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# FASHION

SPECIAL REPORT



## Key takeaways

- US and Asian markets have highest appeal and relevance for local designers looking to make inroads overseas
- An ecosystem to help designers launch internationally is expanding, while grants programs will help contribute capital
- Growing field of designers positioning WA as a hub for modest fashion in Asia
- Jessica Gomes takes Equal Beauty to Asia (page 26)



**PLANNING :** Jonte Morgan is working on a move into the US market. Right: Inside her studio. **Photos:** Gabriel Oliveira



# Designers plan global assault

Asia and the US are the big targets for Perth designers who hope to break onto the world stage.



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**A** SMALL business in the industrial heart of Balcatta is hoping to add a dash of colour and style to Western Australia's export portfolio.

Jonte Designs is one of a number of Perth fashion ventures hoping to break into, or grow a presence in, the international market, with the US and Asia two target destinations on most wishlists.





## 20 years

### PERTH FASHION FESTIVAL'S RUN

There is also a growing ecosystem of businesses and industry associations hoping to support designers pursuing foreign markets, with A.US Official, Perth Modest Fashion and Modest Fashion Australia recently forming, in addition to the longer-running Fashion Council of WA.

Jonte Designs was founded in 2012 by Jonte Morgan, with her Balcatta studio opening about three years ago, serving as a retail store and creative workshop.

Ms Morgan said two of her biggest achievements in the

industry had been opening the studio and being selected to show her work on closing night at this year's Perth Fashion Festival.

Next year, she'll be hoping an international retail base can be added to that achievement list.

"I'd love to get overseas, break into the Asian market and US as well," Ms Morgan told *Business News*.

"I do sell a bit online to Singapore and also Hong Kong, and then in the US I've had quite a few customers.

"Those are the areas that have already shown interest online; I think my brand will suit those markets."

Ms Morgan's first experience of foreign markets was in high school, when she won a scholarship to study fashion in Japan.

Now, driven by encouraging web traffic data, she has linked up with A.US Official, which

organises celebrity placements in the US for local designers.

That business was founded by Perth stylist Ivanna Fontana.

Ms Morgan said placements with celebrities were critical for designers trying to push into the US.

"The market is pretty saturated, so there's competition and being able to stand out (is key)," she said.

"Lots of where you get now is through networking and creating the correct contacts.

"It can be quite hard to break into the market."

Jonte Designs has been displayed at the Ivan Bitton showroom on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles since the start of this year, Ms Morgan said.

"I've had quite a few garments used in music videos and dressing celebrities for red carpet events," she said.

“The market is pretty saturated, so there’s competition and being able to stand out (is key) - Jonte Morgan

"I'm using it to test the market."

Celebrity placements are just one step in what is a major logistical exercise, which involves hiring public relations firms, an agent, and producing a duplicate collection, something Ms Morgan suggested would cost about \$50,000.

She said she hoped that sum would be covered by an export market grant from Austrade, or credit from the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation, as she progresses through the steps.

"I just want to make sure that I have everything sorted and all my ducks in a row before I apply for a grant," Ms Morgan said.

"I'd want to really have (prepared) so that it makes an impact on the business."

A range of local designers secured deals in China last year, after the Fashion Council WA signed an agreement to cooperate with China Fashion Week.

Among them was Empire Rose, founded by Kathryn Cizeika in 1998, which was to retail with Chinese high-end boutique Avectoi.





**SUCCESS:** Tana Grossberg (left), Alvin Fernandez and Ivanna Fontana at Ae'lkemi in Claremont. Below: The Ae'lkemi store. Photo: Gabriel Oliveira



## Fashion designers plan assault on global markets

Two other brands, Ae'lkemi and Morrison, scored relationships with Chinese outlets.

Perth Fashion Festival founder Mariella Harvey-Hanrahan said it was incredibly difficult for local designers to crack into foreign markets.

She said that was why she set up the Fashion Council in 2007.

The Fashion Festival itself is in its 20th year.

"It is all about providing designers with opportunities and support beyond the runway," Ms Harvey-Hanrahan said.

"The greatest barrier designers face trying to crack into the overseas market is a lack of capital and resources, and not having a true understanding of the market.

"An example of this was last year when FCWA signed a memorandum of understanding with the China Fashion Association.

"Whilst it was a tremendous achievement, it took us two years of working in the market and collaborating before this came to fruition.

**“Americans love Aussies, they love Australian fashion**

- Ivanna Fontana

"I'd say it would be near to impossible for a designer to have achieved this outcome on their own."

As part of the growing relationship, Ae'lkemi founder Alvin Fernandez was inducted into the Asian Couture Federation.

Mr Fernandez is also using A.US Official to break into the American market.

A.US Official's Ms Fontana told *Business News* the concept had grown out of the Fashion Downunder events she had managed, which served to introduce local designers to the US market.



"The point of the whole platform is to get (designers) press and exposure during awards season and on the red carpet, that's what LA's about, all the celebrity placements," Ms Fontana said.

"And then once they get some exposure over there, the idea is to connect them to the retailers and get them in store.

"We're going to work on some deals in the New Year, LA Market Week (California) takes place in March."

Ms Fontana works on the project with brand manager Tana Grossberg.

"Tana and I work a lot in LA and we see the opportunities that are available over there," she said.

"Tana is the queen of knowing who's who, which is why I've hired her; she just goes over there and just manages to connect with the right people.

"If you want to have a business in this industry, in this day and age, you need to have the right people who can bring that to you."

In addition to getting the right promotion and securing financing, part of the challenge would be convincing local designers that they had a chance in the US, Ms Fontana said.

"The more Australians that are going to America, Los Angeles in particular, there's just more of that crossover with that platform," she said.

"Americans love Aussies, they love Australian fashion.

"It's that modern, clean, sophisticated aesthetic that you just don't get over there."

By contrast, US designers were often quite driven by pop culture, she said.

## Near neighbour

The Indonesian market is also attracting interest, particularly for Perth's nascent modest fashion sector, which is targeted to religious and conservative women.

Indonesia's strong Islamic community makes that market an ideal destination for modest fashion entrepreneurs.

Two businesses – Modest Fashion Australia and Perth Modest Fashion – have been set up to help local modest fashion hopefuls access international markets.

Perth Modest Fashion, run by Perth-based Imam Faizel



**TAILOR-MADE:** Nita Villamar hopes to kickstart operations in Indonesia. Photo: Gabriel Oliveira

Chothia and Reverend Peter Humphries, will show designers as part of the Perth Fashion Festival celebrations in September.

Modest Fashion Australia had its official launch in August, and founder Aisha Novakovich told *Business News* the company was hoping to open its own space in Perth in coming months, through a collaboration with Activate Perth.

That would give designers a place to work and a shopfront through which to retail.

Ms Novakovich said she had been participating in the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, a program organised by the federal government to help people setting up new businesses.

One big priority would be finding an investor to supply working capital, probably in the order of \$50,000, as the business started to grow, she said.

"There's a lot of urgency for me," Ms Novakovich told *Business News*.

"Six months will go by in the blink of an eye."

Next year, she hopes to facilitate affiliated designers entering overseas fashion shows and building a presence in foreign markets.

Ms Novakovich also plans for Modest Fashion Australia to design and produce clothes

under its own brand next year.

The launch event highlighted the level of interest from Perth designers in the modesty space, which according to some estimates will be worth US\$300 billion globally by the end of 2019.

Examples include Qamar Designs, D-Tribe, Mizan and Kazeca Studio.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has also been supporting Australian modest designers, including through an exhibition at the High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

One designer that intends to collaborate with Modest Fashion Australia is Nita Villamar, of Villamar Couture, based in Karrinyup.

Ms Villamar told *Business News* she was already pushing into the Indonesian market, with plans to show a collection at TS Suites, a showroom associated with a resort in Bali, next year.

The resort hosts an annual fashion festival in May.

"They do a lot of couture work, they have designers from Indonesia and a couple from Europe," she said.

Ms Villamar said she had so far eschewed invitations to show at international events, such as during Cannes Film

“As a business I need to be very open minded and not just consumed by my own design – Nita Villamar

Festival week and Paris Fashion Week, because she felt the brand wasn't yet ready.

However, the TS Suites offer highlights the diversity of the Indonesian market, with that organisation largely following a Westernised focus, not specifically modest fashion.

As part of her expansion into Indonesia, Ms Villamar said she would explore both options, which might mean recreating her revealing line of clothes with a more modest look, with more material covering more skin.

That would be separate to what was shown at TS Suites and

would likely be in collaboration with Modest Fashion Australia.

She said her interest in expanding her repertoire to include more modest fashion was inspired by a local client who asked her to remake an existing design.

"As a business I need to be very open minded and not just consumed by my own design," Ms Villamar said.

Longer term, Ms Villamar said she hoped she would grow out of a space she shares with a local tailoring business to have her own studio, which she envisaged as looking like an art gallery.



## PEOPLE MENTIONED:

Jonte Morgan,  
Ivanna Fontana,

Nita Villamar,  
Aisha Novakovich,

Alvin Fernandez,  
Mariella Harvey-Hanrahan

**BNIQ SEARCH** Fashion Council WA



There are **24** results from our index of **95,829** articles, **9,449** companies and **33,442** people

JESSICA

GOMES  
grows to Asia

China and South Korea are key targets for Jessica Gomes as she seeks to take her skincare business into Asia later this year.

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EXPANDING into Asia is the next challenge for model and entrepreneur Jessica Gomes' skincare business, Equal Beauty, having secured a major investor and launching in Australia last year.

Ms Gomes, who grew up in Perth and is known for her modelling and acting work, including as David Jones' brand ambassador, started the business nearly five years ago.

Equal Beauty, which is manufactured in Australia and Taiwan, has been sold in the local market through David Jones stores since March 2017.

Soon after the DJs launch, Ms Gomes also announced Novena Global Lifecare had come on board as an investor.

Singapore-based Novena was founded by former investment bankers Nelson and Terence Loh, both JP Morgan alumni.

Novena's portfolio includes investments in businesses such as a medical equipment

manufacturer and eyecare centres.

"They're one of the biggest skin aesthetic companies throughout Asia, in China and Singapore," Ms Gomes told *Business News*.

"We're (Equal Beauty) launching in Asia at the end of this year.

"Before I even started working with David Jones I worked a lot in South Korea and I actually discovered a lot of the beauty technology there, discovered a lot of the materials that they use in beauty.

"The Koreans are definitely the tastemakers of beauty throughout Asia; that's where I discovered I'm so passionate about this."

The South Korean skincare market is worth a reported \$US13 billion.

South Koreans also reportedly spend more on cosmetics per capita than other market leaders, including the US.

Novena's involvement was a big step.

Ms Gomes said she had deliberately chosen not to bring investors on board in the first

three years, wanting to maintain control over the business.

"I created my products and made them with my own money," she said.

"I've always been talking about (doing my own brand), and at 30, you've either got to do it now or you're never going to do it."

Faced with the choice of buying an apartment and settling down or diving into entrepreneurship, she said the choice was clear.

"I decided I'd invest my money into my own business," Ms Gomes said.

"Modelling is not going to last forever."

More immediately, Ms Gomes hopes to draw a broader demographic to the luxury brand.

That will mean retailing the product at a wider variety of locations, with Equal Beauty currently only stocked at top-tier David Jones stores, usually those in central business districts, Ms Gomes said.

But there will be a new market in the suburbs, she said.

A first step in that push will be selling the range in David Jones

at the newly expanded Westfield Carousel in Cannington.

"I want to reach people; my mum can now go to Carousel and buy Equal Beauty if she wants to," Ms Gomes said.

**Outsider**

Ms Gomes told *Business News* much of her drive to succeed in business and modelling had come from her years at La Salle College in Middle Swan, where she said it was difficult to fit in.

"Growing up, I felt like such an outsider, I always just felt like everyone thought that I was bizarre," she said.

"It has definitely shaped my drive."

Building a business has been one of her biggest achievements, and a great learning experience.

"I really enjoy it; obviously it's very stressful and definitely a lot to manage ... because I run a business but then I also model and do other things," Ms Gomes said.

"It gives me a sense of accomplishment, and self worth.

"I've had a very long career in modelling and I've always

worked for other brands, but it really is a very satisfying feeling when you have created something that you have control over yourself.

"I'm making all the decisions, I'm taking all the meetings.

"All the tools that I had learned through modelling I brought those together and taught myself a lot about business.

"I consider myself as a businesswoman anyway, within modelling. I've always carried myself in a way where this is my work.







**NEXT STEP:** Jessica Gomes says she'll be launching her luxury cosmetics brand Equal Beauty into Asia next year. **Photo:** Gabriel Oliveira

## “ It really is a very satisfying feeling when you have created something that you have control over yourself - Jessica Gomes

“To take those morals into my own business has been really satisfying.”

One source of inspiration was rapper Dr Dre, who co-founded

the Beats by Dre headphone brand, which was sold to Apple for \$US3.2 billion in 2014

“I love a self-made story,” Ms Gomes said.

“I relate to these guys because I came from the (Perth) hills, I never went to college, I was either going to become a beautician or a hairdresser, and I got out through modelling and I had an opportunity. I've really come such a long way.

“I really admire people who have come from nothing, and have made something of themselves.”

Ms Gomes is among a number of Perth names to have succeeded in the beauty business.

Jo Horgan, who attended St Hilda's College and the

University of Western Australia, opened beauty retailer Mecca Cosmetica in 1997, after moving to Melbourne.

Another local success story is makeup brand BECCA Cosmetics, founded by Rebecca Morrice-Williams in the early 2000s.

That business was sold to Estee Lauder for a reported \$200 million last year.

Although numerous models have put their names to brands, it is rare for them to launch their own business.

A well-known example would be fellow Australian model, Miranda Kerr, who cofounded organic skincare company Kora Organics and serves as managing director.

Model Elle MacPherson counts Navitas founder Rod Jones among investors of her WelleCo supplements business.

Perth-based Invisible Zinc founder Andrea Horwood-Bux co-founded WelleCo and serves as chief executive, while she also helped launch BECCA into international markets.

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