
Career profile

Masters of one

New label Harris Tapper does shirts – full stop. Philippa Prentice learns why.

PHOTOGRAPHY ANGIE HUMPHREYS



It takes a certain self-assurance to commit to a favourite style and embrace it like you can't get enough. With a confidence and maturity that belies their years, Auckland's Sarah Harris and Lauren Tapper are doing just that, perfecting and reimagining a perennial garment as much to fill their own closets as anyone else's.

Their new label, Harris Tapper, delivers what every stylish woman worth her salt needs: beautifully cut shirts. Catering to our insatiable desire for novelty while crafting a high-end product, the pair are forgoing the traditional model of large seasonal collections in favour of releasing concise edits in the first week of every month.

Their approach delivers all the benefits of fast fashion, yet each shirt is ethically produced and built to last.

Sarah and Lauren may be focused on just one item, but they each come armed with multiple skill sets. Sarah (32) brings graphic design qualifications and experience working as a brand manager for Stephen Marr, a buyer for Urban Outfitters in London and, more recently, a brand manager for Topshop NZ. That's where she met Lauren (26), who was doing PR for Topshop, having studied fashion design before working at fashion and lifestyle PR agency Showroom 22 and in store at Karen Walker, with some visual merchandising thrown in for good measure.

With the world as their oyster, what was it about shirts? "First of all," says Sarah, "you can wear them throughout the entire year. They're not a trend item, they're not a fad, they're a staple piece."

"The shirt is the cornerstone of every woman's wardrobe," confirms Lauren. "I wear one almost every day. No matter who you are, when you get dressed in the morning you want to look good, and we're trying to make that easy. You don't have to put on 10 layers to feel stylish. You can just put on a shirt with a classic pair of pants and feel amazing."

Harris Tapper launched last December with 12 looks. "We just wanted to say: 'This is what we're about,'" says Lauren. "We're

OPPOSITE Lauren Tapper (on left) and Sarah Harris are happy to get shirty every day. RIGHT The Lizard shirt, the Port shirt and the Ripple Crop shirt. All Harris Tapper garments are made here in New Zealand.



not making a massive brand statement at the start of the season; we're offering what the consumer loves right now and what's relevant at this point in time."

Doing one thing well means the pair can devote themselves to getting a flawless fit. They're their own crash-test dummies, says Lauren. "I'm wearing a sample now."

The plain white shirt is an essential for us all, but what Harris Tapper does equally adroitly is to create directional variations of standard styles that are as suitable for special occasions as they are for everyday.

"If you want to differentiate yourself from the person next to you, it's those details that can do that," says Sarah. Harris Tapper also provides the ideal opportunity to broaden your sartorial horizons without taking a huge risk: try an oversized cuff here or a pussy bow there without straying too far from your comfort zone.

True to this timeless garment's allure, their friends and mums alike wear Harris Tapper pieces. "They're appealing to everyone because they're open to interpretation depending on how you like to dress," says Sarah.

And what do you wear them with? "Everything!" she exclaims. "We definitely have a brand look, which is simple and pared back, but we love seeing how people interpret our clothes. It's one of the most exciting things about being a designer."

Quality materials are naturally very important for Harris Tapper. "We are pretty fussy," says Sarah. "Our fabrics have to feel nice on the body, look good, wash well and wear well. We test a lot of factors for the customer so they're not disappointed and to ensure a lasting product."

Production takes place at a couple of local factories, something the women love as it enables them to talk to the staff daily and visit every week. "That's the cool thing about right now: it's just Lauren and I,

so we're able to see it all first-hand," says Sarah. "As we get bigger, we'll still have that quality control in place, but the beauty of being so small at the moment is we can see every single working part."

Being the bosses is the best, but these early stages of becoming a business have had their challenges. In the months before the launch both women were also working part time and, without a studio, various lounges around town became their temporary workspaces. "We'd go to my parents' house, make a massive mess, then have to pack it all up again and travel to Lauren's house," says Sarah. These days, HQ is a dedicated office space, but they're already looking for a larger studio.

Harris Tapper is stocked in leading Auckland boutiques Scotties and Muse and Wanaka's 47 Frocks, but is easily accessible for those based elsewhere. "It's actually more exciting [than traditional models] for people whose only option is to buy online because there's new product on our

website all the time, as opposed to quarterly or six-monthly," says Sarah. "We've also made it as easy as possible for people to buy off the website: there's free shipping within New Zealand and free returns if you change your mind within 14 days."

For all their thinking outside the box, the Harris Tapper business model is no gimmick. "Since designing these pieces, they're all we wear, because we love them," says Sarah. "They're quality and we really believe in them."

"Whereas in the past I might have struggled to find something to wear, now I can go straight to these shirts," says Lauren.

You could live your entire life in Harris Tapper, I suggest. "I hope so," says Sarah. "Some of the most stylish women I know have a uniform and make it their own."

Finally, a cure for having a bulging wardrobe yet 'nothing' to wear. "Fill it with shirts," says Sarah, "and you'll always have something." ■

harristapper.com

Favourite things



Sarah: 1. *Rails* (2014) by Matt Arbuckle, from Tim Melville Gallery. 2. Niod Photography Fluid, \$60. **Lauren:** 3. Wandler bag, \$1317. 4. Becca Ombre Nudes eye palette, \$40. 5. Erdem Akan Mr & Mrs Night Set carafes, \$169 set of two, from North.