



FASHION

AUSTRALIAN & NEW ZEALAND DESIGNERS

MITCHELL OAKLEY SMITH

Thames & Hudson

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*This book is dedicated to all of the creative people who
continue to inspire and allow us to dream.*

NOTES

Australian Fashion Week refers to Rosemount Australian Fashion Week, Sydney, which was previously known as Mercedes Australian Fashion Week

Melbourne Fashion Festival refers to L'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival

TAFE Design Institute was previously known as East Sydney TAFE

RMIT University was previously known as Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

New Zealand Fashion Week refers to Air New Zealand Fashion Week, Auckland

Seasons referenced throughout the book are as per the southern hemisphere unless specified.

INTRODUCTION

The work of local fashion designers has a unique identity and place in the international market. In many countries, fashion is an ingrained part of cultural identity, tied up in a sweeping national aesthetic and steeped in history. Australian and New Zealand fashion designers offer a much broader interpretation of our own identity. Drawing upon a mix of race, culture, gender and religion, these designers have created something particularly unique across many varied genres and styles.

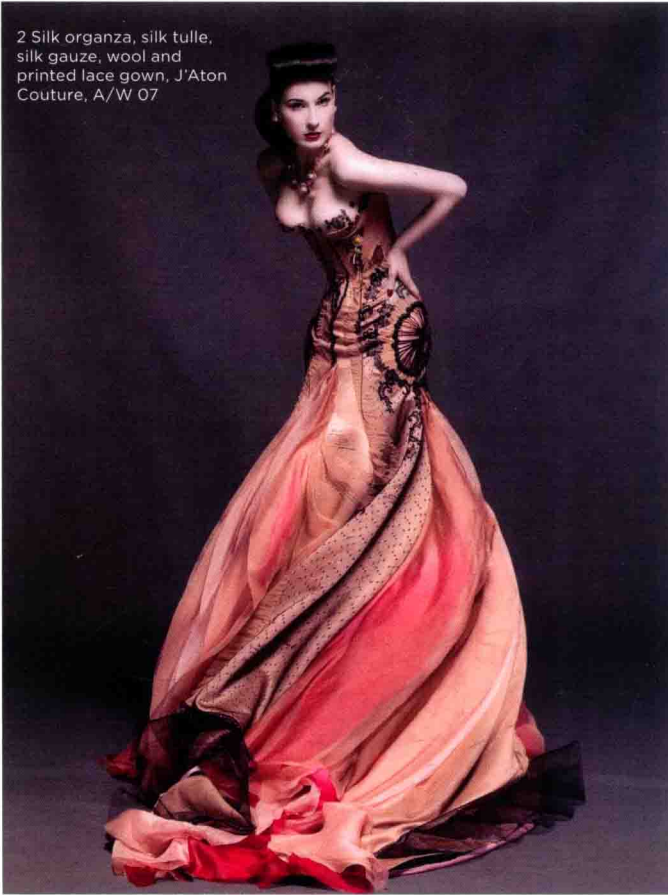
When I first began writing this book, nearly everyone questioned my motivations. 'Are there *really* enough fashion designers in Australia and New Zealand to fill a book?' they enquired sceptically. It seems proof enough that the large extent of this book hasn't compromised the richly varied, talented and deserving designers within it. Although of a high international standard and with a large – and continually growing – export market, it seems there remains a cultural cringe when it comes to antipodean fashion. This is particularly highlighted by our penchant for big-name international brands as opposed to niche, local labels.

And yet fashion in the region is growing at an exceptional rate. In just a decade, Australian Fashion Week, which opened to negative criticism in 1996, has grown into a thriving, week-long celebration of the designers showcased. Similarly, New Zealand Fashion Week plays a pivotal role in promoting its designers. Both events continually attract buyers and reporters from the world's biggest sales and media outlets that relay the excitement to the general public. While the success of fashion in these countries cannot be entirely attributed to such events, it is mutually acknowledged that Australian and New Zealand Fashion



1 Silk dress and Egyptian cotton leggings
with print by Del Kathryn Barton,
Romance Was Born, S/S 05/06

2 Silk organza, silk tulle,
silk gauze, wool and
printed lace gown, J'Aton
Couture, A/W 07



Weeks act as a catalyst of inspiration and confidence for the broader industry.

Professor Roy Greene's 2008 *Review of Australia's Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industries* (TCF) found that TCF output in Australia is valued at \$2.8 billion, with retail and wholesale sectors adding another \$7.5 billion. What's more is that these industries employ over 200 000 people. Creativity aside, such information speaks of the growing success of our fashion industry. Beyond this, the number of enrolments at fashion schools continues to grow year upon year, not only in design but the connected creative industries of styling, make-up artistry and photography. Such increased popularity is mirrored in public fashion and retail events.

More than this, fashion reaches beyond just clothing. Cultural shifts in the past decade have seen fashion considered and respected as a valid art form, in several cases entering the artistic sphere through gallery-style exhibition and appraisal. A 2009 exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, *Together Alone*, showcased eight prominent designers from Australia and New Zealand, including Romance Was Born, Toni Maticevski and Zambesi. In the same year, a retrospective of Easton Pearson collections was shown at Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art, celebrating the brand's trademark weaving of Asian Pacific cultures through its

collections. It was the clothes themselves that garnered the attention of visitors and media alike: here, Easton Pearson's signature styles and ideas remained strongly central to the development of their collections, each interpreted and executed in fresh and relevant ways. In mainstream media, too, fashion is more popular than ever before, particularly with involvement of audiences in television programs such as *Project Runway* and *Australia's Next Top Model*.

The breakdown of the barrier that once existed between the secular fashion industry and the general public has been seen as the democratisation of fashion. Not detrimental to its growth or prestige, local fashion has gained the attention, interest and, ultimately, respect of its public.

On an international level there is great interest in Australian and New Zealand fashion designers. There is something very special about an industry when many of its leading labels – such as Aurelio Costarella, Josh Goot, Willow and Toni Maticevski – are showing on international runways to great acclaim. Beyond this, Australian fashion icon Collette Dinnigan serves as a member of the *Chambre Syndicale* in Paris, the governing body of the French fashion industry. The great contribution

of such designers to the fashion world is welcomed, applauded and, by now, expected – for nowhere else in the world is there a climate or landscape like that of Australia. Nor is there such a close and complementing combination of European and Eastern cultures and influences, uniquely combined with our own Indigenous heritage. From a style viewpoint, the unique trends produced are reflective of the cultural mish-mash of the region.

Before this book, there had not been a singular resource for fashion design in Australia and New



3 Silk and chiffon dress,
Marnie Skillings, S/S 08/09



4 Rib pleated shift dress in silk gazar,
Dion Lee, A/W 10