

# AUSTRALIAN DESIGNER FLAIR SHOWCASED AT WORLD BOUTIQUE

Local fashion designers with a view to the bigger picture are increasingly looking to growing markets overseas for future business...

by **CHERI DEANE**



Local fashion designers with a view to the bigger picture are increasingly looking to growing markets overseas for future business.

Many production factories are in China, and designers often time their visits to the manufacturers to coincide with the twice yearly fashion weeks held in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Fashion Week (HFWK) is a major international sourcing hub for womenswear, menswear, childrenswear, babywear, accessories, mannequins, fabrics and trims.

Earlier this year, a group of Australian designers took part in the exhibition and runway shows

of the annual International Fashion Designers Showcase, World Boutique (WB), which was co-located with HKFW Fall/Winter. Organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the dual fair ran from January 19-22 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) in Wan Chai and attracted over 38,000 buyers from 87 countries and regions.

The Australian brands showcased at the fair included *Sirens Swimwear*, *Fionnuala*, *Danielle Chiel* and *By Weave*.

NSW based designers **Weave Dibden-Neck** and **Danielle Chiel** took part in WB 2014 and

returned to show their collections in this year's fair, while it was the first time that *Fionnuala* and *Sirens Swimwear* had garments modelled on the runways of Hong Kong.

Owner and director of Brisbane based *Sirens Swimwear*, **Bettina McLeod**, acquired the label over a year ago and channels the looks of the '50s and '60s to create a stunning vintage swimwear collection, combined with all the trimmings of modern fashion. ([www.sirensswimwear.com.au](http://www.sirensswimwear.com.au))

Sirens from the silver screen such as Rita Hayworth, Ava Gardner and Marilyn Monroe provide the inspiration for the glamorous swimwear designs produced by the company.

"Our styles are carefully constructed with powerful shape-wear lining and built-in-bust support to ensure our customers look and feel like modern day sirens," Ms McLeod says.

She points out that showing the label in Hong Kong represented the perfect opportunity for the company to extend the label's international reach and make *Sirens Swimwear* more accessible to the global customer.

"Results have been encouraging, with a variety of international businesses expressing interest in the swimwear," Ms McLeod says.

Sydney based designer Danielle Chiel showcased a range of high end hand knits made from Australian merino wool, cashmere, cotton, linen and silk. Her garments reverberated with a patchwork effect of various knitted textures in vibrant hues of red, yellow, orange and pink. The vividly toned pieces featured knitting work done by women in a rural Southern Indian village. ([www.daniellechiel.com.au](http://www.daniellechiel.com.au))

Weave Dibden-Neck used bias-cut merino wool in her contemporary 'WildHeart' collection, inspired by the "brave and free" spirit of

'70s Fleetwood Mac singer, Stevie Nicks. ([www.weaveworld.squarespace.com](http://www.weaveworld.squarespace.com))

Through the use of natural fibres in her label, *By Weave*, the designer sought to bring softness to a world she views as increasingly man made. "I want to nurture and encourage the use of what mother nature has created for us. Silk and wool are just such beautiful materials to work with; they mould and flow compared to plastics," she says.

Adopting a softer take on her usual style, the designer points out that since she has shifted to a rustic country region to live, her days are a lot calmer, and this is reflected in her 'WildHeart' designs.

"My collections used to be very rigid, and I am so happy to be maturing in my knowledge of empowering women through strength, but being gentle in that."

Ms Dibden Neck teamed her *By Weave* garments on the WB-HKFW runway with shoes and bags designed by Sydney based accessories designer and personal friend **Jodie Lee**. ([www.jodielee.com.au](http://www.jodielee.com.au))

The dual fashion fair featured a number of local and internationally renowned designers, such as Hong Kong based design duo **Eric & Philip Chu** and *Butoni's* **Ika Mardiana**; New York based **Loris Diran**, Swedish designer **Lars Wallin** and Beijing based **Wang Yutao**.

Visitors to HKFW find the sourcing fair particularly interesting in terms of new trends in garments, fabrications, manufacturing, labelling and trims. One of the highlights for Ms Dibden Neck at WB-HKFW this year was meeting a Himalayan yak wool supplier exhibiting at the fair. Her aim now is to incorporate yak wool in an upcoming collection.

"My dream now is to travel to the women's tribe where I can watch them weave and learn the traditional techniques. I will be utilising this



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## BY WEAVE

World Boutique-Hong Kong Fashion Week 2015

Himalayan tribe for my winter 2016 collections. The colours are extraordinary, and in this crazy world of futuristic techniques I want to also utilise old world tradition. I would hate for that to ever be lost,” she says.

Ms Dibden-Neck has learned that the follow up in the weeks after taking part in a fair such as WB-HKFW is vitally important for designers, pointing out that the sales she received for her ‘WildHeart’ collection was as a result of the afterwork.

“I was able to pick up one of Asia's largest e-tailers called *Zalora* and am over the moon to be launching on that site later this year.” The designer admits to approaching her debut at WB-HKFW last year with trepidation, but was full of optimism when taking part in the recent fair.

“I didn't feel scared this time and could not wait to get onto the catwalk and show what I had created. It was the best show I've done and now I can't wait to do it all over again,” she says.

HKFW Spring/Summer is scheduled to take place from July 6-9 at the HKCEC. The next WB will be held concurrently with HKFW Fall/Winter at the HKCEC from January 18-21, 2016.