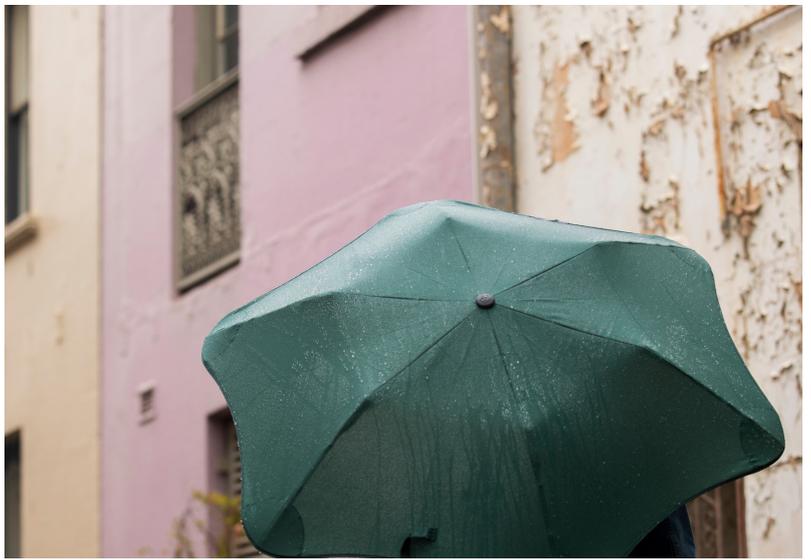


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How BLUNT umbrellas became the must-have accessory of every season

From the day Gene Kelly first began singing in the rain, we've all been wondering the same thing: how did he find time to sing, let alone tap dance, whilst braving the storm? Okay, maybe we haven't all been wondering about this. But there's sure to have been someone out there who, one day, desperately struggling to prevent their umbrella from catapulting backwards with the wind, becoming increasingly damp as they failed to shield themselves from the pouring rain, thought to themselves 'this would all be much easier if I was Gene Kelly.'

The battle between a formerly dry person and a failing umbrella is universally understood. It's a struggle we all relate to, mostly because the present-day iterations of the ancient invention all seem to be the same. Take a walk along any main city street during a storm and you'll see: umbrellas are facing the same structural issues they've always faced. As BLUNT founder Greig Brebner puts it "this was a product that was lost in time. It seemed like mass production had made them cheaper and faster, but no one had thought about making them better."

The idea for an outside-of-the-box umbrella came to Greig in the late 90s, when he left New Zealand to work in the UK. Walking down the rain-soaked streets of London became a daily occurrence and dodging the pointy end of thousands of umbrellas became part-in-parcel of his everyday life. "It was the danger, really, of those spikes coming at eye level. Thinking, 'how is this allowed in this day and age?'" he says of the initial spark of creativity that led to his invention. "I had no idea about the industry, I just thought 'bugger it, I'm going to do this'."

Having spent his childhood tinkering away in his Dad's shed, it was only natural Greig had grown up to be an engineer. After earning his degree and chasing a handful of ideas that hadn't quite panned out, he set his sights on an umbrella that actually - wait for it - worked. "I think it was just getting to London and being in a different environment and seeing umbrellas in a completely different light," he says. "The consumer experience was just... shit."

"And I always thought umbrellas, as a fashion item, were so undervalued. People will pay so much more for any type of fashion product, but when it came to umbrellas people were considering them like rags - a throwaway item." Wanting to create a product that looked good, worked effectively, lasted long-term and - most importantly - wouldn't poke an eye out on a busy street, Greig set out with plans to "radicalise" the umbrella game. But after 18 months of innovation, he had "nothing to show for it" and realised it was time to reconsider the source.

Going back to the drawing board with an idea of keeping everything "good" about classic umbrellas, Greig worked to fix the "bad" parts for years until he was sure his product had kicked things up a notch. With a fully-tensioned aerodynamic canopy to protect you from all conditions (including winds of up to 115 km/h), unique tips that open like their own mini-umbrellas to create superior performance and a sleek new look, he'd finished his mission. BLUNT was born.

"The thing with the BLUNT umbrella is that it's got a really tight canopy, so it's like a wing in the wind and structurally it's sound. It's down to that engineering," Greig reveals. "And because it's built better and the canopy is pulled tight, it just looks better as well. So it's an upgrade [from traditional umbrellas] and that's where the fashion element plays really well with the engineering."

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The old adage says to do one thing and do it well - and that's exactly what Greig and his team have done in the years since. They've upgraded the original model to include five varied sizes, not to mention a crowd-pleasing mix of muted classics, bold colours and wildly vivid artworks courtesy of collaborations with designers like Karen Walker and Studio Jasmine.

But the concept remains simple: create an umbrella that actually works, use top-notch materials and ensure customer satisfaction with a great repairs offering. If you're sitting there thinking to yourself, 'can an umbrella really be that good? Is it worth the extra dollars?' Greig has his answer ready for you. "People are getting a better consumer experience but they're also getting a better sustainable choice," he says. "When you buy BLUNT, you're buying it for a long time and there's something really in that. The market has grown amazingly because I think people understand the value point - if you buy 10 cheap umbrellas and they only last a year, you're better off getting one that can last [longer] and be repaired if something goes wrong."

BLUNT headed to Melbourne with a bevy of other impeccable Kiwi brands to be showcased in the Discover New pop-up in Chadstone in May 2021.

Yes, Melbourne, where the weather is so notoriously unpredictable it's become a well-worn cliché. But while having four seasons in one day can be fun at times - hey, look, more rain! - struggling with a broly remains the lowest item on most people's to-do lists. Greig's suggestion? See what all the BLUNT fuss is about.

"The sensory experience is almost like... people need to use it for themselves to get the full benefit. It looks spectacular and it's quite different from anything else," he says. "It's the wise choice."