



The Australian Sheep Breeders Association is delighted to launch their Women of Wool 2011 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 134th Australian Sheep & Wool Show in Bendigo on July 15 to 17.

The Women of Wool are inviting women to take Friday July 15 off to attend The Sheep Show's Laugh @ Lunch with comedian Cal Wilson, view high fashion and 'wearable art' fashion parades and see Australia's top Woolcraft competitors at their best.

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

Curator and author Charlotte Smith, of Sydney, NSW



Charlotte Smith is the custodian of an extraordinary collection of vintage clothes and accessories. In 2004, her godmother Doris Darnell, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, bequeathed Charlotte a collection of 3000 garments which included every aspect of a woman's wardrobe since 1720 to present day.

The Darnell collection has continued to grow through further bequests to more than 5500 pieces representing 23 different countries and is considered the largest private vintage clothing collection in Australia. Included are many internationally recognised 20th century designers such as Lucile, Vionnet, Dior, Chanel, Balenciaga, Pucci, Jean Muir, Zandra Rhodes, Westwood, Versace, Dolce & Gabana and Jil Sander among many other names.

"Without doubt, wool is the most luxurious fabric you would ever want to wear," Charlotte says.

"I work with historic and vintage garments and accessories every day. When I handle anything from my collection made from wool, history floods back and I am immediately transported

back to the decade or century of that item (could be a dress, pair of trousers, a hat, gloves or even a handbag).

“That is what is so special about wool for me. It is a fibre that has been used for thousands of years in fabrics that have adorned Roman gladiators and their beautiful women; it has graced the backs of dashing Georgian gentlemen living in grand houses in England; it was woven, dyed, embroidered and worn by Victorians on the East Coast of America and then at the turn of the 20th century it continued to be the fabric of choice.

“Demure cloche hats were made of felted wool and framed the porcelain faces of Agatha Christie heroines in 1920s; tailored and classic suits, licensed by Dior, were worn by classy Australian ladies in the 50s. The Jean Shrimptons and Twiggys of the world wore cute wool mini dresses in great colours in the 60s; Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson took wool to quirky new heights in the 70s and by the 90s, fashion designers like Donna Karan and Ermenegildo Zegna created wool clothes for the powerful elite around the world.

“Today, Jayson Brunson, Josh Goot, Akira and Michelle Jank are some of the designers commissioned by Australian Wool Innovation to create striking garments using Australian Merino wool,” Charlotte says.

“The story of wool begins with the land and a farmer, it moves on to the artisan or factory before meeting, as a bolt of fabric, the dressmaker, the tailor or fashion designer before ending up with a very happy customer. And this has been the story of wool for centuries and one which will continue for centuries to come. Wool has integrity.”

Woolgrower and show judge Georgina Wallace of Ross, Tasmania



Georgina Wallace, the first female president of the oldest continuously running show in the British Commonwealth, the famed Campbell Town Show, is a passionate advocate for the wool industry.

She has been on the committee of Tasmania's premier sheep and wool show for more than a decade and is the vice-president of the Stud Merino Breeders Association of Tasmania.

“Over the years I have been very passionate about wool, I believe it is such a wonderful fibre with fantastic properties and has a great future given that it is such a natural, clean, green fibre,” Georgina says.

Georgina and husband Hamish grew Superfine Merinos on their property ‘Uplands’, at Deddington in northern Tasmania, for 23 years before moving back to her family farm ‘Trefusis’ at Ross in 2007.

Georgina is the stud classer at ‘Trefusis’, an 18,000 acre property running superfine merinos, Hereford cattle and prime lambs, while judging at many shows, including Hamilton's Sheepvention, Melbourne Royal, Armidale and Balmoral shows.

“I've thoroughly enjoyed all those judging experiences - you meet so many wonderful people, see some great countryside and some terrific sheep.

"I'm a great believer that you never stop learning and it's always great to see what's going on outside your own back yard!" Georgina says.

Australian Woolcraft Competition organiser Chrystene Antonis, of Euroa, Victoria



As the Woolcraft representative on the executive of the Australian Sheep Breeders Association, Chrystene is the conduit to the wide world of all things Woolcraft including hundreds of passionate knitters, spinners, felters, weavers, crocheters, embroiderers and designers of ultra-funky 'wearable art'.

Chrystene's small team of hardworking volunteers coordinate more than 300 exhibitors in 58 class classes involving four national guilds, several schools and a hundred Woolcraft traders and demonstrators.

The Australian Woolcraft competition at the Australian Sheep & Wool Show has now grown to attract international representatives and a loyal, very vocal band of fans who congregate on the knitters social media mecca Ravelry, a site that boasts more than 1.3 million members.

During the year prior to the Sheep Show Chrystene works with many members of the Handweavers & Spinners Guild to prepare garments to showcase the fibre from the Feature Breed of that year's show. This year creations using wool from heritage breeds will be on display.

"I can't remember who taught me to knit; as a lefthander it must not have been easy for my mother, who I presume it was. It fostered my love of wool and natural fibres," Chrystene says.

She first joined the Handweavers & Spinners Guild in 1971 and says her love of wool and textiles has grown along with her love of gardening, painting and wholistic living. She was enjoying the antics of small herd of cashmere goats while working with their fibre when she decided to undertake a Diploma in Studio Arts (Textiles) at RMIT.

It was there she was introduced to Sheep Show and Woolcraft committee members seeking a someone special for an important role; overseeing the much-loved Kids Corner where hundreds of future Woolcrafters have learnt to spin a wheel and felt like an expert.

"Teaching children and many adult showgoers to have a love and appreciation for wool, the magic fibre that it is, is very rewarding," Chrystene says.

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 thirty 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 and guidance from Liz many entrants have gone onto successful careers in fashion.

Designer of knitwear label *CABLE MELBOURNE*, Georgina Austin (Sutton), of Melbourne, Victoria



The creative force behind one of Melbourne's most distinctive labels, Georgina Austin (Sutton) has earned a reputation as a leading light of Australian style. The designer has worked for some of Australia's most sought after brands, including a design stint at Country Road and a role as head designer for high-end boutique label Nicholson.

It was only a matter of time before fascination with the textural qualities of clothing led to the creation of her own label - *CABLE MELBOURNE* – which made instant waves as a knitwear brand of highly covetable investment pieces.

Georgina's innate understanding of the unique qualities of wool may be part of her DNA; her great, great grandfather was the founder of Thomas S Beaumont & Sons, a leading buyer of Australian superfine merino wool and the starting point of four generations of wool buyers.

Georgina is committed to keeping production in Australia and is proud her designs carry the Woolmark, which ensures the use of pure new wool and is recognised as a symbol of quality and reliability.

"I have specifically designed for women who are not concerned with fashion fads, yet aspire to be a little more stylish than the next person," Georgina says. "I wanted to create a modern look that is highly wearable, simple, yet somehow different. I want my customers to wear the brand with confidence."

Creative director of fashion label *Sabatini* Margi Milich of Sydney, NSW



Margi Milich is creative director and co designer for fashion label Sabatini, a family owned business founded in New Zealand by Zarko and Sonia Milich in the 1950s.

Margi studied classical music at Switzerland's Conservatory of Montreux but it was her passion for family and fashion that drew her back into what she calls the "highly contagious" knitwear business.

"Living in Europe made me realize how special and unique our product is. So 20 years ago - armed with a suitcase and 15 stylish, sexy pure wool garments - I approached selected stockists and the label flourished," Margi says.

"My inability to find a black ribbed pure wool sweater motivated me to make one ...because it's always what you can't find in a market that drives you to create one!"

She says the most rewarding time in her career came when Margi and her brother Tony showed at Paris's famed fashion week prompting a rush for the label's luxurious woollen designs – they secured 120 high end fashion stores throughout the world including Henri Bendel, Barneys and Harvey Nichols.

"The Woolmark is one of the world's best known textile brands – and Sabatini was there right from the conception as a wool partner since 1967. I think modern knit dressing has developed, changing the face of fashion and Sabatini has been a leader in creating progressive and adventurous collections with each new season," Margi says.

