

Do we feel optimistic? Wellington fashion creatives discuss the state of the industry.

In August 2024 The Dowse Art Museum's Gemma Browne met with an intersection of Wellington's fashion scene to talk business, creativity, art and community. In the workrooms of designers James Dobson of Jimmy D and Julia Palm of JPalm, the group sat down over delicious take-out from Mabel's and spent hours discussing the current state of fashion – and all that business entails – in Wellington, New Zealand, and further afield. Attending were James Dobson, Julia Palm, Jessie Wong of Yu Mei, Otsu's Yuka Maud, designer Millar Boddington, stylist Chloe Hill and Hannah Sullivan of Sully's.

Gemma: The reason why we're meeting this weekend is because this is when you would probably all be at fashion week. What are you doing without fashion week? How does that impact you?

Chloe: I hadn't even registered that this was the week that fashion week happened.

Jessie: Do you know why I know? Because I was at fashion week a year ago today and then got home and it was the first of September, and that's when I found out I was pregnant.

Chloe: That was a stressful end to fashion week.

Jessie: It was hilarious, no, we just like were so in shock and laughing.

James: It's always really intimidating when you're like "Okay, we're gonna go round the table and talk about ourselves." So I thought about my relationships with all of you. So I thought I would start with myself, and I am obviously James from Jimmy D. I've had my label for actually like 20 years [applause and cheers from the group] which is crazy.

Chloe: That's a milestone.

James: So I started in like 2004 and cut my first samples on the floor of my flat in Kingsland. I actually can't remember exactly when I started so my birthday's a little bit blurry but it was definitely towards the end of 2004, so, buzzy. I'm choosing it's when the collection first went into store which is like next year. We'll celebrate next year, 20 years next year. And I was working for a shop called Unity in Wellington which also had a store in Auckland and so I was cutting production on the floor of the shop after hours, rolling fabric rolls out in the middle of the shop.

Chloe: On the floor?

James: Yeah!

Yuka: I think that I met you there.

James: Yes! That's what I was just gonna say! So I met Yuka maybe just before I started my collection.

Yuka: So I was starting just before you.

James: Yeah.

Yuka: So I'm already doing 20 years.

James: Because you'd already been going in Japan, right?

Yuka: Yeah, so I'm doing quite a long time.

James: And I was a huge Otsu fan, I remember I had one of your big parkas, like, pigment dyed parkas.

Yuka: Yeah, that's right.

James: Julia I met in 2008.

Julia: It was actually 2007.

James: Was it 2007?

Julia: Yeah.

James: Oh It was the 2008 collection that I was selling.

Julia: To my Mum.

James: Yes!

Julia: So my mum had a shop in Nelson called Palm Boutique and I was a scuzzy punk crust punk teenager, dropped out of high school and went to do a certificate in fashion at AUT and moved to Auckland and was like "This is amazing." And Mum was like "Come on, come buying with me, come to the fashion shows so that you can like get in the industry and meet a few people." And then I met James, and it was amazing. It was an amazing collection that was like based on the ocean and there was like a beach ball dress and everything was black.

James: It was called Tentacles of Destruction.

Julia: Yeah, and like a top with eight arms, octopus arms, I was just blown away. And I was like "This is so cool." I was like "Thanks Mum," but also being like I'm too cool for school, I'm a teenager, and it was just mind-blowing.

James: You were wearing Jimmy D.

Julia: Was I?

James: You had like a beige mesh singlet.

Julia: My mum would have made me wear that. [Laughter] Love it. Did I have green hair maybe?

James: Possibly. And then, yeah, you were very active on social media, even when you were studying. I feel like I definitely kind of followed your journey, saw your show in Dunedin.

Julia: This was in 2014/2015.

Jessie: I graduated in 2015 and we knew each other from studying.

Julia: You were the year above me.

Jessie: At Otago.

Julia: Yeah, I moved to Dunedin 2014, it was fucking amazing. It blew my mind. I got a studio and there were all these different communities collaborating, and like, nothing was too hard, you could just do something and no one would judge you and just cheer you on.

Jessie: Yeah Dunedin is a YES city, totally. Like if you need anything in Dunedin the community will like...

Gemma: How does that compare to Wellington?

Jessie: Slightly less, but still the same energy.

Julia: Totally, like still creative and still lots of amazing communities clashing and collaborating, and more opportunities cos it's a bigger city.. But yeah, Dunedin was really eye-opening, in my early-20s. It was cool. I finished fashion school, and I moved to New York for a year which was great, on the J1 visa. I worked my ass off over there and then came back here and was like "Where am I gonna go? Am I gonna go to Dunedin?" I was like "Oh it's just too small, there's not a lot of job opportunities." And then I was like... all my friends are in Wellington, like lots of Dunedin people had moved here and it just seemed like it was really humming and amazing so I was decided "We're going to Wellington!". Yeah. And then here I am, six years later. And it's awesome. And same energy as Dunedin, just lots of creative communities and cool people doing their thing, and nothing seems pretentious or no one's out to get you, and everyone is there cheerleading you on, whatever it is you're gonna do. Rather than, I feel, like, I have lived in Auckland and everyone's like "So what do you do? Oh, is that right? Okay." It's a little bit more judgy and people have these pre-conceived ideas as opposed to, here... I think people are more open and it's not as scary, intimidating and competitive. And being able to share a workroom with James, and have collectives like this and do fun events, it's not hard. [To James] What's your take on being here? James has just moved down from Auckland. You were in Auckland for like 20 years, moved down about two years ago? Is that right?

James: Yeah. So I grew up in the Hutt, studied at Massey. I did Photography, I did a Bachelor of Design majoring in Photographic Design, and then my family all moved to the UK when I was in my last year of design school. Which at the time was really annoying, cos I was like "I'm meant to be finishing my degree and I'm meant to be going overseas and having my OE!"

Julia: They stole your thunder!

James: Yeah, they did, they abandoned me and I was meant to abandon them. But it did help cos when I finished my degree they were living just out of London. So I could go to London but live with my parents. I did a year in London working in menswear retail. Anyway I spent a year in London, moved to Auckland, had told my Mum that I wanted to start a label or be a stylist, and I had this little tiny amount of money that I got tax back from working in the UK for a year, and I didn't realise my statements were going to my parents' house in the UK, and I'd found one ATM in Auckland where I could get cash out from my UK bank account, and I was slowly draining it away. And then my bank statements went to my parents' house and Mum was like "What are you doing? You were going to use that money to do something." And then I started Jimmy D that week basically. So yeah, I spent 20 years in Auckland and then moved here two years ago and love Wellington, grew up here, no desire to go back to Auckland.

Chloe: That's so nice to hear.

Hannah: How does it compare being in Auckland compared to Wellington?

James: I never connected with Auckland as a city, just like, aesthetically, and it just never felt like home. And I'd always loved coming back to Wellington for sales trips, or any excuse pretty much. And so, when my partner got a job as a Director of a gallery down here – which I pushed him heavily to apply for –

Julia: You'd talked about it for years! It was like three years!

James: Yeah, I'd been like "Julia I wanna move!"

Julia: I'd be like "Yeah, well, when?"

James: Because I grew up here it feels like the closest thing I have to home.

Julia: Which, when your parents move away it's like "Where is home?" I feel the same about Nelson.

James: We were talking in one of the panels that we did for the Dowse show with other Hutt Valley creatives and there's something about the Hutt and Wellington, about like the mountains, about the way they embrace you, and it always feels like, kind of...I don't know...

Gemma: Comforting?

James: Comforting, yeah. But there is something about being out of that Auckland hub, and Auckland scene, and where all the media happens for fashion that personally I really like being removed from. Cos being in Auckland it was like "Why am I not in Viva this week?"

Jessie: Well, there's none of it at the moment so the opportunity to reclaim that as a city is wide open right now.

James: I feel a lot clearer down here. It's like operating outside of that whole Auckland echo chamber.

Hannah: It's quite competitive.

James: I kind of like that about Wellington, we have a good community, so I can just focus on what I do and think about Jimmy D in a more global sense rather than just what's happening in Auckland. How about you guys?

Jessie: Rachel and Anjali [of twenty-seven names] said, globally, if you go and sell overseas, nobody is gonna know whether you're from Auckland or Wellington. So, it doesn't even matter. That doesn't even need to factor into your ambition if you're kind of trying to make it internationally. I remember that so clearly so that's why I was like, Wellington it is!

"Everyone is there cheerleading you on, whatever it is you're gonna do."

James: I remember for me one of the most pivotal memories growing up was the New Zealand four, which was like 1999. And that was Karen Walker, World, Nom*d and Zambesi, and they were showing in London. And they were this group of four designers that didn't have a lot to do with each other but were all New Zealand designers showing in London, and it was so exciting. It was kind of proving that you could have this global business that could be taken seriously on such a big platform like fashion week. So, I think I knew at that point it doesn't matter where you're based in New Zealand. It wasn't that they were all from Auckland, it was just that they were all New Zealand designers.

Gemma: Do you think that they had a big amount of support and funding to make that push, and do you think that still exists now?

Jessie: At that time the New Zealand government was looking at fashion and wine in the same way, and they were funding fashion and wine in the same way. And wine took off, and fashion didn't, so then fashion never received any further funding after that.

Yuka: But Karen Walker took off though. She did big in Japan. She was huge.

Millar: I found old magazines in Japan with Karen Walker in them.

Julia: And she was showing in New York for a long time too.

James: I sent her fan mail.

Julia: When you were how old? [laughs]

James: No, when I was studying photography. I sent her a letter, I was like "I was just in Auckland, I saw all of your posters around town. Can I have one? And, by the way, here are some of my ideas for future collections."

Julia: Wow that's bold! Love it!

James: So fucking bold! And I went through like five different ideas for collections. And then I think she emailed me back on my Hotmail email and she was like "Can't send you any posters, don't actually even have any myself, they're all stuck around town." And then she went through each one of my ideas and critiqued them, and was like "This one has kind of been done, I don't know if that's for us," blah blah blah, and then the last one she was like "This is genius."

Jessie: Bravo to her

James: I printed it out and stuck it to my wall.

Jessie: That is the kind of energy the industry needs. I respect that.

Gemma: [To Yuka] So how long have you been in New Zealand?

Yuka: 20 years.

Gemma: Were there other New Zealand designers that you knew about, apart from Karen Walker? Did you have any idea of what the scene was here before you came?

Yuka: Only Karen Walker. Well, I knew because I would travel down here once a year for four years, but I didn't see many. Well, there wasn't many! It's so many more labels, like new labels now. There was none! And people aren't really worried about what they're wearing back then, so it was only a few people, and so when I launched mine not many people were interested.

Julia: So being an emerging designer then would have been really hard.

Yuka: They were thinking it's crazy. They just don't get it. It was sweatshirt, and they said "This is sweatshirt, you can't price this much." It's not about that. Everyone's wearing sweatshirt now, and they're paying \$200, \$300, \$1000 now!

James: But this is like pre-internet. I always think about that time, because it was very insular, the point of reference was just what was here. And so, when I started, I got called the bastard son of Zambesi and Nom*d, cos that was peoples' only references in New Zealand. And so, Yuka was coming here as an unknown, doing stuff that no one else did.

Yuka: And then I also got pregnant, so I thought “No one likes me, so I won’t do anything.” And then one day, was it you [James] or Christine, Miss Crabb, one of them asked me to make something, I was like “Oh someone likes me.” So I said “Oh yeah, I’ll make some.” Because I wanted to. You can’t stop making stuff if you are born like that. I quite like to make stuff, for myself, because I didn’t find anything I liked to wear, so I just made it. But he’s the one that made me start again.

James: Yeah. Well cos we stocked you at Unity, and Children of Vision.

Julia: So you [Yuka] were at Children of Vision? Jame’s retail store.

Jessie: You totally won’t remember but that’s where I met you, and I would’ve been a baby, coming up from Dunedin. I came up for an interview for this scholarship that ended up being the genesis of Yu Mei and I totally came into your store and was asking you all these questions about fashion, like fangirling, and you so won’t remember.

Julia: The impact of Jimmy D.

“You can’t stop making stuff if you are born like that. I quite like to make stuff, for myself, because I didn’t find anything I liked to wear, so I just made it.”

James: Well on that note we should probably talk about Millar.

Julia: Yes! Baby Millar, 12 years old!

James: Millar, sorry, I’m gonna embarrass you.

Yuka: Did you know him from 12 years old?

Julia: Yeah, you did an internship, was it?

Millar: No, I wish, I wish.

James: This is Millar [shows photo of young Millar]. I’m sorry, I’m sorry.

Millar: No, it’s fine. I wasn’t 12 but I looked 12. I was probably 14. So, on the way to a Lady Gaga concert I met James at Children of Vision, and I picked up some piece that was Jimmy D and I was like “Oh I love Jimmy D,” and then James was like “Well that’s my label.” And then I got a photo with him. And at that time I was wearing an I Love Ugly hat that I’d just bought, and some kind of varsity jacket, I was not quite sure what my style was.

Julia: As any 14 year old is.

Millar: And I was a prolific Tumblr user, so I was sort of “Am I sea punk or am I Americana?” And then after seeing what Children of Vision had, I started getting interested in Daniel Palillo, and Jimmy D obviously, and then that sort of took me in a certain direction where I was like “This feels more like what I’m into.” I liked that you had kind of funny clothes.

Julia: There’s humour in them.

Millar: Yeah, and that’s what I loved about Palillo’s stuff, was that I’d never seen anything like that.

Julia: Palillo was like out the gate.

Millar: Yeah, completely! And then I really liked your [James] stuff because it felt like the blending of this fashion goth thing that was happening but also a distinctly whimsical take on it. And I was a silly goofy teenager so I really liked that, and I still am silly and goofy.

Julia: But how old are you now?

Millar: I'm 26 now.

Julia: You're just a baby still.

Millar: Yeah, and still a Jimmy D fan, and I just think that was quite a pivotal moment in my life.

Julia: Is that what inspired you to go to fashion school?

Millar: No. At that stage I already knew that I wanted to be a designer. I think since I was 12. And Wellington High – cos I went to Wellington High – was very much about vintage clothes, and I was into that as well and was wearing 60s cardigans and things like that. And then I went goth and never looked back.

James: Did you wear the big platforms?

Millar: Yeah, I had Buffaloes and I got those for the Lady Gaga concert.

James: With your I Love Ugly Hat.

Millar: Yeah exactly, there was a strange dichotomy happening. But yeah, I bought them from ebay Spain and they smelled of cigarettes, they were straight from the 90s and I was really pleased with them and then I saw someone else at the concert had the exact same colourway Buffaloes and I thought "Okay, this is hell on earth." But it was fine. And then I wore them once to high school.

Julia: Didn't break an ankle? [laughs]

Millar: No, but someone said "Are you going to the moon?" and I never wore them again. But yeah, I wear normal shoes now. Well, slightly.

Chloe: Do you still have them?

Millar: I do. Actually my friend has them and we spray painted them so they're quite crispy now.

Julia: What colour?

Millar: Black. They weren't black originally, they were grey and blue.

Julia: I was gonna say turquoise - did you go seapunk eventually?

Millar: No, I only dipped my toes into the sea of seapunk.

Julia: The subcultures! I feel like there aren't as many subcultures any more?

Millar: Well there's microtrends.

Julia: But there aren't really subcultures. I feel like the internet's mixed them up a bit, it's a real mixed bag now.

Millar: No Temu at that time, which was good, I think.

Julia: Tell us, you went to fashion school, when did you graduate? And you've just started your brand, what, literally in the last year?

Millar: Well, that's another thing. While I was at high school I was pretty convinced that I was ready. And I was not. I couldn't really sew, but I was like "I'm gonna have a label. I'm gonna be the first 15 year old fashion designer ever." But then I sent an email I think to James at one point, and that's the amazing thing is that he was so supportive and nice.

Julia: Like Karen Walker was to you [James]!

Millar: Exactly!

James: I did have in the back of my mind about how she replied. I'm terrible now. If anyone emails me I probably haven't replied. I feel like I was definitely better back then.

Millar: Well it was super exciting to get responses. And then I went to uni, and there was this time during uni where I applied for fashion week and I think I was in my third year or second year of uni, second year I think. And I wasn't ready, but I was excited about being accepted, and then I spoke to James and he was very nice about it but was also telling me to ask myself whether I was actually ready. And I totally wasn't, had no idea about production. And then I finished uni, went to Japan after lockdown as soon as the borders were open. I was in Japan teaching English, only meant to be a year, then loved Japan so much cos I lived in Tokyo and the exposure to fashion and art was amazing. Then I went to a school in Tokyo just briefly, for 12 weeks, called Coconogacco. It's not like a normal fashion school, it's part time and the guy that runs it used to work for Galliano. So that was a really exciting thing. It was all in Japanese, I could maybe understand the first hour of class and then I couldn't understand anything, so the bilingual people, a girl used to sit in front of me, she would transcribe it for me in English which was so, so nice, and would be like "We're talking now about what it means to be human," and I was never going to be able to understand that [laughter].

Julia: Because you're not human?

Millar: Perhaps. So that was super cool and my teacher was really, really nice, and then I was like "I need to start my brand" because my friends had started theirs post-fashion school. So seeing them I got FOMO, because they were doing guerilla kind of fashion shows, they did one at a train station. And so I was like maybe you don't need fashion week, maybe you do, I don't know. Or you can have both probably, but they managed to do it on the budget they had and so I was like this can happen in New Zealand. And this was a time when people didn't, well people don't, have a lot of money, and they still managed to get a lot of hype and people were wanting to buy their stuff. So all of that was happening and I was like "Well I'm not moving to Auckland, sorry." But I will come back and fill the hole that you left, cos then they moved to London.

Yuka: Did living in Japan make it different, how to design clothes?

Millar: Yeah, I found it really interesting seeing the way that people at the school designed, and how different it was to my experience of fashion school. This school was less focused on construction, it was very conceptual, so I'd rock up with my workbook, and other people, whatever they'd worked on, it would like cover the floor or something. Like they'd done huge paintings or something really abstract. And one guy, he made his whole mood board, it was like a huge dog tag, well there were like dog tags, and I was like "Oh my god, my collage is in an A3 book." But it was crazy, people were like super receptive to it, and like "I've never seen this," and they were like "And the way you've done this collage..." I was just like "Yeah!" and so everyone's

super supportive of each other and that was really cool, but also I think I was super influenced by just seeing Japan and the fact that men dress how they want to, it's almost 50/50 in terms of spending on clothes.

Yuka: Make-up as well.

Millar: Yes, yeah, so it felt super like "Wow this is what could happen". Maybe. In 50 years.

Yuka: It's so different how the students learnt, and the school, because they do conceptual more than the structure, because structure you have to learn anyway, that's the second thing. You learnt a lot of structure as well, I guess?

Millar: Probably not to the same degree.

Yuka: Designing is the design. That's a tailor – how to tailor. So many people in Japan want to be a fashion designer, and what's the difference? But here is less competition. But in Japan, like every year a new designer's coming up, you can't do the same style again and again. Here people are asking [for the] same style again. And it's like "Are you sure you can sell it again?" You can sell two or three turns and then they just die down, but they still want the same things again and again, I think that's why it makes it harder.

Julia: Your [Yuka] pattern making is just so amazing and I'm always like "How the hell did you get that circle in there?" It's always something I would never fathom when pattern making.

Yuka: Because I can't make patterns!

Julia: Yes you can! You're amazing. It's such a skill.

Yuka: But also I can't make patterns because I never learnt fashion.

Julia: That's why you think outside the box though, as opposed to like "That has to have this much ease, and that has to go there."

Yuka: How I see your [Julia's] work, I'm thinking "It's perfect." And your sewing is so perfect.

Julia: Don't look too close. [laughs]

Yuka: I can't do that, I'm not learning that.

Julia: It's the same with James. James didn't study fashion, he did a photography degree, so I feel like you both have such a unique take on fashion as opposed to me, I'm trained with tailoring and straightforward techniques.

James: And I think about that. What would Jimmy D look like if I'd studied fashion? And I literally don't know. I have one pattern making paper, and then I was like "Well what happens if I make this shape and put it on a body?" You know, it's a more inquisitive way of thinking.

Julia: And sharing a workroom with you, it's so interesting, because I use my blocks, and I do a blazer and it's got this kind of tailoring and this kind of dart, but you're like "I'm making this like a snail!" And I'm like "What?!" It's so eye opening for me, I should think outside the box even more, you know.

"What would Jimmy D look like if I'd studied fashion? I literally don't know."

Jessie: So how did we meet Hannah?

Hannah: We actually met when I used to work at GAG, Good As Gold. I think I was managing the store at the time. And you had, I don't want to say your first, but maybe it was the first season.

Jessie: And what was Good As Gold like when you were there?

Julia: They are such a Wellington institution!

Hannah: I came in and at the time retail was okay, but it had kind of started to decline.

Jessie: Was this after global financial crisis kind of vibes?

Hannah: Yeah.

Yuka: It's been like that for a long time though, since 2004 I reckon, eh? Do you think? 2004 they had a big fashion show in Auckland. It was huge. International buyers all came over, but after that they cut it off.

Gemma: So where are you now, Hannah?

Hannah: I have my own store called Sully's. It's on Ghuznee Street. So I ended up being a buyer in the end, after a couple of years.

Julia: How long were you at GAG in total?

Hannah: Maybe like 6 years. It was really good, like I've just worked in retail my whole life, I used to work in shoe shops.

Yuka: Do you like it? Do you like retail?

Hannah: Yeah, I really like retail.

Julia: On a good day. [laughs]

Hannah: On a good day, yeah. So then I left there and started Sully's.

Julia: And how long have you been open? Two or three years?

Hannah: Yeah, two and a half years. And it feels so weird, like "Why did I open a store? Why at this moment?" But it's been really nice, and kind of like what you guys are saying about the Wellington community. It's been cool, everybody's been so supportive. I feel like we have so much support and respect for each other, nothing is competitive. We're all just egging each other on to do well. Which has been really nice because I felt like I didn't really see that vibe in previous stores. It felt a bit...

Julia: Cut-throat competitive?

Hannah: Yeah.

Julia: : 'Me-against-you' vibes, right? I've experienced that in retail. Like it's everyone for themselves. But Wellington's different. You've got places like Kaukau, Hunters & Collectors, Caughtley, and Sully's all doing their thing in the same area and actually supporting each other. They've figured out how to make it work.

Jessie: It's like an eco-system, right? There has to be everyone for it to actually thrive. And even David Jones closing down I thought was really sad because that was actually a big pull for people to come shopping in the city.

“I feel like we have so much support and respect for each other, nothing is competitive. We're all just egging each other on to do well.”

Julia: And it's not just on the retail side of things either - but the fashion brand side too. I've experienced so many people gatekeeping the industry in the last 10 years. Lots of people won't even tell you about manufacturers, fabric suppliers, trim wholesalers, no tips or anything. They all pull up the ladder once they're successful.

Hannah: So gatekeeping, eh?

Julia: It's so gatekeepy—always keeping their cards really close to their chest vibes, it's been so hard. I've had to fight to find out lots of things in this industry. Luckily Iona, our local manufacturer from Umsiko, has held my hand through lots of processes and learning. It's those relationships that I think are so special. And the same in retail, you've got a community and you're all kind of sharing information.

Jessie: It's a backwards mindset though, because actually if you self-generate and you're more abundant – there's more than enough space for everyone. And if you all pool resources to make a bigger industry together...

Julia: It's so rewarding.

Jessie: Well, it's rewarding for businesses financially as well. If you can just do things once and then all learn from each other and share those learnings.

Julia: And I feel like with Gen Z – Millar, I appreciate you're Gen Z – [laughs]

Millar: I'm a cusper.

Jessie: I heard you say your age before.

Julia: I feel like Gen Z are changing things and it's becoming more about community.

James: On that note, obviously this week we've had The Service Depot announce that they're closing.

Julia: Huge blow to the community!

James: We've had Caughley closing, not to mention all the hospo, all the restaurants, everything. I talked to Ange [Gordon] from The Service Depot this week and she was like “I feel like my city is being torn apart brick by brick.”

Julia: And she's been such a pillar.

James: Yeah! I mean I was in Artikel before it changed to The Service Depot, which was on Lombard [Street]. So how do we all feel about the current situation, the current environment?

Hannah: It's really scary. I think Caughley closing, I was really sad, cos she's a neighbour, just across the road. I'm quite new so I was just, y'know, “Oh ffff-shit!”

Gemma: Does things like the building crisis...I was going to say the housing crisis but it's not just a housing crisis. We've got people land-banking buildings that are red-stickered and stuff like that. Does that have an impact on your industry as well?

Jessie: Definitely. I think it just has an impact on the city in general. Obviously, things like all the roadworks make it tough as well. But it's not really that, it's also density of people in the city, and public transport. When Let's Get Wellington Moving got shelved and they announced the Golden Mile project, that really is a focus on the facelift of pavements and the city, but we're not getting light rail, we're not getting parking. I think it is really important, the city planning. [But] it's not really about the product, it's about the service provided and the culture. Unity Books is about people who love to read and you go in because you know you'll get a great recommendation. All these brands are just part of the fabric of the city, and if you go and just roll out a bunch of construction that is very intensive short term, but makes it impossible to operate for people who have chosen to invest in the city and set up here, you go and put hoardings in front of their shop? Nobody is going to be able to deal with that. That's impossible. And you actually need to be thinking now, if this is a short term thing that we're going to be doing for the bettering of infrastructure – and I agree with where we need to get to – but if you exterminate all of that in the meantime you're going to find it very hard on the other side to try and recultivate all of that.

Yuka: In Japan there's no way, that inner city, they don't close for that long. They know they're gonna kill it.

Julia: I do pop-up shops–SLUG– and I go around the city and look at empty spaces all the time and there are so many of them. It's so difficult to find good spots! They all want so much money for a space that has been empty for years. They'll want \$7000 for 3 weeks or something - that is so much money! There should be more consideration for people bringing life to the city and creating opportunities for people.

Yuka: It's so expensive, because, as everyone said, there's not enough people to buy so much stuff.

Jessie: There's only like 300,000 people in Wellington.

Yuka: It just doesn't make sense. And all my friends who live in Upper Hutt don't want to come into town. They just don't want to. Some said "I'd like to go to a restaurant but there's no parking, and all the road is closed." Always somewhere is closed, you don't know.

Julia: The central city is hard, and there are so many shops that have literally been empty for so many years going unloved. And I think landlords won't reduce the rent because of the reduced equity, or thinking it's better to wait for the market to catch up to their high prices–but no regard for the vibe empty stores create in the city. But then again I was talking to an industry contractor recently and he was saying it's not all doom and gloom out there, a brand he works with has just opened three new stores nationwide in the last two months, and they're doing it now because they've bargained down rents for like 10 year periods in great central spots, because of the recession.

James: Do we feel optimistic?

Jessie: I feel optimistic. We opened retail, our Wellington store, in August 2019. Arguably we had a few stable months of the old retail environment and then nothing has been the same ever since. And it could be easy to point to Covid but I actually think it's technology that's sped things

up, and the way that the customer buys is changing. Not just e-commerce, because we've had the e-commerce wave and that's crashed as well. But it's actually the service and the experiences that you create in your store that is such an important part of the overall brand composition.

Julia: And like Brick and mortar is always important in the scheme of things.

Jessie: It is totally important, and so is wholesale and so are partner channels and so is e-commerce. All four channels need to work in harmony together. And it's particularly interesting, we're in New Zealand but we've been doing this market validation in Australia for two years, they are all important at different points in your growth and your customer journey. And so in Australia wholesale's great because David Jones can roll you out in like 8 stores and you suddenly get all these touch points and customers can start to discover you and you start to build this brand. And then when they've bought their first bag David Jones isn't gonna cut it for when they want to get into the product and do the whole collection and figure out everything.

Julia: Leather care and all that.

Jessie: All of that, the art of packing. And so we then need to be there for the second visit, the third visit, the fourth visit. It can't just be like turning on e-commerce from New Zealand because then you're shipping across the Tasman, which just gets struck out because of margins. So you actually need to invest in 3PLs over there, and retail, and doing activations and PR. And oh my god PR's so expensive.

Julia: And also, Australia's fucking massive, there's so many more people over there.

Jessie: There's like 5 million people in Sydney and 5 million people in Melbourne.

Julia: It's a whole different ball game.

Jessie: It's actually so much easier to just operate in one city where there's a lot more people.

Julia [to Chloe]: And you lived in Sydney for a long time right?

Chloe: Yeah, I did. I had a really different intro to the fashion industry to all of you. I didn't know anything about the New Zealand industry until I was in my mid-20s probably. I grew up in the Hutt and I didn't know anything about New Zealand fashion. Probably the walls of Queensgate were as far as I got.

Julia: But you were interested in style? Like you got into making outfits and stuff?

Chloe: I was. My mum was really into sewing, she always made handmade things. That was probably my only avenue into fashion. Then I moved straight to Sydney out of high school. I didn't go to uni and I probably felt a bit anxious about it, because I know everyone has their uni plan, and was like "Oh gosh, what if you change your mind? What are you doing?" So I followed my boyfriend over there and worked there for over 10 years in magazines.

Julia: Doing what?

Chloe: I started at Cleo. Remember Cleo? That was an intro to the industry.

Julia: Did you go straight into styling, or were you doing something else to begin with?

Chloe: I was actually quite lucky, when I look back. I didn't actually style anything for probably like four years. I was interning, assisting, I was a fashion assistant and then a market editor,

assisting in shoots. I look at young stylists now and I'm just like "Oh god, you just put your work on Instagram!" Like you're styling straight away, maybe still discovering your style, whereas back then you would slowly learn from really established stylists. No one would see your work. By the time you started styling you knew what you liked, and you've had a lot of training.

Julia: I was a stylist assistant in New York—it was so different there compared to New Zealand too. I remember I did so much steaming!

Chloe: So much steaming. I still do so much steaming!

"I grew up in the Hutt and I didn't know anything about New Zealand fashion. Probably the walls of Queensgate were as far as I got."

Julia: I feel like New Zealand's so small you can be a little bit more free, doing projects with your friends and putting it on Instagram and stuff.

Chloe: Yeah, there's pros and cons I think to it, and I think it's so hard here, like styling as a career isn't feasible here really.

Julia: It's the same in many parts of the industry compared to overseas. Like in New York you'll have one incredibly specific job and that's the only task you'll do... but here it's kind of like you've got to do it all - every single aspect.

Chloe: Yeah, I remember when I went to London and I went to a PR agency and they were like "What do you do? I see you take photos as well." And yeah, even in Sydney you're like a bit of a multi-tasker but over there they couldn't understand that. It was like you really had to hone the one thing. I don't even know how you'd get into styling starting just here. It's so hard unless you want to get into really commercial TVCs, film and costume, which is so different to fashion styling.

Julia: Do you remember doing your first shoot for Cleo?

Chloe: Yeah I do, it was a summer shoot, you know when they do the how to wear certain things certain ways? I styled actually Sarah Snook, she was one of my first. Her first ever magazine shoot I styled her for just this one page. She was a new actor and now she's like...

Gemma: So when did you come back here?

Chloe: I moved back properly four years ago. My first intro to the fashion industry was coming back for fashion week, when would it have been? I was at Oyster mag and I came back representing Oyster, and no one knew I was from New Zealand I don't think at that stage, and I was like "Hi!" And I got to meet so many people. I feel like I probably met you [James] at one of those early fashion weeks?

James: Yeah. When do you think?

Chloe: That would have been like 2012 maybe? Or maybe 2010?

Julia: Fashion week used to bring a bunch of PR from overseas, I remember this, and they'd all be sitting front row.

Chloe: I came over for quite a few years from Australia, and it's so weird that that was my introduction to the industry here because I'm a kiwi. It was really exciting to come back, I was so hyped to be at fashion week. I remember going to the Stolen and the Huffer shows where they were just like massive parties. It was really, really fun. So I came back for two years when I was with Oyster and then I came back after that once I left Oyster and had established myself as freelance.

Julia: Was that a big transition? The stylists I know are all freelance—that I can't even imagine having a stable salary job as a stylist now, especially in New Zealand.

Chloe: Well, I don't know if they were very stable salary jobs in magazines, I mean it's more stable being a freelancer. Freelance rates are more stable than magazines. They were so badly paid. I don't know if it's changed that much. For magazines you're on a salary but you work so hard. At the start of my 20s I was definitely doing 80 hour weeks. I would be lucky to have a weekend. And it was very demanding, especially when you're a fashion assistant. Things have changed a lot now. You couldn't get away with employing fashion assistants or interns. I worked unpaid as an intern so much.

Yuka: Yeah because they are so hyped to be there.

Chloe: And you're one of 20 interns and there's one fashion assistant role that comes up every three years and you just hope that you get that job because that's your only way into the industry.

Julia: And you work your ass off! In New York interns were just getting absolutely abused in these systems. So the New York Council basically put in place a rule that if you're interning, and it is to the exact same level as an employee's role, you have to be doing it for either school credit, or you have to be paid. A bunch of brands like The Row got brutally called out and taken to court for this to happen.

Chloe: Yeah, so Sydney did implement that after I was an intern.

Julia: : I was interning in New York for Eckhaus Latta and doing huge amounts of hours. And it was amazing, so pivotal in my fashion industry journey. I went to New York Fashion Week. helped with retail installations, and had all these cool experiences, and it was all totally worth it in the end.

Chloe: I know, you get all these opportunities but also that was so unethical.

Julia: So you're basically doing it for the hype [laughs], but I think you can only do that when you're younger and can work a job on top of interning. Like you actually need to be paid and be looked after.

Jessie: But it also creates such an inequity because a lot of people can't afford to do that.

“You're one of 20 interns and there's one fashion assistant role that comes up every three years and you just hope that you get that job because that's your only way into the industry.”

Julia: Is it hard having a business and being a creative? Do you miss working with your hands?

Jessie: Yeah.

Julia: Cos I find in my job there are such different periods throughout the year, where you're doing spreadsheets for a month, then you're doing pattern making, sewing, dispatch...

Jessie: My job is different now. I'm literally like, growth strategy.

Julia: Like I get like two months of the year where it's a block of just sewing. Must be hard when you're taken away from working with your hands as a creative?

Jessie: I think there's a misconception in a way though, because I think that figuring out a growth strategy is very creative in a way, and figuring out all the different pieces of the puzzle that you have to put together. I was having a conversation last year in Paris with a friend Ian Luna, he writes the Rizzoli fashion books, so they're responsible for archiving fashion. I was saying to him I feel kind of disheartened because everything is just about the Instagram moment, it's not really about the process, that's still how I approach a collection, you know: research, understanding an inspiration then doing a deep dive, researching it, pulling out all of the things that make it interesting and then interpreting that in your own way for the collection, and then building a narrative and a campaign, maybe a show or a photography campaign around it. And I just feel like maybe the last designer to do that was honestly McQueen, you know, in a big way.

Julia: I often think as a maker "What would I make if I didn't have to sell it?" And I think, wow maybe I would design something totally different you know? Something with lots of hours of complex work in it. This collection that's about to come out, I have my most expensive garment ever, which is \$1200 for an amazing blazer that has so many tailoring details in it, but I'm still just like "Ugh, that is so expensive!". But it cost that much to make it, and it took me ages to put that together—so much trial and error, but it's just that whole thing of what is the consumer gonna pay for this versus how much work went into it? And how do you value your own labour?

Jessie: But you would be surprised though. Last year we had an exercise on price points in the business and we pushed our price points up, our top one is now \$2000AUD. We've still sold out of that style.

Julia: Exactly. And it's about putting that thought process into the value, like actually, it is worth that. And like you [James] last season had your most expensive piece, which had what? Literally like 6 metres of silk in it?

James: Digitally printed silk.

Julia: And they sold!

Chloe: But even if it doesn't sell it doesn't mean it's not worth that amount. And you have to always remind yourself of that, but it's so disheartening when you're just there on your own like "Someone buy this amazing piece I've put my heart into."

Julia: But I've also got to pay my wages and the rent and all the other overheads from those designs, and if you're sitting on stock that isn't selling it's so nerve wracking. I'm thankful that I don't actually sit on that much stock ever, it all does sell eventually. But it is that thought process of "What would I make?" Maybe I'd do beading or embroidery, or super complex pattern making. Maybe I'd make something that takes a thousand hours, maybe I would try out new and difficult skills as time isn't money.

Chloe: And you don't ever get a block? You never think "I have nothing new to output today?"

Yuka: No.

Chloe: That's amazing.

Julia: I always find fabrics are big for me, like I just started importing fabrics from fabric mills and it's so exciting.

Yuka: Fabrics here are terrible.

Julia: It is, it's very limited.

Julia: But for me importing fabric's been really exciting because it means I can get stuff that no one else has. I get so inspired by textiles, it's a huge part of the design process. But it's a fucken hard industry that we're all in, I'm not gonna lie.

Yuka: Ten years ago no one was using linen, and I thought "Oh yeah, I'm gonna use linens." And now everyone's using linen.

Jessie: There's something interesting about that though. I've been going through this process with the business at the moment where I've had to talk to a lot of different people about it. In New Zealand there's a huge focus on tech, and like "Tech is growth! Tech is good!" And consumer goods is like a slow creaky thing that happens, and I have to remember that the rag trade is a business that is as old as time, like LVMH, Bernard Arnault is like the richest guy in the world. All off the back of the creativity of all of these fashion houses which were originally started by women and now are headed up by men. And I just think that's such an interesting thing that the current mode of the day favours new technology but actually people are always gonna need clothes, always gonna need bags.

Gemma: How have you seen the change in print media affect your business, or industry as a whole? Have you had to rethink that?

Julia: Yeah, what was it like when you started James?

James: I mean print was all we had. If you got it in print the phone – literally the landline in your shop – would ring off the hook with people wanting stuff.

Julia: What were the mags at the time that you wanted to be in?

James: I wanted to be in Pavement.

Yuka: There were more mags, eh?

Gemma: Yeah, there were so many more magazines.

Yuka: I remember I was in Pavement too.

James: My whole youth I loved Pavement, I worshipped Pavement. I got in Pavement and the photo that I had was a girl and she was in silhouette. You couldn't see the clothes. And I felt a little bit ripped off because that was my one moment in Pavement.

Yuka: I remember it was a really good magazine. My fashion friends from Japan saw it and they couldn't believe it was from New Zealand.

James: But I remember that point where it was like going to magazine stores and flicking through magazines and it's ones I usually would have bought but I'm like "I've seen these images on Instagram." Or I feel so image fatigued from looking at Instagram.

Chloe: Also all the editorial content is now paid, so that also takes the magic out of it when you know that the whole story's been paid for by Louis Vuitton. It's just so different now.

Yuka: Also for me, Upper Hutt doesn't have those magazines. So I have to come into town.

James: But I do remember getting stuff in Viva much later, after Children of Vision which was 2009. It was like the phone just didn't ring as much.

Jessie: I still feel like Viva feels like the one fashion magazine moment, you know, that you can get.

Chloe: Dan [Ahwa, Creative Director of Viva] works really hard to keep it authentic, and that's the thing, because they have that newspaper tie-in they have to have integrity. Whereas when I've worked for other magazines there's so much that's paid for by brands that isn't disclosed, whereas Viva, you know I styled for them for so long, they never would ask for me to include an advertiser, because that's not ethical, being forced to put something in.

Julia: But it also hinders on your creativity when there are too many have-tos.

Chloe: But every other magazine does that. When I was at InStyle it was like "Here's 15 brands to include on these two pages." At Cleo it was "How can you get another pair of Havaianas into your trend page for winter?"

Julia: And when did you see it change? So there's print media and when did you start Instagramming, and when did social media or E-comm go through that change?

James: I feel like at Children of Vision there was a point, like I vividly remember getting the Australian Label TV - Tvanek Verner, before it became Verner.

Chloe: Yeah, I remember TV.

James: Yes! TV! We got a TV dress in Viva, phone ringing off the hook. And then by the end of Children of Vision, which was like maybe 2012-13 it kind of just stopped...

Julia: Which would have been similar time like just after global financial crisis, so it would have been sketchy times?

James: Yeah.

Chloe: And online shopping had really opened up. That changed a lot. People were looking at blogs. Instagram launched in 2009 probably.

Jessie: Do you know the only thing that has impact like that now is Substackers.

Chloe: True!

Jessie: Not even Vogue Runway.

Chloe: Because Substackers have such loyal subscribers.

Jessie: Yes! Vogue Runway has 10 million followers which is like twice the population of New Zealand.

Julia: I love Vogue Runway, tbh.

Chloe: Well that's what they say about getting brands on celebrities. I know brands in Australia that have had stuff on Kendall and Kylie [Jenner], it doesn't sell anything, but then they just get it on the right Instagram person who has the right 10,000 people following and they'll sell out.

Julia: Influencer culture's another thing, media has changed. People wanna see real people wearing things. But often you don't know that it's actually paid for advertising, it's like magazines but on a person on a tiktok. [laughs]

Chloe: And that's the tricky thing, there are now all these laws to help influencers know what to disclose, but then magazines here do not have any laws, and I see so much in them where they don't even have the promotion on the page, but it's a paid story. That's been interesting to see.

“The rag trade is a business that is as old as time...and I just think that's such an interesting thing that the current mode of the day favours new technology but actually people are always gonna need clothes, always gonna need bags.”

Gemma: So the reason that I'm here is because of James's connection with The Dowse with the show [The House of Dowse X Jimmy D]. I know your jobs are all-encompassing as they are, but do you feel like you have to seek out other collaborations and connections just to build your brand in new ways? And how does that work?

Julia: Definitely. James you are quite special because you do so many collaborations with artists, like every season you've got a new print that's amazing, and I feel like that is such a special way to interact with other communities. I've just done a screen print collaboration with two artists, but I don't do that every season. Jessie just linked me with someone at the Asia New Zealand Foundation to apply for a really cool Young Business Leaders Initiative delegate trip to the Philippines. So yeah, you have to put yourself out there all the time.

Yuka: Well you have to know someone in New Zealand to get to that point.

Julia: It's a community thing.

Chloe: And it's so insular. Like you're working on your own so often that it's really nice to have someone else to hype you up, or someone else to just bounce a project off.

Jessie: I feel like there isn't enough of a connection between – well obviously you guys, massive connection between fashion and The Dowse – but fashion and all of the museums and galleries in general. Te Papa has a wealth of a collection, so does the Dowse. I've never been down to see the Te Papa Collection.

James: I have stuff in the Te Papa collection. I think largely because of my artist collaborations with people like Andrew McLeod. I'm so thankful for that, it's so nice to know my pieces are in a national collection and properly archived.

Chloe: In Australia a lot of the very creative brands are able to create these amazing collections because they have the support of these galleries. And they know, Romance Was Born and brands like that, know that if they put so much time and money into pieces, they'll get picked up by all these galleries, vying for their collections, in the different states. It's really beautiful because fashion is valued as art, which I think often it's not.

Jessie: It's seen as women's work, right? Like it's underfunded, underpaid, undervalued, underrepresented.

James: We can't get CNZ funding.

Julia: Because it's commercial?

Jessie: It's the same all over the world though, because you know Anna Wintour had to fight for the Costume Institute to really even be a part of The Met.

Chloe: I think The Dowse has noticeably championed fashion, from what I've seen, like the Eden Hore exhibition.

James: From doing my show, their archive of fashion probably beats most other institutions. And they have the weirdest stuff, which I love.

Julia: I friggen loved the collection show where you had everything out [Unhinged: Opening the Door to the Dowse Collection]. It was overwhelming but beautiful and I was like "This is phenomenal."

Gemma: And that's the other thing that we've found at The Dowse, and that's the t-shirts, those Unhinged t-shirts, you see them everywhere. That really took off. And it's simple but I feel like that could grow. Surely it could be more than just t-shirts, or more than one style of t-shirt. I mean you never know what's going to hit and what's not.

Chloe: I love that little part that has the kete, in the permanent exhibition. I think things like that are really special, and that is fashion, and that's the history of this country, little bits and pieces that just remind people fashion is around.

Julia: What do you think it is? Is it something wearable and every day so people just discount it? They don't see it as exciting as contemporary art or something? There's so much skill involved.

James: It's like fashion is commerce, that is the association.

Chloe: So it's like a practicality, that you can carry it around with you.

Jessie: No, I honestly think it harks back to sewing being a woman's job.

Yuka: If someone says a compliment like "Your piece is like art," for me, art is more like a painting.

James: But then I get that with fashion! When I went to London I was going to Selfridges and I was worshipping clothes in the same way I worship art. Like "Oh my god, I'm getting to touch Celine!" Like, this is my gallery.

Julia: When I unbagged a Prada coat as a stylist assistant, I was like "This is probably \$10,000" and I was touching it! I was in awe.

Yuka: I don't have that response.

Chloe: Maybe you need to value your work more, because you are so much a craftsperson.

Yuka: I know, but I don't go into Chanel and go...I'm more like "I like these, but I don't like this."

Julia: But that's your style, that's your point of view.

Chloe: You'd say that in some galleries as well.

“When I went to London I was going to Selfridges and I was worshipping clothes in the same way I worship art. Like “Oh my god, I’m getting to touch Celine!” Like, this is my gallery.”

James: And so, Hannah. Internationals. Bringing them into New Zealand. Sitting alongside – you have some local?

Hannah: Yes, I have a few local jewellers, but at the moment I don’t have any local clothing.

James: So what are you looking for when you’re buying? What’s the criteria?

Hannah: I think for me Sully’s is a real passion project. So it’s something that I personally like, which is all about craftsmanship and style and the timelessness of a garment. So that’s how I look at buying, and like, if I want a brand that’s kind of the boxes I like to tick.

Julia: Which is why I think you’re so unique. Like when you opened I was like “Oh my god, she has all these cool brands that I’ve heard of but I’ve never seen.” And that is so unique cos no one else really has those in New Zealand.

Hannah: No, and I think it’s so cool to do, but it’s also super, super risky, because we’re in New Zealand and I think sometimes the mindset is very not open to that.

Yuka: They want to wear what everyone’s wearing.

Julia: Having to educate your customer’s a whole other process in the thing as well.

Yuka: It’s worth it though.

Hannah: It’s fun. That was really fun though, educating people, it’s really nice to do. And like “Don’t you wanna stand out? Don’t you wanna be different?” You know? But I think I started like that but I’m actually still paying for that. It didn’t work as well as I thought. So I’m still catching up. I have to be really smart about stuff.

James: Isn’t that what’s good about fashion and what we hate about it though, is that you never nail it?

Julia: Yeah, you learn something every season.

James: It’s never an equation that you learn, that you’re like “I’ve got this fashion thing. This is what you do.” It changes.

Julia: : Every season I’m like “This is gonna be the number one seller, it’s going to be so cool, everyone’s gonna love it.” And it’s never the one. It’s the one thing you didn’t manufacture enough of. [laughs]

Hannah: It’s always that way.

Julia: Do you find being a small boutique you can be quite flexible? You can order in tiny quantities, or if something sells out - you can be like “can I have five more of those please?”.

Hannah: Yeah totally, I could do that, if they have five more there.

Chloe: It’s hard when you’re buying wholesale though, eh?

Hannah: So hard. You really do have to be smart with cashflow – obviously everybody knows this.

Julia: Cashflow is the hardest lesson I've ever learned about small business.

Hannah: Same! I just had no idea, I was honestly so delusional.

Julia: I was like "The money just comes in all the time!" But no, it does not. It comes in twice a year in large chunks and then nothing.

Jessie: Why is cashflow not a sub paper option?

James: Yes. Why is it not taught at primary school?!

Julia: Tbh I still don't fully understand GST!

Jessie: Do you feel like consumer behaviour is changing? Because I feel like the only time I shop Sully's is online.

Hannah: I think it's changed a lot. I feel hopeful that it's going to continue upwards and people's mindset is going to be more positive.

Julia: I feel like you've really come into it in the hardest moment too, like through COVID.

Jessie: I think it is trending upward upwards now.

Hannah: I think so too. But I think I'm lucky because I'm so young, as a business I can change things so easily, you know I pivot and it's just me, and I have one part-timer who works one day a week. And I also had a baby and I was just fucked up.

Julia: You did! Like how are you managing all these things? You're superhuman!

Hannah: Oh, I've had huge help. Huge help financially, like from my parents, I'm openly speaking about this.

Julia: It takes a community.

Hannah: Yeah, and I wouldn't be here without that. But I've also started the consignment side which has been huge!

Julia: And that's such a pivot. It's so cool to see a business just be like "I'm not going to be pigeon-holed, I'm going to do whatever I want". That's so inspiring!

Chloe: It's such a perfect fit for your store as well.

Hannah: I'd been thinking about it for a while and I was probably having a really terrible week and on Tuesday I was like "Okay, I have to fucken do this." And by Friday I was like "I've launched it! Here it is guys!" But it being spontaneous is really nice. I think it catches people off guard in a good way.

James: And I think that's why I'm still here. It's because we can pivot so quickly. It's like, COVID, I got this. Global Financial Crisis, I got this. I can run this thing on the smell of an oily rag.

Hannah: It's good. And you can really push yourself because it's just you. There's no other option really.

Gemma: Can I just do a really cheesy once around of what's next for everyone. What's your next plan? Or what's your next dream thing that you maybe want to voice in this group and get ideas or support for?

James: I wanna move into fragrance. I wanna move into candles. I have worked with Nathan Taare of OfBody on some perfumes and working on those has been truly collaborative and very exciting and that's what I would love to launch.

Chloe: I'm studying te reo Māori almost full time at the moment, I'm in my second year, so I guess that's something that I would love to see more use of in the industry, tikanga and te reo Māori. I don't know in what form, but it was really cool seeing fashion week last year and how much they transformed it. It felt so different, what Yasmin had done, and what she'd worked on with local iwi and so on, it was just so awesome and so I'm really excited to see where we go in that respect.

Julia: Like in your styling?

Chloe: Well, more just in how we conduct things in the industry, things like photoshoots, just everything. I think there's a lot to be learned from indigenous people all over the world and we're on this beautiful land and there's so much we could learn as well. It's a very white industry still. I don't have the answers, but hopefully we can get on the journey.

Jessie: For my business and for Yu Mei, we've got a global ambition next. Australia is sort of where we want to go to but beyond that there's a lot that we want to do. I feel very inspired by this conversation and I actually think more locally I can see a future where there's a big fashion industry in Wellington and there's partnerships between galleries and our national museum. And actually just maybe a taking back of the culture and bringing that all home to Wellington and maybe having fashion week here. Why not?

James: True.

Julia: Why not! Let's be ambitious!

Jessie: I mean, it's nowhere right now.

James: And there's such incredible venues here. I'm always walking round like "Fuck, I would like to do a fashion show here."

Jessie: So why not? I think there's the creativity here, there's the ambition, the appetite and all of the right minds to make that happen. So that's just something I'm gonna ponder for a wee while.

“Locally I can see a future where there's a big fashion industry in Wellington and there's partnerships between galleries and our national museum. And actually just maybe a taking back of the culture and bringing that all home to Wellington and maybe having fashion week here. Why not?”

Julia: As a one-person business it is really hard, and I find it really hard to think about anything beyond Christmas right now. But I do have dreams for new collections on the horizon, the next one I'm working on is a denim capsule, and I'm excited to do something that brings it back to something quite tactile and utilitarian. Beyond that I just don't know what's really going to

happen for JPalm, I just have to blindly trust I will keep the wheels turning and have more ideas. In an ideal world I would have a permanent retail store, staff, and lots of collaborations with people doing cool things, and we're all having a good time! But I can't think that big at this stage - I wish someone would give me \$100k to open Slug Pop Up as a permanent space [laughs].

Yuka: I am living the dream, I think. I've got what I want to do and how I want it. I didn't want to make a big business. I can't work with people, I'm not really good with people. I like to keep it small and make whatever I want. As James said, I'm by myself, I'm fine. If I miss one collection, who cares? But if you have a few people you always have to keep going, you always have to pay. And I had that, and now I'm semi-retired, and I just work whenever I feel like working, and when I feel like going on a walk with the dog I do. It's great, I'm living my life, that's why I'm here. I didn't want to be in Japan and just busy busy busy.

Julia: It's so inspiring to hear that you are where you want to be.

Yuka: Yeah, I am! I'm always thinking "I should do a big show." No, I don't want to. I was asking myself "Why don't you do it?" Because I just don't want to. I don't want to go on an aeroplane. I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want to be too big because you can't keep doing it. I can't. I just don't want to get stressed.

Millar: I'm very much at the beginning, so just about to go into manufacturing.

Yuka: Sorry! You have to be ambitious to a certain age.

Millar: Yeah.

Yuka: And then learn heaps. If you don't try everything you don't learn. You should try, and then cry. That's how you learn!

Millar: Yeah, so I'm manufacturing with Iona as well, it's fantastic. And then the plan in October is to travel to Tokyo for a fabric buying trip, because like you said, the fabric here is a small pool, and I really loved having that access at the time that I was there. That's kind of the plan, we'll see how this collection rolls out, and try and get more stockists. Because I only have one currently, but once I have more inventory I can expand.

Jessie: Where are you stocked at the moment?

Millar: I'm stocked at Collect in Whangarei, which I share with some of the people here.

James: Are you up there Jessie?

Jessie: No.

James: Oh, you should be.

Jessie: Should we be?

Millar: Yeah, they're wonderful.

Yuka: It's a really cute shop.

Millar: Yeah, so that's me.

James: And Hannah?

Hannah: Basically I'm just wanting to continue to grow Sully's, try and get more brands on board, and keep thriving, hopefully get bigger. Maybe move location.

Julia: To...?

Hannah: Somewhere bigger maybe. And maybe do my own brand at some point. That's very far away.

Julia: Well hit us up if you ever need any manufacturers or any tips.

Hannah: Oh, I will be, because I don't know. But yeah, that's the dreams.

Since this conversation, there have been more changes taking place in Wellington. Mabel's, the Burmese restaurant that our guests' dinner was from has since closed its doors. Sully's has moved to a bigger shop space at 30 Ghuznee Street. New Zealand Fashion Week has plans for a 2025 return – still in Auckland. And our fashion crew continue creating collections, navigating international supply chains and all the new challenges that working in fashion in Wellington in 2025 throws their way. Because, as Yuka Maud says, "You can't stop making stuff if you are born like that."

A note from The Dowse Art Museum's Senior Curator, and co-curator of The House of Dowse X Jimmy D, Chelsea Nichols: The Dowse has been building a modest collection of fashion and costume since the early 2000s, to expand upon the tradition of collecting textile art which has been a core part of the craft collection since the museum opened in the early 1970s. The costume and fashion areas of the collection was particularly well-cultivated during the tenure of former curator Claire Regnault, who is an expert in fashion history. The Dowse collection and exhibition programme has always tried to reflect a broader view of creativity than the typical art museum, and it's eclectic and eccentric nature reflects the very different tastes, expertise and collecting preferences of various directors and curators over the years.