

Priceless Fletcher Jones coat that fits us all



Designer Jack Hancock brings out his bespoke Fletcher Jones Memorial Coat as part of the fashion parade before the Fabrication II auction. Image: Kim Sargent-Wishart.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] Moments of magic happen when they are least expected which is, of course, what makes them so special.

And such a moment happened Saturday night (19/9), under the stars, in the chilly breezeway next to The Artery, in Warrnambool, when a small group of people bought a coat for the community.

This was no ordinary coat.

Like all of the other items up for sale at [the Fabrication II auction](#) that night, the coat was made of unwanted offcuts of

vintage Fletcher Jones fabrics that had been retrieved by members of the art collective, The F Project, after the Fletcher Jones factory closed.

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Except these offcuts were made of the finest cashmere and wool, designed and made in the United Kingdom exclusively for Fletcher Jones' suiting when the company was at its heights and known for its clothing of enduring quality.



The Merri and Hopkins rivers on the back of the coat: Image Jack Hancock.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] Y
[dropcap]oung [clothing designer Jack Hancock](#), who grew up in Warrnambool and is now finding his way in Melbourne, knew this fabric was special and the mere thought of it being destined for a dumpster made him almost weep.

Jack took these offcuts and created something exquisite: a single-button, double-breasted coat that fitted across the shoulders, but was deliberately “shapeless” across the hips so that it could be worn by either a man or a woman. The collar flipped up to reveal a splash of bright orange, a daring bolt of colour.

Turned, the back of the coat revealed an aerial view of the veins of Warrnambool – its waterways – the Merri and Hopkins rivers flowing toward the sea.

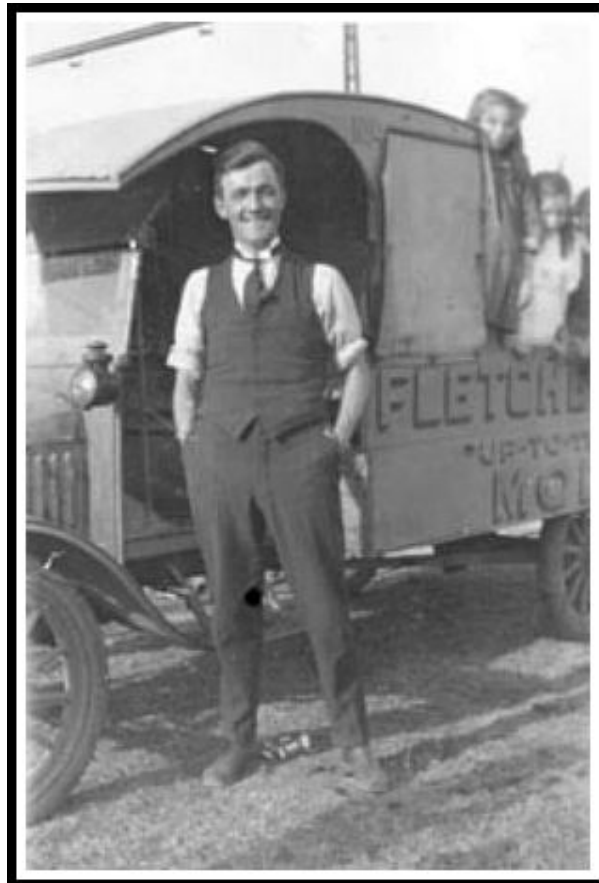
Each river was hand-sewn, stitch by gorgeous stitch, using silk thread.

This was a coat of fairytales, of fantasy and of Fletcher Jones.

[learn_more caption="Read more about the coat here"] ...The internal structure of this wool/cashmere garment is supported by woven horsehair canvas, a traditional suiting canvas used to maintain form. Unlike contemporary suiting and coating construction, these breast plates were mounted against the wools by hand, using needle and thread. The lining is a combination of silk fabrics for the body and shirting for the sleeve. As part of my own process, I strive to maintain these traditional techniques whilst experimenting with new themes. This coat could be worn casually on a day to day basis or kept as a special garment. It is intended to last for a long period of time and does not draw themes from fashion or trends. Investing in a coat like this could be likened to the purchase of a set of fine silver cutlery or a tea service of fine bone china. Both should be used and enjoyed, and with care, will

one day be given to somebody else who will do the same.
[/learn_more]

Jack, who is 24, stood nervously to the side, shifting from foot to foot, as he waited and waited and waited for his coat, the last item of the night, to go under the hammer. Would it sell?



A young Fletcher Jones in his days as a hawker. Image: Screen Australia.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] A
[/dropcap]t 24, Jack is one year older than Sir Fletcher was when he set out in a hawker's van to sell his wares around Victoria, having been entranced by the world of the tailor.

"The first time I saw a tailor, tape around the neck, pin cushion clipped on his forearm, a chest full of tape and scissors and things, I was spellbound," Sir Fletcher wrote in his memoir, *Not by Myself*.

To see Jack standing on the sidelines last night, doubting himself, wondering what would unfold, was to see a 2015 version of a young Fletcher Jones about to set forth on his destiny.

Auctioneer **Gary Webb** opened the bidding at \$500. It then climbed to \$800, \$1000 and stalled, still below the reserve.

And then the magic happened.



Roy Reekie, left, inspects the exquisite coat made by Jack that he helped purchase for the community.
Image: Madeleine Peters.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] W
[/dropcap]arrnambool identity **Roy Reekie**, together with a bidder who would prefer to remain unnamed, and *Bluestone Magazine*, all decided there and then that this coat needed to be bought and it needed to be owned by the community.

The three of us all bid independently, but knowing we would all contribute to the final cost – \$1400, \$1500, \$1800,

\$1900...\$1995...sold!

And with the fall of the gavel Warrnambool now has a very special coat – the Fletcher Jones Memorial Coat – that personifies all that Sir Fletcher stood for: quality, care, community, endeavour and taking time.

Jack, it must be said, was shaking.

It is a coat that, both Jack and the buyers hope, will eventually be displayed at the former Fletcher Jones factory but, as Jack insists, in the meantime it “must be worn”.

And it *will* be worn.

But by whom? When, and where?

Wait and see.

[box]While Bluestone would love to say we made a major contribution to this coat, in reality we only made a small contribution. Roy Reekie and the other donor were the major contributors. The Fabrication II auction is a major fundraiser for The Artery and F Project.[/box]

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