

renegade

game changers | thought leaders | rule breakers | style makers

COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 8
One Year Anniversary Issue

**IS THE WORLD
READY FOR THE
WEARABLE TECH
REVOLUTION?**

**MODEL
MOTHER
MEDIA MOGUL
MONEY MAKER**

martha

**INSIDE THE MIND OF AMERICA'S
FIRST FEMALE BILLIONAIRE
8500 PRODUCTS + GROWING**

**JOHN
CLEESE**
"AND NOW FOR
SOMETHING
COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT"

**WHEN
BAD THINGS
HAPPEN TO
GOOD PEOPLE**



FIERCE FASHION

IT WAS THE BEACH that lured Welsh couturier SARAH JOSEPH away from FAME in Britain to live on AUSTRALIAN soil. And it was also the beach that gave the ballsy DESIGNER her BIGGEST BREAK.

WORDS: MELANIE DIMMITT
PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT COPPA

Chasing the sun, golden-tressed surfer Sarah Joseph left a trail of celebrity clients in the UK and arrived on Australian shores penniless, with nothing but a suitcase full of “wild evening gowns” and an unshakable determination that this was where she would continue to grow Sarah Joseph Couture.

With her striking, transient style, fashioning exquisite bridal and evening wear that conjures everything from ethereal goddesses to risqué vamps, these diverse, intricate creations evoke their maker’s nomadic urges and boundless imagination – often manifesting in impulsive, emotionally charged flashes of inspiration – whether she’s behind a sewing machine or on her surfboard.

Daughter of a crochet artist, design has always been “an obsession” for Sarah. She studied pattern cutting before



donning a backpack and travelling the globe, returning to London on gaining entry to the then much-coveted fashion degree at Kingston. “They weren’t happy that I could make dresses,” she says of the prestigious university, “but I rebelled against that.”

First flirting with our shores after graduating with honours, Sarah worked alongside Maggie Sottero and Alex Perry before heading home for two years, eight months of which she spent creating bespoke couture gowns for rugby player James Hook’s fiancée Kimberley Tashara and her six bridesmaids. Widespread press coverage of the wedding sparked excitement around her designs.

“I was inundated with work,” she recalls, “dressing Miss Universe contestants and Bollywood stars.” But with the promise of sun and surf, she left the accolades – and the wet, misty mornings of Britain – for a life in Oz, hoping her design dreams would follow.

Sarah needn’t have worried. More media attention was around the corner, this time on marrying her partner, Paul, under a Moroccan Bedouin tent in her “dream dress” made from cottons and crochets embellished with turquoise semiprecious stones she found in the North African country.



The newlyweds returned to home soil (and sand) after their nuptials – heading straight to the water from their flight.

“I noticed flashbulbs to the side of the beach, which meant one thing,” she excitedly recalls. “Photo shoot!” Despite suffering symptoms of what later turned out to be salmonella poisoning, Sarah approached the crew, insisting they look at her designs and cheekily asked if they’d photograph them as well. “I ran to the car, dragged my suitcase across the sand and popped it open,” she recalls. “Their jaws dropped.” A quick change saw Sarah’s handiwork published within weeks of her arrival, but the gutsy designer hadn’t foreseen the challenge of starting from scratch on new turf.

“I took for granted how many people knew me in the UK,” she says, and surviving on Paul’s wage alone, found

machine that she bought “on special for youngsters learning to sew”. With patterns cut from newspaper and an ironing board recovered from a skip bin, she built her dream at all costs – on one occasion forgoing dinner to buy diamanté trim the next day.

Devastatingly, once ‘Retour à L’innocence’ was ready for the racks, retailers had been hampered by the global economic crisis. “One week I was asking if they wanted to stock my dresses,” she recounts with exasperation, “and the next I was calling them for alterations jobs!”

Undeterred, she got in touch with photographer Robert Coppa who was casting a designer for an alternative shoot. Sarah, in fact, was put out, and said, “Why haven’t you asked me to make something?” Robert replied that

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herself on a mattress with no bedding. “One night I used the lining in one of my gowns to cover me,” she reveals.

Wanting her dresses in shops, Sarah was designing “like crazy” for her first bridal collection, all on a basic sewing

he saw her as an elegant bridal wear designer. Her answer to this? The bondage dress. “I was so angry – I didn’t even draw it,” Sarah recalls, “it literally flashed through my mind straight away. I got ribbon and just made that dress.”>



A few days later, kinky creation in hand, she arrived unannounced at Robert's door, winning the shoot and resigning from any assumed 'design bracket'.

Admiring the ever-morphing offerings from Versace and Azzedine Alaïa, Sarah places importance on her versatility as a designer. "I pride myself on being unique and don't have a certain look or trend I follow," she says. Robert's photos appeared across multiple titles, and, with its black cut-out bodice, cheekily exposed derrière and billowing tulle skirt, Sarah's bondage dress sexed up the catwalk at Canberra's Fashfest. "I wanted to shock Australia with my designs," says Sarah. Shocked they were – and impressed, with extensive press coverage igniting a flood of orders.

A year in the capital saw Robert become a collaborator and business partner, his talents proving invaluable for Sarah's online presence. "I had a vision of what I wanted customers to see," she says, "but couldn't execute it myself because I'm completely computer illiterate." The "pen-and-paper sort of girl", now with the website and imagery she wanted, moved to Sydney and found her first stockist, Bridal Reflections. "My collections sit proud and strong there," she says.

"So many people have told me it's impossible to set up a business in fashion these days without a huge backing but I disagree, I believe that with a lot of hard

work, determination and a great product, the sky's the limit."

Within two weeks of her first collection being stocked, Sarah had several sales and inquiries. Her second collection was moving prior to its unveiling. "I had several sales off one design," she says, mindful of her

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*I just do what I want
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customers' desires. "I'm absorbing what they're asking for and able to create that." By contrast, her evening gowns afford a more experimental creative outlet. "I can just run wild with it," she says. "I'm a very creative designer – I could have easily done costume design." Working from a studio in the city, it's still just Sarah creating garments. "In a couple of months I'll have to start employing people. It's progressing in the way that I really want it to."

A walking contradiction, her business mind is as cautious as her creativity is bold. "You don't want to run before you

can walk," she says, "you've got to have the infrastructure to support you."

Her insistence on knowing every facet of the industry has granted her "full control" of the business.

"I've got that standard and quality behind me," she says, crediting her sewing and pattern making skills for nothing being lost in translation.

"Exactly what I want in my mind, I can get out of my garments." With infinite "crackers" up her sleeve, more shocks are on their way.

"I don't have any boundaries," she breezily avows, "I just do what I want to do and run with my eyes shut." ■

what an attitude...

- ✕ **confidence:** I've never feared speaking to anyone, celebrity or anything – I never treat anyone differently – that's where the confidence comes from.
- ✕ **opportunity:** Fashion, is so fast-paced, you've got to grab your opportunities.
- ✕ **strength and persistence:** I'm good at holding my head high and just keep rolling with it. I always swim upstream – I don't ever let go, don't ever give up.