-speaker JBL system.

Adventure looks like it has some serious plans for the weekend. It gets larger over-fenders, its own bumper and grille, bridge-style roof rails and 18-inch matte grey metallic alloys. Inside, there is black synthetic leather or an exclusive Mineral interior that is worth seeing in person before deciding.

Then there is GR SPORT, the first GR SPORT RAV4 in six generations. A Plug-in Hybrid with improved system output, it gets 20-inch black and machined alloys, red GR brake calipers, GR synthetic leather and Brin Naub microsuede, aluminium sports pedals and a shift-by-wire selector finished in metallic and gloss black.

It is the one that looks least interested in disappearing into the school carpark. Which may become increasingly relevant to Carrington.

"I still want to be an athlete, plus being a mum, it's like, 'Oh, that's right, now you have to put a car seat in the back'," she says. "You actually have to think about it because I've had really big cars growing up, being a sports person."

She also has a hybrid Highlander. "It's a big car just for two of us, but I've got more gear."



An elite paddler's boot is not a normal boot. There is training equipment, paddles and everything else that follows an athlete around. A baby does not replace any of that. It just arrives with another category of equipment.

When I ask whether the car situation is going to work, Carrington already knows whose luggage is likely to lose the argument. "Yeah. I think the difference is I'll have to take less of my own stuff. So that little addition, I'd say it'll be big."

Anyone who has attempted to fit a pram into an already full boot will recognise the struggle. The new RAV4 has had its cabin reworked with this kind of daily use in mind. The Adventure grade also gets a rear seat designed for greater durability and long-distance comfort. It does not sound especially glamorous written on a specification sheet, but three hours

into a drive to the coast it probably matters more than the wheel design.

Inside, there is a new-generation multimedia system, a customisable home screen, faster voice recognition and wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Depending on grade, the central screen runs up to 12.9 inches.

More importantly, Toyota has decided not to put all of the controls into the central screen. Indicators, wipers and temperature controls are still where your hands expect to find them.

The new RAV4 is also the first Toyota launched in New Zealand with Toyota Connected Services.

Of the new technology, the emergency functions are probably the most useful to understand. There is a physical SOS Emergency Call button in the overhead console. Press it and you are connected to an around-the-clock call centre, who can contact emergency services if required.

"I still want to be an athlete, plus being a mum, it's like, 'Oh, that's right, now you have to put a car seat in the back'."

If the airbags deploy or the vehicle's impact sensors are triggered, the car can make that connection automatically and provide its location and vehicle details if emergency assistance is required. Nobody inside needs to find a phone or press anything.

Toyota New Zealand says neither it nor its dealers can track the vehicle and that its location is shared with the Toyota emergency call centre only during an emergency.

There are more everyday functions through the myToyota Connect app. You can check fuel level or battery state of charge before leaving home, find the car in a carpark, lock or unlock it remotely, receive an alert if a door has been left unlocked and start the climate control to clear the windows on a cold winter morning.













Toyota Essentials, which covers SOS and Automatic Collision Notification, comes complimentary with the vehicle. Connected multimedia and remote-function packages are also complimentary for an initial period.

Underneath all of that is another fairly significant change. For the first time, New Zealand gets a plug-in RAV4. The petrol-only version disappeared several years ago, and at the top of the new range is Toyota's sixth-generation plug-in hybrid system. It combines a 2.5-litre engine, front and rear electric motors and a 22.7kWh battery.

Output is 201kW in the front-wheel drive GXL and 227kW in the all-wheel drive XSE and GR SPORT.

Official quotes are 154km of electric-only range for the front-wheel drive version and 144km for all-wheel drive on the official NEDC test cycle. That makes it possible to handle a substantial amount of ordinary weekday driving without the petrol engine getting involved. When the battery's usable electric range is gone, it carries on as a hybrid.

That simplicity is probably the most persuasive part of the plug-in argument. Charge it and you can do much of your daily driving electrically. Don't charge it and you still have a hybrid. Toyota is betting that flexibility will appeal to RAV4 buyers more than asking them to suddenly reorganise their lives around a different kind of car.

It also fits Toyota's wider multi-pathway strategy, with petrol, diesel, hybrid, plug-in hybrid, battery electric and hydrogen technologies developing in parallel rather than waiting for one winner to emerge.

And speaking of winner, Carrington still has Los Angeles in her sights, with baby in tow.

"I guess it's going to be different. I can get through this, and it'd be really enjoyable, but also give myself the option, if this is such a big change in my life, ultimately that's where I want to go."

New Zealand wants to see her back on the water, and I tell her so.

She smiles.

On land she is relaxed and down to earth to a degree that is genuinely disarming, which is not quite what you expect from the most decorated Olympian this country has produced.



The Day of Departure

I recently got the notion in my head that a road trip was needed. Whether it was too much rosé or too many rounds of NZ edition Monopoly that influenced me, I can't be sure, but I chose the grand and glorious heights of New Plymouth for this soirée.

WORDS BY KATE TAYLOR

I saw it clearly in my mind. Days spent wandering the waterfront, going to the beach and checking out the budding restaurant scene. Evenings spent feeling artistic and inspired at the Festival of Lights. It would be a grand time. I'd book a hotel with a pool. Bliss!

What I hadn't reckoned on was the teenagers. First, the teen girl decided she wanted to come along. Ok. Company is good. She likes restaurants. We can share a bed. No problem. Planning proceeded. Then the teen boy decided he would come too. Right. Well, the beach is still on the itinerary, but now I need a bigger budget to cover an extra bed and a significantly larger restaurant bill. Manageable though. And besides, I should be grateful that the teenagers are even interested in travelling with their Mum. Proving to myself that all those expensive, half-filled gratitude journals were not a waste, I took a mindfully deep breath, murmured some Insta-worthy, grateful-sounding, live in the moment catchphrases and proceeded to book our trip.

The day of departure arrived. As I barked orders about bags and road snacks and making sure the teenagers' dirty clothes were not left on the floor, I noticed something strange.

Our system of packing involves leaving completed items in a hazardous pile by the front door ready for loading into the car. We've done this for years. If we're going to the bach, board games and beach towels and bottles of bubbly pile up by the door. If we're going on the plane, travel pillows, hand luggage and carefully weighed suitcases trip people over. This process is our normal. But something about the items piling up at the door prior to this departure stirred alarm in me.

First, it was the presence of my son's ridiculously large hiking boots. Then it was the walking poles. The final straw was the gaiters. For those who, like me, believe that hiking is the distance from the couch to the kitchen to top up the snacks, let me explain. Gaiters are not sharp-toothed reptiles lurking in America's southern swamps waiting to take a snap at the first guy in overalls who rides past them on his fan powered tin dinghy. Gaiters are protective covers that wrap around a hiker's boots and lower legs. Generally they are there as protection from snake bites but in New Zealand, just protection from looking like a normal person, I believe. Although I suppose they could be for the mud.

"What are you doing?" I asked the teen boy.

"Packing," he said.

I advised him that I could see that quite clearly but was he aware that it was extremely unlikely he was going to encounter a snake at the Festival of Lights? And was he aware that it was extremely likely I was going to disown him if he wore gaiters as casual attire?

"Mum, I need these to climb."

Climb? "Excuse me, what?! Did you just say climb? Mount... WHAT?"

"Mount Taranaki, Mum. That's why we're going to New Plymouth."

I had been deceived. I had been tricked. My attitude of gratitude was done under false pretences. I was not taking my kids on a nice, relaxing holiday to eat some food and see some twinkly lights. I wasn't even taking them on a nice, artistic holiday so I could pretend like I was instilling culture in them. They were using my holiday as a transport route so they could climb A MOUNTAIN! I did not sign up for this.

While I tried to regain my equilibrium and work out how to take back control of my rapidly deteriorating road trip dreams, I stood in the doorway and examined the growing pile. Under the bags and boots and the odious gaiters I spotted the corner of a snaplock bag. My breath caught. My heart plummeted. I knew what it was and I knew what it meant. There would be no classy restaurants. There would be no art. There probably wouldn't even be any twinkly lights. There would be a grimy, unsophisticated all-you-can-eat buffet in order to load up on as many carbs as possible. The mountain climbing was a done deal and there was not a thing I could do about it. The teenagers had won. That snaplock bag was filled to the brim with scroggin.

I picked up my suitcase. I carried it back down the hall. I unzipped it and pulled out the strappy sandals. I pulled out the pretty sundresses. I pulled out the beige coloured suck-'em-in tummy tucking knickers. I threw in some socks and some tshirts and then I rummaged in my drawer until I found them. My biggest and best pair of elastic waisted stretchy pants. I placed them on top, zipped the bag back up, and returned it to the doorway pile, a smug smile on my face. I might not have had any intention of climbing that damn mountain with those damn teenagers, but I can tell you now there is no way I was going to let them defeat me at an all-you-can-eat buffet.

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