

FRESH



From high country to high street

Christina Perriam has been selected to help push wool into the spotlight at New Zealand Fashion Week. **Jude Hathaway** catches up with her.

CENTRAL Otago designer Christina Perriam's love of merino wool — its exciting qualities, diversity and potential — will be shown off when a selection from her winter 2016 line takes its place at next week's New Zealand Fashion Week (NZFW).

Perriam's outfits will debut, aptly, in the new Choose Wool section on August 25 in front of a host of international media and fashion delegates.

Her label, Perriam, is a reflection of Bendigo Station where she grew up and a tribute to its heritage and her parents, John and the late Heather Perriam.

"It's about slow fashion; about beautifully made clothes rather than throwaway fast fashion; it's about stopping long enough to treasure those special moments in life," she explains.

The show is curated by notable New Zealand stylist Anna Caselberg, who also has a love of wool and a drive to focus the spotlight on its vital role in New Zealand's fashion and interiors industries through numerous initiatives.

Equally enthusiastic about promoting wool is Dame Pieter Stuart, director and founder of NZFW, who approached Caselberg about organising a show featuring wool.

"The public focus is beginning to return to wool's role in fashion since the establishment of Campaign For Wool New Zealand, and I want to help it along by activating people's interest in it through various initiatives," she said.

Perriam's selection will be modelled alongside those from some of the country's enduring brands. There's Sabatini, Hailwood, Liz Mitchell, twenty-seven names — which had its genesis in Dunedin — and Wynn Hamlyn. Tanya Carlson and her Carlson clothes will also be there.

The paths of Carlson and Perriam first converged back in the 1990s. Carlson was still based in Dunedin and Perriam, then a pupil at St Hilda's Collegiate, was already thinking seriously of a career in fashion design.

"I was lucky to be able to get work experience at Tanya's studio and in that short time learned a lot about the day-to-day running of a studio and the demands that must be met as a designer in the business world." Carlson was a strong influence on Perriam's decision to take up the challenge and indulge her dream.

But most influential was Perriam's mother, who had set up the Merino Shop at Tarras where she stocked her Suprino merino fashion brand. She also wholesaled it around the country.

The small farming settlement is just a few kilometres from Bendigo Station, which was Perriam's backyard and playground. She also spent time after school in her mother's shop, unaware at the time she was gleaning her first experiences of fashion retail. As a silent mark of respect for her mother, the name "Heather" features on all swing tags of the Perriam Woman range.

The forthcoming NZFW is not Perriam's first showing of her designs at a prestigious fashion event.



Stepping out . . . Perriam fashion at this year's iD Fashion Week in Dunedin, part of her winter 2015 range. PHOTO: GREGOR RICHARDSON



On high . . . Merino sheep on Bendigo Station, the inspiration for Christina Perriam. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Following graduation from Massey University's Wellington campus, where she completed the two-year diploma and spent a further two years achieving



Space to work . . . Wanaka fashion designer Christina Perriam is showing a wool-focused collection at New Zealand Fashion Week next week. PHOTO: SUPPLIED



her bachelor of design (fashion) degree, her hard graft was rewarded when she was invited to show at Australia's Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week.

She was then approached by a store to produce garments for its Auckland and Wellington outlets. "It was time for me to get more

training," Perriam remarked. And where better than the newly founded Dunedin Fashion Incubator, put in place as a springboard for young designers wishing to begin their own fashion design business? As one of the first four designers to be "incubated" it was where the first Christina Perriam range was produced.

Fittingly, in 2002, the Dunedin fashion public had the opportunity to see the new label at the iD Dunedin railway station show and she was also invited to show at New Zealand Fashion Week as an emerging designer.

PERRIAM had the bit between her teeth and she began producing ranges that she sold to stores throughout the country. She opened a Wanaka store and design studio where she retailed her clothes alongside other brands. In 2007, she successfully applied to be a young merino ambassador and headed to



Second skin . . . Christina Perriam's contribution to the New Zealand Light Leathers section at iD this year. PHOTO: GREGOR RICHARDSON

woollen textile mills in Italy to study how the fibre makes the transition from fleece to fashion. "It was an amazing experience to be immersed in the Italian fashion industry, made more so because the cloth for mum's Suprino label was 100% New Zealand merino, imported, ironically, to be made into Suprino garments from those mills in Italy. "The vertical integration fascinated me and it is a concept I would love to be involved with in the future." The trip had left her wanting more. Consequently, on coming home, she closed the Wanaka store and headed this time, for London. The next 18 months saw Perriam once again immersed in the fashion industry of another country. She worked in quality control first for Gap before moving to a similar



Sheer style . . . More from Perriam's 2015 winter collection at iD. PHOTOS: GREGOR RICHARDSON

position with a company that produced garments for large stores such as Top Shop.

By then, she was facing a big decision to stay on or come home. Ultimately it was her mother's illness that drew her back, a decision that allowed her valuable time with her mother before her untimely death.

Her focus then became Tarras, where she ran the Merino Shop and opened the Christina Perriam store. She also developed the delightful Suprino Bambino range for babies and children.

Rebranding came last year when she dropped the label names of Suprino Bambino and Christina Perriam, replacing them with Little Perriam and Perriam and launched the flagship store in Tarras and website, www.perriam.co.nz.

"I wanted both the children's and women's ranges to come under the same lifestyle brand," she says.

Little Perriam was unveiled last February followed by her first Perriam Woman winter 2015 collection. This was applauded nationally when it kicked off at the iD Dunedin Fashion Week in April.

Since then, as well as launching a summer 2016 line, her concentration has been on the Perriam Woman winter 2016 collection, which exudes similar alluring qualities as the 2015 winter range.

This time a sports lux feel will be seen on the NZFW catwalk. Expect a mix of classy high-end dressiness with the luxurious comfort of cable knitwear and ponchos. The signature gold trims will be there, while merino leather and rabbit fur will act as a further reminder of the label's roots.

Perriam is taking the high country to the high street in one assured step.