



Back to NATURE

Avoca Beach designer Lisa Carney is celebrating the beauty in imperfection with her new 'Sand to the City' collection.

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Lisa Carney Design collections have been charming their way around the world for more than 20 years. Based in Avoca Beach, globetrotter Lisa has had her collections featured numerous times on the runway for Mercedes Australian Fashion Week, exhibited in Paris and worn by well-known celebrities such as Kirsten Dunst and Nicole Kidman.

Lisa worked as a travel agent before her free spirit and wanderlust took her on many global adventures. But it was in Biarritz, the sophisticated French surf resort, where her career really took off.

The merchandise manager for Quiksilver Europe stopped her on the beach to ask about the jewellery she was wearing, which led to securing her brand Mamo Jo in partnership across 120 Quiksilver Boardrider stores in Europe.

Lisa then moved to Bali where she established and trained a team of artisans. Her business grew and she was supplying 240 retail stores, including her own stores in Bondi Beach and The Rocks in Sydney.

After 10 years of endless summers, Lisa moved to the UK, started a family and opened a store in the market town of Warwick. Although she is now based in Avoca Beach, she continues to travel extensively and create new collections. Winding back the clock, though, Lisa says she created her first piece when she was just four years old.

"It was a shell necklace made with treasured finds from a summer holiday by the sea," she says.

"Many years later I created a necklace using shells from a broken vintage shell lei that my great-aunt had bought me back from a holiday in Tahiti. This shell flower necklace went on to be the signature piece of my brand Mamo Jo, which is Caribbean for mermaid."

Working with her hands and expressing creativity has always been a part of Lisa's daily life. Her mum and six aunts loved sewing, painting and crafting and her grandfather was an industrial designer and inventor who encouraged ideas and creation.

"Grandma had a magnificent crystal collection that completely captivated me – the light shining into the glass display case created rainbows across the room," she says.

Having spent a lot of time in Biarritz and Bali, the resort lifestyle inspires her collections, which feature sunset beach tones and muted colours of coastline and surrounds. It is something that she likens to the burgeoning style of the Central Coast.

"We Coasties live a resort lifestyle too," she explains. "We want to wear ocean-inspired jewellery and cool, comfortable clothes made with natural fibres that look and feel great. I have added some fabulous scarves and wraps to my collection that I admit are more couture in that they lean more towards luxury and distinction rather than practicality and function.

"But that's fun! Silks and velvet for evenings out and cotton and linen for casual summer days and nights. These wraps are sheer and sexy and feel like a big hug when you wrap up in them."

After a long coastal lockdown, Lisa is celebrating returning from the "sand to the city". Her 'Let It Be' collection was inspired by being able to enjoy the arts and music performances again – fittingly, her work is now stocked at the Brisbane Powerhouse Performing Arts Theatre Boutique.

But it all begins with the ocean, Lisa says. Her new 'Heart' collection was created with the intention of showcasing nature's perfectly imperfect state of flux, influenced by our beautiful Bouddi National Park.

In local Aboriginal language, Bouddi also means 'heart' and Lisa found the beach treasure that she is using in the new collection at the national park's Maitland Bay.

"I have moulded these old broken shells and cast them into various metals. Shells that have been smashed on the rocks, tumbled by the waves for years and sanded by the ocean's floor and washed up. That 'heart of the shell' is the tough inner workings that we all naturally possess," she says.

"It's just like the Zen philosophy Wabi-Sabi. That is, to find beauty in broken or old things. A celebration of the perfectly imperfect. The lovely asymmetric pieces I found on the beach are brought to life in silver and gold."

Lisa says she wants everybody to feel empowered by nature. "We are all so busy and constantly in technology. What better way than to carry the reminder of nature on your fingers, around your wrist or neck, or to adorn yourself in jewellery and clothes that feel good?"

"Be it through the mystical magic of stones, textures in the jewellery from castings of shells or pebbles or a natural fibre like linen and cotton, dyed in the colours of the seaside at sunset, within all of my pieces is a spirit of nature that reveals itself and connects us all."

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