



## **Iconic New Zealand designer Karen Walker on her eponymous brand and the pieces she's most excited by this season**

Karen Walker is one fashion brand that needs no introduction. What started as a self-made label in New Zealand in 1989 has grown into a globally renowned brand beloved for its 'eccentrically elegant' ready-to-wear, eyewear, jewellery, bags and fragrances.

Walker's signature androgynous style 'with a twist' ensures that every piece stands out. A contrasting splice of prints in her '70s inspired Supersonic sunglasses; an acorn pendant hanging delicately from a gold branch necklace; these are the markers of her distinctive designs that makes them coveted by fashionable it-girls across the world.

Walker's hard work and dedication to innovative design over the past 30 years has consistently placed her on The Business of Fashion's powerhouse BoF 500 and her pieces have been worn by the world's biggest stars including Sienna Miller, Rihanna and Jennifer Lopez. But the sight of seeing someone walk past on the street wearing one of her pieces still brings the most joy - "even more so" than seeing a celebrity don her designs.

Here, the designer talks of her eponymous brand as she brings the label to Melbourne's iconic Chadstone Shopping Centre as part of the New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE)'s ['Discover New' pop-up store](#).

### **Do you remember your earliest memory of a specific outfit or accessory that sparked your interest in fashion?**

The circular skirt my grandmother taught me how to make for my Barbie was a crucial moment in my development as a designer as it connected for me, for the first time, the concept of idea + execution = success.

### **Can you tell us about the very first piece you designed? Would you wear it now?**

The first piece I was commissioned to make (and got paid real money for) was a man-style shirt for a friend who needed something to wear when performing with his band. It was masculine with a big '70s collar and executed in ultra-feminine Liberty floral in pink/burgundy/cream. The masculine/feminine handwriting was set. I would totally still wear it today.

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**Your journey as a fashion designer began in the late '80s - what are some of the major changes you believe fashion has gone through in that time for the industry and the consumer?**

Everything's changed except what's at the heart of what I do: providing my community with interesting products, engaging stories and great experiences. How and what we deliver within those parameters has been reinvented many times over but our reason for being has stayed true.

**Anything you wish had stayed the same?**

No, I'm always excited to see change and to invent how I impact and am impacted by it.

**After more than three decades as a designer, you launched your first bridal collection in 2019, showing there were still new facets of design you wanted to explore. Is there anything else on the bucket list you want to try?**

My focus at present is 100% on refining what we already do rather than adding new projects.

**You've described your style as "chic-meets-eccentric" - how can others incorporate some of this ethos into their own style?**

It was actually Style.com who came up with that description and we happily grabbed its elegant and to-the-point way of describing what we'd always felt. I love seeing people's own take on this approach to style - whether it's including something they've bought from us or not!

**With three decades of work to look back on, do you ever draw from the archives for inspiration for a new collection?**

Yes. We have so many great shapes in the archive that we refer back to and refresh, reinvent, reapply. But, more importantly than individual designs is the overarching mood of the brand, its attitude and ethos, and that's there throughout everything we do and at all times.

**What styles and colour palettes are you gravitating towards as we head into winter this year?**

There's always black, navy, tan, off-white in our palette. Add to that this winter plenty of dusty pink and dusty blue.

**Which pieces from your current ready-to-wear collection are you loving right now?**

Our navy cotton voile shirt is my favourite right now.

**If you had to reach for one pair of your iconic sunglasses - from any collection - which pair would you pick?**

Right now, I'm especially enjoying the Celestial.

**When it comes to jewellery, there's a real bond between the wearer and the piece. So much so that people often feel "naked" without their favourite necklace or ring - why do you think that is?**

I think that if you wear an item of jewellery enough it becomes part of your muscle memory and you just feel off without it.

**There's a certain art to getting dressed - what's your best piece of advice for creating a great ensemble?**

I'm a big fan of a uniform that can be tweaked in small ways. For instance, my wardrobe's always got a carrot-leg black pant, a grey cashmere high neck sweater, a black Chelsea boot and a tan trench with ever-changing jewellery and eyewear.