

# The Australian Sheep Breeders' Association is delighted to launch their Women of Wool 2010 series, a celebration of the women who grow and work with one of the world's most beautiful natural fibres.



The Women of Wool series is a feature of the 133rd Australian Sheep & Wool Show in Bendigo on July 16 to 18.

The Women of Wool are inviting women to take Friday July 16 off to attend The Sheep Show's Laugh @ Lunch with famed comedian Jean Kittson, view high fashion and 'wearable art' fashion parades and see Australia's top Wool-craft competitors at their best.

Five Women of Wool from across the wool industry are sharing their love of the fibre in the lead up to the show, they include:

## Fashion Designer Therese Rawsthorne, of Sydney, NSW

Therese Rawsthorne has been touted as a talent to watch by no less a discerning eye than that of Vogue editor Kirsty Clements and other Australian fashion royalty.

Growing up on a wool growing property in central west New South Wales set down-to-earth foundations for Therese but while she worked in the wool shed she dreamed of a future in fashion.

Intent on carving out a niche in the fashion world, Therese applied herself at high school, studying textiles by correspondence, and went on to study fashion at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

A stint in London saw Therese land coveted roles with design house Issey Miyake and then Oswald Boateng. At Issey Miyake, where the creative process of designing prevailed over trends, she learnt a dedication to creativity before all else.

Returning home in 2005 with a yen to start something of her own, Therese started the successful label Youth World then launched her eponymous label three years later. The Therese Rawsthorne label has since garnered much acclaim – she was recognised with a place in the finals of the 2008 Woolmark Award, and took home the gong for 'Breakthrough Designer of the Year 2009' at the Madison Fashion, Style and Music Awards.



## Maker of Jemala ultrafine high fashion garments Phillis Gill, of Benalla, Victoria

In 2001 the Gill family – relative newcomers to the Australian superfine wool industry produced the world's finest bale of wool. It measured 12.9 micron, and as a consequence of achieving such a standard the Gills are invited to meet a legend of wool manufacturing, Lora Piana, in Rome.



Phyllis Gill and her husband Ian say this was the moment their eyes are opened to how different and rare their ultrafine wool is.

And thus was born the "Jemala the Golden Fibre" brand.

"An interesting set of circumstances led us to the elite top makers and spinners in Italy, and then to the owners of the only 45 gauge knitting machine in the world. This machine is used by Zegna, Dior, Prada, Dunhill and "little old Jemala", Phillis says.

The quality of knitting and the finishing of Jemala's garments is superb and is appreciated by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth 11 (fond of pastel twin sets), Nicole Kidman, Renee Zellweger, Milla Jovovich and all the Heads of Governments and their spouses who attended the APEC Conference in Sydney.

Fashion connoisseurs in Australia, Japan, Paris, Moscow and Italy now favour Jemala garments.

*Supermodel Milla Jovovich at an AWI-sponsored Paris event with a Jemala shawl*



## **Woolgrower & Managing Director The Australian Wool Fashion Awards, Liz Foster, of Armidale, NSW**

Not content to grow some of New England's best wool with husband Don on their property "Green Willow", Liz has been promoting the fibre for over twenty-nine years as the managing director of The Australian Wool Fashion Awards.

Under her passionate guidance, The Awards have not only become one of Australia's longest running fashion competitions, but more importantly one of the wool industry's major events.

The original successful formula remains the same: every year to bring together a unique collection of exemplary wool fashion for showing throughout the rest of the year to as many audiences as possible. To achieve this, Liz works full time organising not only the competition, but several shows including sixty-five parades at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, while supporting sponsorship and development of the concept to keep The Awards fresh and relevant.

The competition's main aim is to educate and encourage young designers in the wonderful qualities of wool. Secondary school students through to tertiary fashion students are enticed to use the many versatile wool and wool blend fabrics to create their entries. The rewards include significant cash prizes, gifts of work experience with leading Australian fashion designers and Scholarships to study at recognised Fashion Institutes.

With help & guidance from Liz many entrants have gone onto successful careers in fashion.



## **Fashionista & champion sheep breeder Lorraine MacGowan, of Mt Pleasant, South Australia**

Lorraine MacGowan has been a woman of wool for nearly 50 years. It began the day her first daughter was born, the same day her husband Des entered two merino ewes in the 'Farmer's Class' at the Lock Show, a small rural town on Eyre Peninsula. He came home with a first prize for both ewes. The MacGowan's Merino sheep stud, Deloshanda, was registered in 1975 and by 1995 the small stud had become the provenance of famous champion merino ram 'Tulloch', acclaimed at the time as 'The Most Decorated Ram in Australian History'. He won many broad ribbons right across Australia and his genetics have been used far and wide.

At this year's Australian Sheep & Wool Show the MacGowan's are representing South Australia, for the fourth time, with the merino pair.

But its Lorraine's love of fashion that brightens up the crowd at agricultural shows around the country. "I guess you could call me a bit of a 'fashionista' as I have always been interested in fashion and colour – I love colour," Lorraine says.

Lorraine's passion for fundraising, 'Miss Show Girl' judging, modelling and working for Simona Designs has meant fashion and wool have been a huge part of her life.



## **Top Woolcraft competitor Dot Vallence, of Wheeler's Hill, Victoria**

If Woolcraft had a chief executive officer or global head of communications, Dot would be a prime candidate. The 32-year veteran of all things Woolcraft is a passionate advocate of the soul-soothing qualities of taking the time to work with wool.

The Australian Sheep & Wool Show's 'day off to discover wool' is a perfect antidote to the frenetic pace of life, according to Dot.

"We are all so 'busy, busy' these days. I believe the resurgence in women working with and also wearing wool is about seeking a little bit more luxury – the luxury of time to knit, or weave, or spin and the luxury of wearing a beautiful natural fibre," Dot says.

"Working with wool has all the elements of what we may need right now – taking time to slow down a little and focus on something else than daily life, it can be very social, it can bridge generations and it's highly creative," Dot says.

Social is the word. Dot helps to organise Woolcraft's biggest national competition, is part of the 370,000 strong online community for knitters, Ravelry, and regularly attends the affectionately named 'Stitch & Bitch' groups and Knitting in Public Days.

