

HARPER'S BAZAAR

NOVEMBER 2010

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PRINT POST APPROVED 255003/00001

THINKING FASHION

# Harper's BAZAAR

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Lord Howe Island inspired milliner Stephen Jones's new collection.

## Drifting & DREAMING

Milliner to the stars and Myer Fashions on the Field judge **STEPHEN JONES** falls head over heels in love with the jewel that is Lord Howe Island

Stephen Jones.



I'd headed to Australia for the opening of my exhibition, *Hats: an Anthology* by Stephen Jones for London's Victoria and Albert Museum, at Queensland Art Gallery. And after a week of non-stop interviews, meetings and events, I was shattered: I needed some R&R.

Brisbane may be on the doorstep of the Great Barrier Reef, but on recommendation of Oz-o-phile Marion Hume, my partner and I climbed into a tiny Qantas plane and headed out to a dot in the Pacific: Lord Howe Island.

I felt as though I was in a film as we scraped past the volcanic mountains and landed on the abbreviated runway. A five-minute ride to the luxurious Capella Lodge later and I was ensconced in a sumptuous armchair, champagne in hand, looking at the most extraordinary view of fluttering palm trees against a shimmering lagoon, and emerald grass studded with grazing black cows.

The whole island is dominated by two foreboding mountains, Mount Gower and Mount Lidgbird, home to myriad sea birds. Alarmingly, when I was cycling from Capella to the most perfect beach in the world, Cobby's Corner, I met a birdwatcher from Warrington, northern England. (I came from the other side of the world. What was he doing here?)

I understand the mountains were scaled regularly by overly healthy antipodeans

and not just to pluck feathers from the bottoms of the unsuspecting tropic birds. Pixie and Kerry, owners of Pinetrees Resort Hotel, told me their childhood hats were decorated with these feathers, believed to be good-luck charms.

Pinetrees is an extraordinary place and, much like the rest of Lord Howe Island, a little like stepping back in time. A gong for dinner and a bowling club. Packed lunches with egg sandwiches and an apple. Houses and cars unlocked. A 20-kilometre-per-hour speed limit and my favourite, the Lord Howe Island Museum, home to the Coral Cafe and a wonderful if slightly dysfunctional display of charming memorabilia and fascinating history.

The island has been a whaling station, a kentia palm-tree nursery, a flying-boat refuelling stop and the most southerly reef in the world. Remember *Finding Nemo* features the East Australian Current? Well that's why the Howe lagoon is a hot-tub temperature of 22°C.

As well as R&R, I went to Lord Howe for inspiration; the island was to be the starting block for my spring 2011 collection. Technically my collections are ranges of hats, but really they're a group of ideas. So many of my hats are for formal occasions and the London season — Ascot, Cowes, Henley — but there, for the first time in years I was able to relax, and that got me thinking of hats to wear for a day at the beach, an afternoon under a parasol, a night under the stars.

The most fascinating thing was walking at dusk through the limpid dark green of the jungle. Cooling, airy and relaxing; the background to spring 2011. Beachcombing around the lagoon was equally inspiring; rocks weathered by the elements, broken shells, and driftwood that suggested Issey Miyake's pleated twisted dresses from the '90s. I could see driftwood was becoming a key element as I had also seen in it as a motif in the work of British painter Marion Adnams (my recent discovery), whose paintings from the 1940s seemed as surreally picturesque as Lord Howe itself.

On the way back home from this charmed island, leap-frogging as I did from Sydney to London via a fitting at Dior in Paris, my mind started to liquefy all these different influences and spin out a hat. An abstract green whoosh of tulle; micropleated raw silk twisted like a branch; sculpted white arcs of sheer straw describing shell-like forms (hopefully not too Sydney Opera House); and for the finale, revisiting the Queen's hats for the royal tour of Australia in 1954, so a touch of sulphur-yellow wattle, too. ■

Capella Lodge, [www.lordhowe.com](http://www.lordhowe.com); Pinetrees Resort, [www.pinetrees.com.au](http://www.pinetrees.com.au). Stephen Jones will judge Myer Fashions on the Field on Oaks Day, November 4.

Surf, sand and pure relaxation at Pinetrees.



Pacific gem: the view from a Capella suite.