



Photography—Forged In  
The North

Words—Philippa Prentice

# Lola Varma



The mind behind understated Australian bridalwear brand Lola Varma explains how her aesthetic developed, and what she's learned about love along the way.

For designer Courtney Illfield, authenticity is everything. She just wants you to be yourself — and turn heads while you're at it. Drawing on international accomplishments as a wedding, fashion, music and extreme sports photographer, she and a friend launched Lola Varma in 2016, making contemporary pieces for self-assured brides, pieces that reflected their real-life look, stripping away traditional flourishes to leave only a showstopping, sensual simplicity. Her creations are sold online and throughout

Australia, Europe, and the US, and will soon be available in New Zealand, too.

**TJ:** How did your photography lead to the creation of Lola Varma?

*Courtney:* Photographing weddings revealed a common thread: that brides struggled to enjoy shopping for their wedding dresses. They didn't feel that the 'norm' — tradition — represented them and their day-to-day style. They wanted outfits that were unique and felt like home.

The Lola Varma bride isn't afraid of what others think. She's confident in who she is and wants to celebrate her and her partner's love in a way that reflects their values. The typical feedback I get from Lola Varma brides is that they felt like themselves on their wedding day.

**TJ:** What is it about the minimalist aesthetic that appeals?

*Courtney:* To me, minimalism — not just in weddings, but in design and interiors, too — allows





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people's personality to be seen, rather than assumed. And a minimal approach can exude a calming vibe. A minimal outfit allows you to add flair with accessories and statement pieces, aligning your wedding outfit with your own style and character. (I suggest searching for vintage accessories. One of my favourite stores is Vestiaire Collective.)

**TJ:** As well as dresses, you make beautiful separates, too.

*Courtney:* Women's bodies come in all shapes and sizes, and in my experience a top-and-skirt combination can flatter and fit more precisely and comfortably. Another important factor is that the wedding industry can be quite wasteful. As well as minimising your consumption and doing your bit for the world, separates allow you to wear your wedding outfit again. Woohoo!

**TJ:** Where are your pieces made?

*Courtney:* Lola Varma garments are laser cut,

ensuring minimal waste, and handmade in Perth. The majority of our fabrics and accessories are sourced in Australia and New Zealand. I tend to favour silk due to its aesthetic, wearability and breathability, but a handful of garments are made from bamboo, which is more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

**TJ:** What was the inspiration behind your exquisite new collection, *Midnight Sun*?

*Courtney:* Romance. Simple as that.

**TJ:** Tell us about your recent showcase in New York...

*Courtney:* I held showings in my New York apartment and at a trunk show at Brooklyn store The One Bridal. Women flew up from Florida for the show and I even had a New Zealander visit. Many unexpected and exciting things happened while I was in New York and I'm so thrilled that Lola Varma will now be stocked at The One Bridal

and accessible to New York women and beyond. Our exclusive stockist family has recently grown and in early 2020, we'll become even more accessible.

**TJ:** Shopping for a wedding gown can be a sentimental experience. What is it like to be part of that?

*Courtney:* I'm a romantic at heart and cry all the time, in fittings and behind the camera! Something this journey has taught me about love is to be patient. I've met many different women who've shared their stories with me and made me realise that the puzzle comes together when it's ready.

**TJ:** What advice do you give brides?

*Courtney:* Keep things simple, in all ways, not just the outfit. The less fuss, the more opportunity you'll have to be engaged in the moment and feel the power of vulnerability. Stay present, comfortable and true to you. And read Esther Perel's book *Mating in Captivity*!