

STYLE



Heathermary Jackson with daughter Chloe.

EVOLUTION

Heathermary Jackson has spent decades at the epicentre of the fashion world. Now 51, the New Zealand stylist tells Catherine Sylvester how she is refocusing to move forward.



Launching her styling career in London, Jackson later moved into the prestigious role of fashion director at the epitome of innovative and trend-setting 90s cool, *The Face* magazine.

After 30 years in the business, Heathermary Jackson no longer attends the annual fashion shows that were once such an important staple of her working life. She jokes that too many influencers now take up space and that anyway, she's too short to see past them.

The reality is that, like many who find themselves dancing into their sixth decade, the diminutive New York-based stylist and fashion director has reached one of life's pivotal moments where priorities are reassessed and refined; a time when reflection on where we've been intersects not only with our current circumstances, but with the issues of importance that impact our daily lives, and those of the ones we love.

It's this convergence of life both past and present that have provided Jackson with the gentle nudge towards new ventures and instigated a refocus of where her energies are best spent.

Navigating her late 40s in the middle of a pandemic, and the coming out of her daughter as transgender during Christmas of 2020 caused Jackson to look back, in order to move forward.

Launching her career in London styling for the irreverent and creative culture magazines *Dazed & Confused* and *i-D*, it wasn't long before Jackson moved into the prestigious roles of fashion editor then

fashion director at the epitome of innovative and trend-setting 90s cool, *The Face* magazine.

Her collaborative portfolio reads like a who's who of one of art and fashion's most exciting periods, the 90s and early 2000s. Names from the giants of photography – Steven Klein, Peter Lindberg, Cass Bird, and Terry Richardson – pop up in conversation.

"Terry's shoots would probably be the most fun experiences I had on set," the New Zealand-born creative says. "We always shot celebrities, and the sense of joy and community was so real working with him."

It was Richardson she collaborated with on one of singer Amy Winehouse's last shoots.

"Amy was amazing to work with, so fun to dress as she was quirky and interesting," Jackson reflects. "But it was also a crazy day – a bit disturbing and sad." Referring to Winehouse's issues with drugs and alcohol, Jackson says, "Most people keep their stuff hidden, but she was very upfront about her personal life."

Based in New York since 2001, Jackson's styling has featured in magazines, music videos and commercials. Inspired by her love of vintage fashion, she created *Brownstone Cowboys* in 2012. Originally a website for those looking to purchase high-end, pre-loved fashion, she is in the process of turning it

into an archive of garments to rent to stylists. "It feeds my urge to shop for vintage," she says. "When in New Zealand earlier this year, I scoured every local source to buy these things, though it's getting harder now with everything being fast fashion."

The topics of sustainability, politics, mortality and being of service are clearly important to her, coming up regularly in conversation. We first meet in the Pāpāmoa home Jackson owns as a base for her trips to New Zealand to visit her mother, who lives locally. The solo-mum shares what it's like to truly have time to herself for the first time in 13 years. With daughter Chloe, 16, in an educational programme in the north-east of the States, Jackson reflects on the personal journey she's taken these past few years.

"I broke up with Chloe's dad when she was three and I realise that since then I've been living in crisis management mode," says Jackson. "I never wanted to rely on anyone, so it's been up to me to afford everything we need, to find someone I can totally trust to look after her when I travel for work, and to be here to support mum. It's been a huge juggle and I'm just realising now what type of survival state I've been in."

Propelled into securing US citizenship by feelings of redundancy to effect change when Trump was elected, she jokes that though excited her first time voting, the fact Trump's signature was on her citizenship certificate slightly dampened the moment.

George Floyd's murder at the hands of police, the pandemic and Chloe's coming out all made 2020 a seminal year for Jackson.

"Through Covid my relationship with the fashion industry changed. After Floyd was killed I felt like I couldn't not be in the conversation; I had to be openly political about social justice. I had to be the opposite of racist."

Launching the online magazine for *Brownstone Cowboys* means she is able to provide a platform for the issues she's passionate about.

"The magazine focuses on the positive things people are doing; it's there to spread goodness, not misinformation," Jackson says. "We also do small collaborations and editorials with sustainable brands, which are a fun way to bring these people up in the industry and spread the word about what they do."

When war broke out in Ukraine, *Brownstone* organised a sale, with profits going to assist a Ukrainian woman Jackson met through social media to secure safe passage out of the country. Contributions also went towards the rebuilding of shelters for horses displaced by bombing in the region.

Jackson offers the *Brownstone Cowboys* studio as a meeting place to various causes, such as Abortion Access Front, founded after Roe vs Wade was overturned, by ex-*Daily Show* writer Liz Winstead.

"Part of my premeditation was to help in this way – to offer space for those involved with fighting social injustices," explains Jackson. "When something impacts you directly, it creates a focus. Transgender rights, the Dobbs decision. It's been scary, but less so if I can help people."

We speak next when Chloe is still out of State, and Jackson is back in New York tied up with navigating insurance companies and the astronomical cost of health care. Although she loves New Zealand and can see herself growing older here, she knows that will not be for some time yet.

"New York, even if it's expensive, has lots of gender-affirming care options for Chloe, and the



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sense of community, acceptance and safety for her is amazing.”

Jackson is looking to undertake online study to qualify as a social worker, so she can put to use her passion for helping trans kids and their families by sharing what she's learned through her and Chloe's journey.

Still engaged in the fashion world and frequently brought on as a consultant to various brands, she finds this work fulfilling as she's included in the creative process from inception to completion, as opposed to short stints freelancing. She would love to take on consultancies with NZ brands as it would mean she could live out her dream of being able to spend part of the year here and follow the summers.

For now, Jackson will continue to pursue the best care possible for her daughter, create spaces for those fighting for social justice and the environment, and make the long journey home to spend time with her mother. And maybe, someday soon, she will be able to put her feet up on the deck of her beachside home in Aotearoa, and just breathe. Until the next venture comes along.