

YOUR *ex*

FORMERLY EXPRESS MAGAZINE



Spring
Design
Trends

Sexiest Rides on Four Wheels

Build Your Dream Home

THE FIGHT FOR D.R.A.G

SILO STARS ON SAVING QUEER SPACES

Exclusive
Stranger Things'
Dacre Montgomery

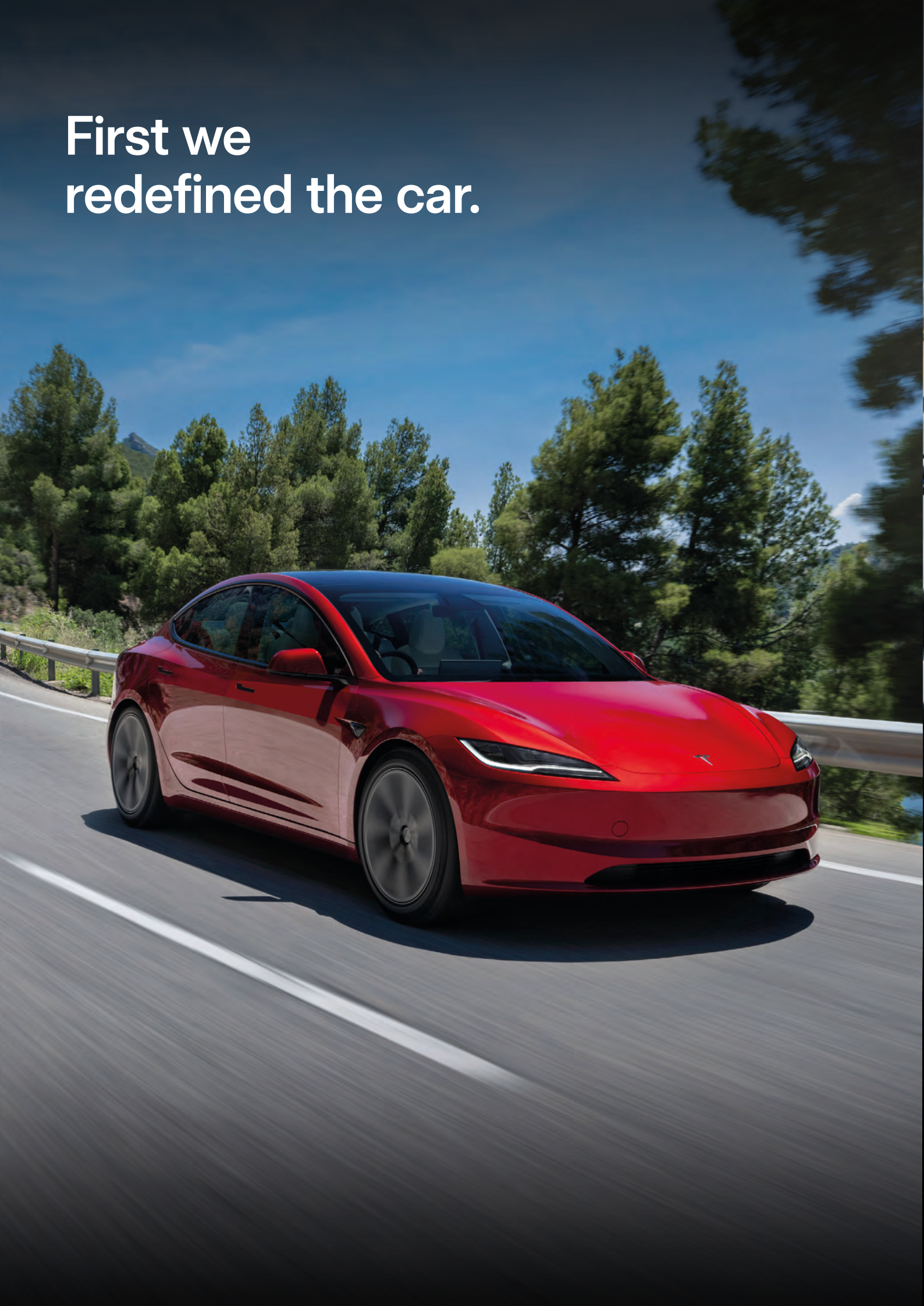
The World's Greatest
Arts Festival

How You Can
Help Protect
Human Rights

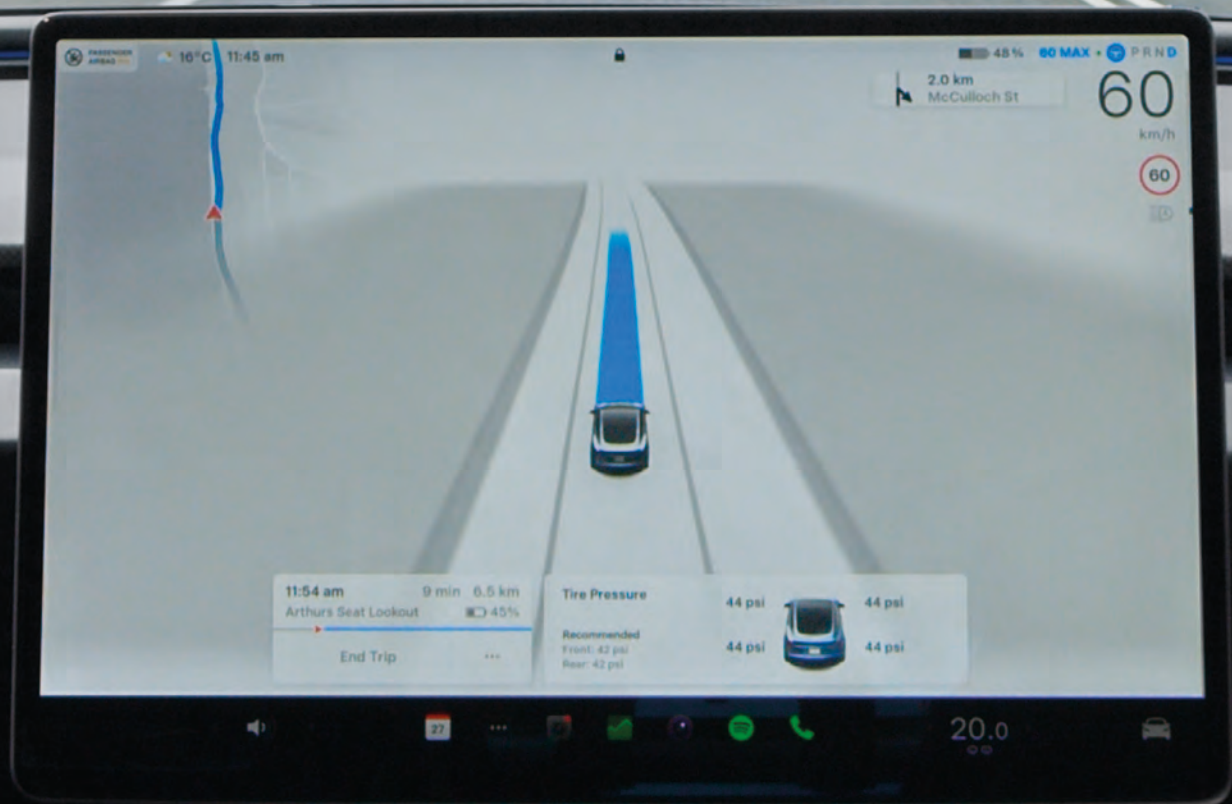
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G.J. Gardner. HOMES

FROM THE EDITOR



It's Time To Use *YOUR EX*

October is an exciting month for us as we take a bold new step forward with the launch of our brand-new website yourex.co.nz

This fresh online space has been designed to connect, inform, and celebrate our community like never before. At its heart is our Online Directory and Events Portal, two tools built to help local businesses and organisations shine. Whether you're looking to raise your profile, connect with new customers, or showcase what's on in your region, these platforms make it easy and affordable.

Businesses can now list in our Online Directory from just \$69 per month, ensuring your brand is front and centre when our readers are searching for trusted local services. And if you've got an event to share, you can reach our community directly by listing it on our Events Portal from just \$99.

We're proud to bring you a platform that not only supports our readers, but also empowers businesses and event organisers to grow and thrive.

Olly & Matt



COVER | **SLAY WEST & HUGO GRRRL**
SHOT BY **TOAKI OKANO**

YOUR *ex*

UNAPOLOGETICALLY QUEER

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ANGUS MCDUGALL

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DR MATARORIA LYNDON

is the Co-Founder and Director of Population Health & Equity at Tend. He's also a public health doctor and senior lecturer, championing inclusive healthcare for our rainbow whānau.



This publication has been printed by Webstar, a Toitū enviromark diamond certified company and a winner of a Green Ribbon Award "Minimising our Waste".

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Family Bar's double decade celebration brings big names, glamour and glitz, the Purchas Cup launch attracted gay rugby hunks from across the Tasman, G.A.Y. & Pink Pony bring the party, and Eagle Bar gets everyone excited!

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PHOTO: ARAPETA HAKURA



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FAMILY'S LEGACY OF LOVE

Family Bar marked 20 glittering years with a night that brought together celebrities, politicians, drag royalty, and community stalwarts under one roof. Hundreds packed the iconic Karangahape Road venue, celebrating two decades of queer resilience, identity, and joy. The dance floor pulsed with nostalgia and pride as dazzling drag shows and DJs lit up the night, creating an electric yet intimate atmosphere. More than just a party, the milestone was a heartfelt tribute to a cornerstone of Aotearoa's LGBTQ+ history—a place where chosen families were forged, careers launched, and memories made. Here's to Family: still thriving, still fabulous.



OUT & ABOUT



Family Bar & Nightclub
270 K Road, Auckland.
PHOTOS | TUX HIKA

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FROM LUXE TOUCHES TO OUTDOOR LIVING



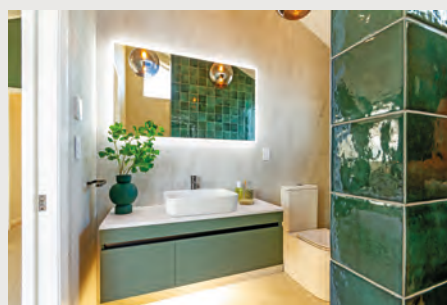
G.J. Gardner's Top Trends for 2026 reflect not just what's fashionable, but what makes a house feel like home – inviting, stylish, and uniquely tailored to your lifestyle.

As we step into 2026, Kiwi homeowners are embracing bold style choices and timeless functionality in equal measure. From moody colour palettes and luxe finishes to hidden sculleries and feature walls, the homes of today are all about personality, practicality, and creating spaces that feel distinctly yours. Outdoor living also remains a cornerstone of New Zealand design, with seamless indoor-outdoor flow continuing to shape the way we live and entertain.



MOODY COLOUR PALETTES:

A return to the dark side! A resurgence of love for dark and moody vibes is on the rise. Showcasing a minimal and sleek style, this colour palette is sure to create a standout feature in the home, and combining it with statement lighting is sure to wow anyone.



GREEN TONES:

Green has been a go-to for a few years now, with many of our showhomes incorporating this popular colour. While green is said to have a calming effect, we can't help but get excited when we see these gorgeous hues as feature walls and cabinetry!

LUXE TOUCHES:

A little glitz and glam has been popping up in our showhomes. We've seen lots of statement lighting, feature walls, luxurious bathrooms, and even a hidden bar and wine cellar in our Rodney West showhome.



HIDDEN SCULLERIES:

Hidden sculleries are becoming a popular feature that provides both functionality and style to any kitchen. Concealed behind what looks like another pantry door lie endless opportunities – hide mess from guests, extra space for a large household, an extra sink or fridge, and plenty of additional storage. These secret little hideaways are definitely growing in popularity.



FEATURE WALLS:

Feature walls have been a trend for a few years now, but this year has seen the resurgence of wall panelling. Combining panelling with bold colours like green and blue, or popular textured effects like limewash or brick, and subtle patterned wallpapers are taking this trend up a notch.

INDOOR–OUTDOOR FLOW:

Perhaps not a trend, but a major priority for Kiwi-style living is indoor–outdoor flow. Prioritising the flow from indoor spaces like the kitchen to outdoor dining and lounges creates the perfect space for entertaining and the typical Kiwi summer BBQs – plus the ability to open up the spaces and bring the outdoors in.

OUTDOOR AREAS:

Outdoor areas have long been a key feature in



Kiwi-style living, and today, they are seen as a top priority for many homeowners. The focus on seamless indoor–outdoor flow makes these spaces ideal for entertaining, especially during the long summer months filled with barbecues and gatherings. Connecting indoor areas, such as kitchens, to outdoor dining and lounge areas creates the perfect setting for socialising and relaxation, allowing for a continuous flow between the two.

Designs that make the most of sun exposure and the home's location offer a natural integration between the indoors and outdoors. This connection helps to bring the beauty of the outdoors inside, creating an open, airy space that is ideal for any occasion.

Homes like Bespoke in Brooklands and Te Awanui Lodge truly exemplify the benefits of outdoor living.

The Taranaki showhome, Bespoke in Brooklands, features a stunning sunken fire pit, offering a perfect space for entertaining. Surrounded by native trees and scenic landscapes, it is easy to imagine a lively evening with friends and family, making the most of the beautiful surroundings.

Meanwhile, Te Awanui Lodge in Tauranga North makes excellent use of its kitchen layout and deck space. A fold-out kitchen window and outside serving shelf make this home ideal for outdoor dining. Whether soaking up the morning sun with a coffee and cake or hosting a summer brunch, this practical feature enhances the indoor–outdoor flow, creating a functional yet stylish space for everyday enjoyment.

These homes are designed to inspire, showing just how much joy can be had in outdoor living. They present endless possibilities for Kiwi families to embrace the best of both indoor comfort and outdoor freedom.

Ready to bring these trends into your dream home? Talk to your local G.J. Gardner team today (or visit www.gjgardner.co.nz) and design a home that captures your style, suits your lifestyle, and inspires you every day.

YOUR NEXT COLOUR CRUSH



Resene presents the interior hues guaranteed to slay this spring!

Colour has entered its main character era. This season, we're not blending into the background, we're sashaying front and centre with hues that are bold, soft, seductive, and serving all the looks. Whether your vibe is And Just Like That sophistication or Drag Race drama, Resene's latest palette is here to turn your home into its own fabulous runway.

Saturated realness.

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CATEGORY IS: SATURATED REALNESS

She's bold, she's brilliant, she's Resene Resolution Blue. Pair her with dusky, romantic Resene Coral Tree and some sultry browns, and your walls are giving high-art energy with a touch of Studio 54 opulence. This isn't background colour, it's full-on diva energy. Less is more when your paint is doing all the talking. Think of it as letting Beyoncé do the vocals, you just provide the lighting.

SERENITY, BUT MAKE IT DESIGNER

Need a break from the noise? Slip into something a little more comfortable, like the soft serenity of Resene Miso and Resene Bubble White. These muted greens and creamy tones are the design equivalent of a Lana Del Rey ballad, moody, soft, and just a little bit extra. They say, "I do yoga and have strong opinions about oat milk."

NEUTRALS, BUT NOT BASIC

Neutrals are having their Kim Cattrall comeback moment, classic, dramatic, and not to be underestimated. Clean whites like Resene Black White and Resene Alabaster still serve elegance, but it's the deeper tones like Resene Masala and Resene Half Jumbo (topped with a Resene EX Greige paint effect, naturally) that bring that brooding, sculptural depth. Add accents in Resene Invincible, Resene Tino Pai, and Resene Tua Tua for an interior that's equal parts masculine, mysterious, and Jonathan Bailey-level hot.

TIMBER THAT TOPS

Wood isn't just for the tradies anymore, it's the leading man. Stains like Resene Colorwood Japan Black and Resene Colorwood Walnut are giving dark academia with a leather twist, while Resene Colorwood Oregon brings that light, breezy, "weekend in Byron with your situationship" vibe. It's masculine, it's grounded, it's the interior design version of Pedro Pascal.

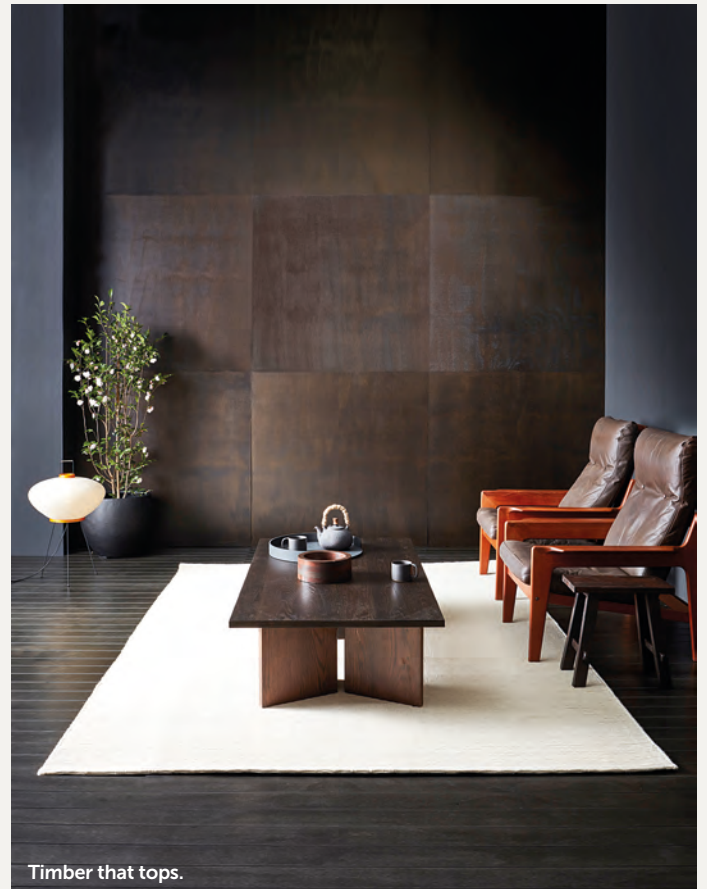
So whether you're styling a New York loft fantasy or just want your studio flat to feel like a Milan runway, remember, colour isn't just an accent, it's the moment.



Neutrals but not basic.



Serene but make it designer.



Timber that tops.

Ready to slay your next interior makeover? **Resene.co.nz** has everything you need for your next decorating project, from premium colours and paint, to wallpaper, curtains, decorating accessories, trend inspiration, and professional advice.

LOVE ALL

GAME.
SET.
SNATCHED.

On green courts we worship,
where balls bounce freely
and rackets swing like gospel.

McEnroe raged,
Serena roared,
Martina carved history in chalk-white
lines,
and here we come,
sun-kissed, muscle-bound,
serving body for the crowd.

Every toss a tease,
every volley a flirt,
every grunt an aria of sweat and hunger.
Love isn't nothing here,
it's everything.

Federer's grace,
Nadal's biceps,
Djokovic stretching further than reason
allows.
And then the new gods:
Berrettini's smirk,
Tsitsipas' golden locks,
Alcaraz charging the net like spring itself.

Our uniforms? Brief at best,
fabric cut tighter than a fifth-set tie-break.
We play for the gaze,
for the gasp,
for the wild applause of springtime.

And when the final point lands,
make no mistake, darling,
it's always our match.

And if you're wondering why we watch?
It's not the trophies.
It's the balls,
the grunts,
and the glory of love all.



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THEATRE

WHY QUEER SPACES MATTER: THE FIGHT FOR D.R.A.G.



From Māori drag activism to trans visibility and safety, and the wisdom of drag elders, Oliver Hall talks with Daniel Williams, Hugo Grrrl, Slay West and Adena Delights about the world premiere of D.R.A.G. (Dressed Resembling a God), Silo's Queer Christmas Spectacle.

Step inside Q Theatre this November and you'll be transported to Lady T's, a drag club dripping in sequins, sweat and survival. It's the kind of place where laughter cuts through the haze, where a political jab can land just as hard as a high note, and where queer past and present dance shoulder to shoulder.

Equal parts party, protest and performance, *D.R.A.G.* is a love letter to the Aotearoa drag scene. Three artists fight to save their beloved club, navigating diva antics, fragile alliances and the creeping threat of a world outside that doesn't always value queer spaces. Each night brings a different guest star, from Anita Wig'it to Tom Sainsbury, ensuring no two shows are alike. But the heart of *D.R.A.G.* is not chaos, but a story about community: fragile, defiant, and fiercely fabulous.

LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

The show marks the theatre-directing debut of Daniel Williams, a longtime Silo set designer and drag performer known as Lady Trenyce. For Williams, *D.R.A.G.* is more than spectacle; it's a reckoning with queer history.

"We are paving the way for the future of drag and what that looks like, but to celebrate and pay respects to the past was definitely something I wanted to hero in this work," Williams says. "Looking back to look forward is an important part of being queer and it's a key story point within *D.R.A.G.*."

Williams cut their teeth in the Wellington and Auckland drag scenes of the early 2000s, and much of what unfolds at Lady T's is drawn directly from lived experience: the dressing-room banter, the moments of chosen family, the inevitable arguments and mishaps.

The design team, Micheal McCabe and Sean Lynch, are steeped in the same queer lineage. McCabe's academic research on queer spaces in Aotearoa and Lynch's celebrated theatre work combine to recreate the essence of venues like Carmen's Coffee Lounge and The Purple Onion. The result will be immersive: Q Theatre will become a nostalgic cabaret venue that pays homage to a scene of the past.



Daniel Williams.

THE POLITICS OF DRAG

Drag has always been political, Williams tells us. "From K' Road gentrification to Brian Tamaki, Luxon, Georgina, Chloe and everything in between, we knew we would cover some polarising subjects," he says. "Slay's character has a passion for activism and social change. Weaving a strong Māori perspective into the narrative through dialogue and performance is integral to the piece."

For Hugo Grrrl, one of New Zealand's pioneering drag kings and a proud trans man, those politics are lived daily. Hugo knows first-hand how fragile queer safety can be: he was at the centre of the Destiny Church protest against drag storytime back in February, and the art form that saved him as a young performer is still under attack.

"Wellington in the 2000s was an incredible place to start out," he recalls. "The venues were open, nobody stopped you from getting on stage, and you could clock up an enormous amount of stage time. I didn't feel like the biggest freak in the room, I found my weirdos there, and that made all the difference."

By contrast, Hugo feels Auckland's drag scene today is more commercialised and less accessible. He points out that some new performers have to drive to Hamilton just to get stage time. "Drag just doesn't get programmed in the same way anymore," he says. It's a shift that mirrors a global trend: drag moving from underground resistance to corporate commodity.

INDIGENOUS DRAG MEETS DIGITAL ACTIVISM

For Slay West, a proudly political Māori queen and member of Indigenous drag girl group The Tiwhas, the question of drag's purpose is clear: it's about visibility, sovereignty and survival.

"It's an honour to get to sing in te reo and use poi and make our own haka," Slay says. "It's amazing for people to see it with a queer twist."

Her drag is rooted in culture but also unapologetically modern, shaped by the TikTok generation. She sees social media as a tool, not for clout but for mobilisation. "We should use our profiles to spread the word of what petition to sign or where to donate or protest," she says.

Slay also acknowledges the duality of online platforms: empowering community while exposing queens of colour to racist backlash. She's received hateful comments, but she laughs them off. "I am very proud to be a POC drag queen and I try to incorporate my culture into my drag as much as I can," she says. "If I get ignorance, I'm happy to educate – or put people in their place."

THE WISDOM OF ELDERS

While Slay represents drag's digital future, Adena Delights embodies its seasoned legacy. A veteran queen who has worked in both Australia and Aotearoa since the 1990s, Adena has seen how much drag, and queer nightlife, has changed.

"For me the physical space of having a club was so important," she reflects. "I never would have had the opportunities in my drag career, and gained the friends I have, if it wasn't for physical spaces. We need to have somewhere to go that we feel comfortable."

Adena welcomes the explosion of new talented drag artists but worries that something essential has been lost. "It is very different now. There isn't the same community feeling as there was when I did drag in the late 90s and early 2000s," she says.

Her perspective adds depth to *D.R.A.G.*'s central tension. The fight to save Lady T's isn't just a plot device; it's a metaphor for the precariousness of queer venues everywhere.

INTERGENERATIONAL DRAG

Taken together, the voices of Hugo, Slay and Adena reveal drag not as a monolith but as a living, evolving conversation. Hugo speaks to the precariousness of safe stages; Slay brings the urgency of activism and identity; Adena reminds us of the fragility of queer spaces and the wisdom of elders who built them.

Williams sees this interplay as essential. "Some one-liners and scenes have directly come from lived experience," he says. "I'm sure the community will recognise themselves or people they know within the world we have built. It truly is a cross-section of Aotearoa drag."

The drag hierarchy, such as it is, doesn't quite hold in Aotearoa. Hugo notes that because drag here rarely sustains a full-time career, people dip in and out, leaving fewer rigid tiers. What remains is something more valuable: a patchwork of artists across generations and identities, carrying drag's radical heart forward in different ways.

By the time Lady T's closes its glittering doors each night, audiences will have witnessed more than just a drag show. They'll have been immersed in an archive of queer resilience, activism, humour and joy. A reminder of why queer spaces matter, and why they're worth fighting for.

D.R.A.G. (Dressed Resembling a God) runs from 13 November to 6 December at Auckland's Q Theatre. Tickets from silotheatre.co.nz.

"HARMONIOUS, FREE, & EQUAL"

— THE CHIEF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER'S
HOPES FOR A POLARISED AOTEAROA

*New Zealand's Chief Human Rights Commissioner, **Stephen Rainbow**, talks to Oliver Hall about the importance of societal cohesion, intergenerational dialogue, and what's needed to protect LGBTQ+ human rights in a polarised world.*

When Stephen Rainbow took on the role of New Zealand's Chief Human Rights Commissioner, he knew it would be complex. But for someone who's spent decades straddling ideologies in politics and local government — with Labour in the '80s, Greens in the '90s, National at the dawn of the noughties — this kind of nuance is familiar terrain.

And perhaps nuance is what's most needed now. Rainbow sees New Zealand as a country more divided, with fewer bridge-builders, and a shrinking space for civil discourse.

"In the past, if you disagreed, you could sit down, have the discussion, and part ways with mutual respect," Rainbow says. "Today, there's less appetite for those bridging conversations."

He's speaking to a broader climate, one in which polarisation is growing, social media is supercharging division, and dehumanisation is creeping into discourse. "When you label someone with a different view as a 'bad person', you erode their dignity, and their human rights protections, by dehumanising them," he warns.

It's a concern with a historical shadow. Rainbow points to pre-Nazi Germany, where LGBTQ+ life was thriving — until it wasn't. "The Weimar Republic was incredibly gay- and trans-friendly," he notes. "Within three months, the Nazis eradicated that. Division feeds an appetite for authoritarian solutions, and LGBT people are always the first to suffer."

RESTORING COMMON GROUND

The Commission, now nearing its 50th year, is preparing a national human rights action plan that Rainbow hopes will rebuild some of that lost social cohesion.

"We want to identify shared values all New Zealanders can agree on, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or sexuality," he says. "The goal is to reduce polarisation. That's our challenge heading into 2027."

It's not just a theoretical exercise. The Commission received over 8,000 inquiries last year alone, offering mediation in over 1,000 cases. But while policy and process matter, Rainbow believes that human rights work must ultimately begin and end with connection.

"The most important thing I've learned, through politics, transport policy, and everything in between, is the ability to work with people you don't always agree with."

And he's quick to acknowledge that he's had to learn, and unlearn, a few things himself.

ON TRANS INCLUSION & INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

Rainbow's appointment drew criticism from some corners of the rainbow community, in part due to comments made during his tenure at Auckland Transport referencing a "trans agenda."

He doesn't dodge the controversy. Instead, he reflects on it as a moment of misalignment between generations.

"At that time, I was observing a shift in the rainbow movement, from a focus on same-sex rights to a broader movement, with a different generation leading it," he says. "I failed to understand that shift then."

Now, he's clear about where he stands.

"I am the Human Rights Commissioner for all New Zealanders, including trans and non-binary people. I take that seriously. Trans people are part of my world. I have their back because I must uphold the human rights of every New Zealander."

But part of the gap, he thinks, comes down to silence — particularly from older rainbow people who've lived through unspeakable trauma, but never fully passed on their stories.

"My life journey has included times when it felt better to be dead than gay," he says. "I lived through AIDS. I feared for my life after sex. We haven't communicated effectively just how challenging our lives were."

Next year marks 40 years since homosexual law reform. Rainbow came out ten years later, in 1995.

"We were exhausted. Or maybe we thought we'd done our bit. But we didn't sit down with younger rainbow people and say, 'This is what it cost.' The silence became a kind of gap, and now we're paying for that gap in understanding," he says.

Rainbow believes the loss of so many voices to AIDS and suicide has left a generational vacuum.

"The average life expectancy for gay men of my generation was 37 — not only because of AIDS, but also suicide and emigration. Many gay New Zealanders had to leave — London, San Francisco, Sydney. Our AIDS story hasn't been fully told... I'd like to see more dialogue within our community so we remain united and supportive of each other's aspirations."

"I am the Human Rights Commissioner for all New Zealanders, including trans and non-binary people. I take that seriously. Trans people are part of my world. I have their back because I must uphold the human rights of every New Zealander."

THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

Rainbow's appointment as Chief Human Rights Commissioner in late 2024 came amid criticism. Some were concerned his past comments on Israel might be at odds with the role. The independent panel that shortlisted candidates initially did not recommend Rainbow; but Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith persevered with his appointment.

While Rainbow's past public support for Israel drew concern from activists, he doesn't back away from the conversation, but reframes it.

"I've always had strong ties to the Jewish community. But that doesn't mean I can't empathise with Palestinians," he says. "Human rights is about seeing beyond our differences to our shared suffering."

That shared suffering, he notes, is showing up here at home. "One of the most challenging human rights issues in New Zealand right now is the local impact of the Middle East conflict — on Palestinians, Syrians, Iranians, and Jewish families. They're all suffering in different ways."

THE IMPACT OF AI ON AOTEAROA & DEMOCRACY AS A WHOLE

As part of his role, Rainbow recently returned from an AI conference in Doha, and his takeaways are sobering.

"AI is based on data. Seventy percent of that data is North American; only one percent is Australasian. The tangata whenua contribution is tiny," he says. "That means AI can easily reinforce the invisibility of certain communities, and entrench existing inequalities."

In addition, Rainbow has concerns about the impact of AI on democracy itself.

"Everything I've gained as a gay man has been because I've lived in a free, democratic society. We must ensure AI isn't used to undermine that — rather, how it might strengthen it."

HOPE FOR OUR FUTURE

After a conversation rich in challenges and complexities, it's fair to ask: what, if anything, gives him hope?

"My personal story is a human rights success story," Rainbow says. "The transformation for rainbow people in New Zealand over the last 50 years is extraordinary. If we could replicate that across all areas of society, we could be much more harmonious, free, and equal."

For queer people who want to contribute to that, Rainbow advises, "We need to do a better job of telling our stories," he says. "Especially across generations. Older rainbow people need to share their experiences, and younger people need to understand the challenges we've faced — so they know how far we've come, and what's still at stake."

Find out more about the Human Rights Commission at [tikatangata.org.nz](https://www.tikatangata.org.nz)

OUT & ABOUT

GAY RUGBY'S BIGGEST NIGHT

The 2025 Purchas Cup lit up Western Springs with legacy and grit. Brisbane Hustlers stunned rivals Sydney Convicts 7-5 in a historic first win, while Convicts secured the Purchas Shield. NZ Falcons shone as hosts, embodying pride and community.



Purchas Cup Launch Party
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PHOTOS | TUX HIKA



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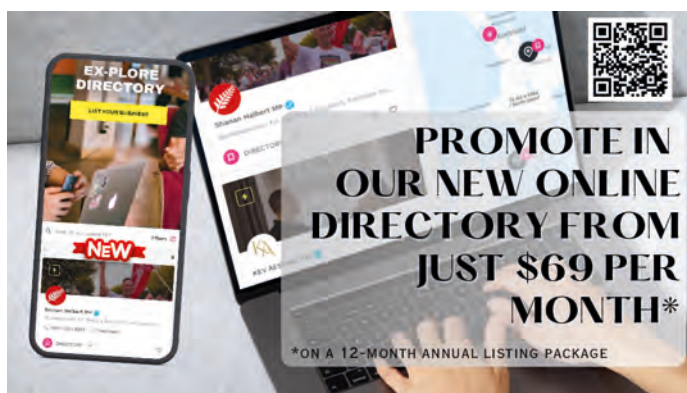
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FLAMING STAR: QUEER COWBOYS AND CAMP CRITIQUE

*Oliver Hall speaks with Milly Mitchell-Anyon, curator at The Dowse Art Museum, about **Flaming Star**, a brash, shimmering exhibition that reimagines the myth of the cowboy through queer, Indigenous, and feminist lenses.*

At The Dowse in Lower Hutt, cowboys are kissing, saddles are shimmering, and bolo ties are coming gloriously undone. *Flaming Star* is a camp, seductive, and unruly exhibition that queers the American Western — and curator Milly Mitchell-Anyon is gleefully holding the reins.

Flaming Star borrows its title from Elvis Presley's 1960 ballad — a crooning cowboy anthem steeped in masculinity and fate.

"I've been obsessed with cowboys for a while," Mitchell-Anyon admits, "but it became a full-on affliction after Lil Nas X released *Old Town Road*." For her, that viral cultural moment exposed how flexible, even fragile, the cowboy image really is. "You could see the breakdown of gender norms, masculinity, and the blurring of lines over what is and isn't country music. Because everyone is so familiar with the stereotype of the cowboy."

Flaming Star takes that familiarity and twists it into new forms. The result is cowboy as

drag — a powerful reimagination that unsettles colonial narratives, queers the frontier, and invites audiences to explore new modes of identity, performance, and power. "The idea of the cowboy is deeply escapist and problematic," she adds. "So I wanted to curate a show that interpreted it through a queer, Indigenous or feminist lens — through the work of contemporary artists from Aotearoa."

The exhibition features eight artists, each pushing the frontier myth into wild new territory. In *Cowboy Motel*, Arapeta Hākura takes the rural queer archetype by the horns, populating their motel with glitter-dusted cowboy guardians and a flock of members under their watchful, shirtless gaze. It's sensual, tongue-in-cheek, and reverent all at once. Bec Agnew unspools a stop-motion spaghetti western where cowboy Barbies drift through a surreal, phallic landscape of cacti and confusion — a coming-of-age tale dripping in camp and critique. And in Christopher Ulutupu's short film, a soap opera meets *Ghost Hunters* as choker-wearing cowboy spirits haunt a colonial



Curator Milly Mitchell-Anyon.

mansion, blending melodrama, mystery, and desire in a parallel cowboy universe.

Each artist was chosen with intention. "For *Flaming Star*, it was about remembering artists I'd seen and loved, or whose practices I knew would resonate," Mitchell-Anyon explains. "I kept thinking about Michael Haggie's drawings of gay cowboys I saw in Whanganui years ago — they were so compelling. Now, he has over thirty drawings in the show, from *Brokeback Mountain*-style pashing scenes, to BDSM swagger, to a cowboy in a little black dress."

Camp and desire simmer just below the surface of the show — but it also runs deeper, tackling appropriation and colonial legacies. Ming Ranganui's silky, rhinestone-laced saddles reclaim the cowboy from its colonial

ART & CULTURE



function. “They’re like luscious Trojan horses,” Mitchell-Anyon says. “They draw you in with ruched satin and rhinestones, evoking labial folds, but they completely divorce the saddle from its utilitarian use. It’s fantasy over function.” Ranganui’s work is partially rooted in her own discomfort working in a haberdashery store, where she watched Pākehā customers buy materials to make DIY *kākau*. “That stayed with her, and the saddles flip that appropriation back.”

Meanwhile, Sandy Gibbs brings wit and provocation. In one gallery corner, two cowboys ride gyrating mechanical bulls in slow motion, while a fountain spurts water in a cheeky, erotic loop. “Humour is such a useful and underrated tool,” says Mitchell-Anyon. “You don’t have to have a PhD in gender theory to understand what’s happening. Even if you’re not familiar

with Judith Butler, you see it: masculinity is performative. Gender is performative. Everything is drag.”

From the emo-country tones of Melanie Tangaere Baldwin’s ode to Patsy Cline, to Keri-Mei Zagrobelna’s bolo ties and sheriff badges repurposed to reckon with ongoing colonial violence, *Flaming Star* traverses genre, identity, and time. It wrangles camp, grief, desire, and critique all within the seductive fantasy of ‘the West.’

Mitchell-Anyon is clear: *Flaming Star* isn’t about nostalgia. It’s about rupture. “You work out pretty quickly what excites you when putting shows together,” she says. “You just have to be yourself, and that’s always reflected in the exhibition.”

Flaming Star is on at The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, until 9 November 2025. Entry is free.

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GIVEOUT DAY IS BACK!

Aotearoa's day of rainbow giving is back for its fourth year running. GiveOUT Day is an online peer-to-peer funding platform hosted by the Rainbow New Zealand Charitable Trust, which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year.

Last year's GiveOUT Day brought in over \$50,000 for 25 LGBTQ+ charities across Aotearoa. The Trust is confident they can beat that figure this year. "We already have \$45,000 of match pool funding from our amazing sponsors this year, so we expect to raise more than last year easily. That's what makes GiveOUT Day so unique and special. These generous sponsors allow the public's donation to be doubled," says Gurv Singh, co-chair of the Trust.

This year's invaluable support comes from Kiwibank, Z Energy, Lion, ISS Facility Services, AUT, the Rule Foundation, and our brand-new sponsor, L'Oréal.

"Having L'Oréal partner with us couldn't have come at a better time, really," says Jessie Lewthwaite, the other co-chair. "Allowing people's donations to be doubled really does make a significant impact on their favourite charity. Goodness knows our community organisations are doing it tough out there this year, so we really hope the wider community gets in behind GiveOUT Day this November," says Jessie.

Helping to get the word out and adding their sparkle to this year's GiveOUT Day are Glambassadors: Buckwheat, Louisa Wall, Jacob Carter, Luke Bird, and Anita Wig'it. "I have been involved with GiveOUT Day since it began here four years ago," says Buckwheat. "It's just such a great way for people to get behind their favourite community organisation, knowing they will get more bang for their buck—no pun intended!" says Aotearoa's favourite drag star.

Along with GiveOUT Day, which launches on Thursday, 6 November, the Trust is hosting a cocktail extravaganza on Friday, 7 November, called Glam & Give! "This is a chance for people to chuck on a party frock/blazer and start the party season in style," says board member Steven Oates. "The event will be packed with surprises and the Trust's infamous charity auction, with all proceeds from the event and auction going straight to the Trust's community grants and student scholarship programme."

Tickets are a steal at \$45 for early birds until 17 October, then \$55. All the action

"Goodness knows our community organisations are doing it tough out there this year, so we really hope the wider community gets in behind GiveOUT Day this November."

will be upstairs at Freeman & Grey, 43 Ponsonby Road, from 7pm sharp!

Tickets available from events.humanitix.com/glam-and-give

The Trust is seeking glamorous, unique items to be donated for the auction. If you can help, please email: info@rainbownzcharitabletrust.org.nz

OUT & ABOUT

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FROM SEQUIN TO SPIRITS: ACCLAIMED KIWI DIRECTOR'S QUEER GHOST STORY

PHOTOS | COURTESY OF CAUSEWAY FILMS AND POP FILM

*With Stranger Things star Dacre Montgomery in the lead, Samuel Van Grinsven's **Went Up the Hill** is an eerie tale of control, family history and the past that won't stay buried. Samuel and Dacre chat with **Oliver Hall** about the power of self-truth in making art that feels real.*

Kiwi director Samuel Van Grinsven's debut, *Sequin in a Blue Room*, announced a filmmaker unafraid of desire's sharp edges. "That film feels like a mirage," he recalls. "We made it for \$30,000 as my graduate project at film school, with no expectations. Everything about making and releasing it was new, surprising and thrilling. It was my version of what Gregg Araki (*Mysterious Skin*) or Todd Haynes (*Velvet Goldmine*) were doing in the New Queer Cinema movement – run and gun, no rules, not expecting a big release. I'm proud I got to make my first feature with that kind of raw energy."

Sequin in a Blue Room is a must-see, and an exploration of how queerness has long been tied to risk. "I was exploring cycles of transgression," he says. "Being queer is often framed as transgressive, and sometimes that leads to a thirst for further transgression. I was interested in how that plays out across generations – older characters coming from a cruising culture,

younger ones in a digital age, each with different relationships to risk and rebellion. *Sequin* was about a character diving into that world without knowing its history, and then shifting through those contrasts."

His second feature, *Went Up the Hill*, which is out in cinemas this month, shifts from digital hookups to gothic possession. A young man returns to his estranged mother's funeral, where her spirit begins to inhabit him and her widow, forcing both to reckon with inheritance, harm and intimacy.

Van Grinsven gives the ghost story a unique twist, making both protagonists gay. "I was playing with the audience's expectations," he tells us. "With a ghost story and a film about possession – a man and a woman both inhabiting this third role – if both were heterosexual, the expectation would be a romantic relationship forming, along with questions of morality. I wasn't interested in any of that. I wanted everything in the film not to

be clouded or burdened by those assumptions. The film is about family – the baggage it passes on, that cross-generational weight – which feels very true to queer communities as well."

For him, the story is about power as much as it is about spirits. "The film is about control. It's about giving over one's self-control, literally, by inviting the abuser into the body of the abused and giving full permission. That act is framed as love, but also as a way to process and let go. Abuse and trauma within family dynamics are explored often in cinema, but rarely through a queer lens. That felt new and important."

And when it comes to future projects, Van Grinsven assures he will continue representing our communities. "Honestly, I find it hard to sit down and write a screenplay where everyone isn't queer. That's my world, and those are the characters I'm interested in."

For Dacre Montgomery, *Went Up the Hill* arrived after a conscious break from the Hollywood treadmill. "After (starring in) *Power*



Rangers and *Stranger Things*, I stepped back from my commercial career for seven years. I'd lost my anonymity overnight, and the notoriety and fame weren't why I got into acting. I love great movies and filmmakers. I used those years in Australia to reposition myself, and now I feel really proud of *Went Up the Hill*, and (Gus Van Sant's upcoming) *Dead Man's Wire*, as well as the film I'm about to direct myself. I'm excited to finally take risks and throw myself into the work I love."

What first drew Montgomery to *Went Up the Hill* was the unusual performance structure. "The idea that I'd be sharing a third character with another actor – I'd never heard of that before in cinema. Then there was Samuel's vision, so fully realised early on. We didn't shoot the film until about a year after we first met, but even then he had the palette, textures and locations mapped out. For me, there was so much to sink my teeth into. Samuel's process is very multi-faceted – it's not just visual, but also audio and textural. Costumes, fabrics, physical items – all that tactile detail really spoke to me."

Montgomery describes sharing the role with Vicky Krieps as "intense and captivating," explaining, "we didn't feel the need to perform her the same way. Our characters are strangers, so we stayed strangers during filming. We only really connected at Toronto Film Festival, long after we wrapped. Vicky commits completely, and I'm an intense performer too, so it was all incredibly rewarding."

Montgomery also draws a line between Van Grinsven and the queer icons he's been fortunate to collaborate with, including Baz Luhrmann on *Elvis*. "The connective tissue between them is specificity and bravery. All three are deeply in touch with themselves and their vision. Gus, Baz and Samuel are sensitive men – something I relate to, having grown up in a family where expressing emotions through

art was encouraged. With Baz, it's camp and colourful. With Samuel, it's complete visual contrast, but he's just as tactile and textural. Gus is endlessly curious and always chasing creativity. What bridges them is their constant evolution and refusal to hold back. That bravery is inspiring."

Montgomery says his work on *Elvis* inspired him to soon step behind the camera and try directing. "Baz is still completely himself, which is inspiring. Austin Butler, too, is an old soul – he reminded me that you can balance commercial success with meaningful art. It's about staying in your own lane, never comparing yourself to others, and focusing on autonomy. Directing will be a part of that for me."

For Van Grinsven, the location of *Went Up the Hill* (filmed at Flock Hill in rural Canterbury) is central. "There's definitely a thread of unease



and gothic in New Zealand cinema across generations," he says. "I think it comes from the landscape – it's beautiful but haunting, daunting, it dwarfs you. You feel isolated and tiny within it. You can't shoot a film here without welcoming that in. And it's the most beautiful place on earth – point a camera anywhere and it's hard to get a bad shot."

Went Up the Hill is a possession tale, queer reckoning and family drama. For Van Grinsven, it continues his project of queering genre conventions. For Montgomery, it marks a move toward autonomy after global fame. Together, they've created a film that insists ghosts are never just supernatural – they are the baggage we inherit, and the question of whether we can let them go.

Went Up the Hill opens in cinemas on Friday 9 October.



HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

ARTICLE | OLIVER HALL

*Director Kathleen Burns talks puppets, packs, and queer families in The Court Theatre's next production, a cutting-edge piece of contemporary theatre, **Wolf Play**.*

Kathleen Burns is no stranger to Christchurch audiences. Over the past two decades, she's been a fixture at The Court Theatre – as an actor, improviser, director, and all-round powerhouse of Ōtautahi theatre. Following her acclaimed direction of *Fun Home* in 2023, she returns to helm one of the most anticipated works in this year's season: *Wolf Play* by South Korean playwright Hansol Jung.

"It's the most challenging play I've ever worked on," Burns says. "It assumes the highest intelligence of its audience. It's smart, funny, moving, inventive – it really puts the 'theatre' in theatre. This is for people who want to see creative storytelling."

BUYING & SELLING YOUR CHILD

At the heart of *Wolf Play* is a six-year-old boy, first adopted from South Korea and then "un-adopted" by his American father, who attempts to rehome him online. It's a story inspired by real-life cases of "re-homing" – and one that Jung transforms into a work of theatrical imagination.

"The play is about international adoption and the repercussions of that kind of displacement on children," Burns explains. "But ultimately, it's about family and chosen family, and what you'll do to survive and protect your pack."

The boy is represented not by a child actor, but by a puppet – designed by Julian Southgate and animated by performer Reylene Hilaga.

"First of all, puppets are hard work!" Burns laughs. "But what's beautiful about this one is that it's not too detailed. That allows the



PHOTO | DAN BAIN

audience to project themselves into it. The wolf is this child's psychological manifestation – a survival strategy. It also ties into the idea that this child has been treated like a thing, bought and sold, pulled between adults trying to get what they want."

EXPLORING QUEER PARENTING

While adoption is the starting point, *Wolf Play* is equally concerned with the wider questions of belonging and identity. The boy's new adoptive parents are Robin and Ash, a queer couple, with

Ash portrayed by Ōtautahi poet and comedian Ray Shipley in their Court Theatre debut.

"The most urgent theme here is family," Burns says. "And I don't think you can separate that from queerness, because queer people want families just as much as anyone else. The difference is that sometimes there are barriers – financial, legal, or cultural – that heterosexual couples may not face. This play holds all of that complexity."

She's especially proud that *Wolf Play* offers queer audiences something rare: representation that

CHRISTCHURCH

isn't centred on tragedy.

"Christchurch audiences are hungrier now to see works where queer people live full lives, not just trauma stories. That's another thing I love about this play. It acknowledges trauma but it doesn't retraumatise queer audiences. It shows that queer people want the same things everyone else does: love, family, connection."

FIGHTING FOR FAMILY

Ash's character is also a boxer, and the production incorporates a highly physical, stylised boxing element. Burns sees this as more than just stagecraft – it's metaphor.

"We've had Ray training with a boxing coach, and there's a consultant on board. The boxing serves the story – it's about survival, about fighting for family. It becomes a metaphor for the difference between a lone wolf and a wolf that's part of a pack. What will you do to fight for your family? How far will you go?"

FALLING IN LOVE

Burns admits she wasn't instantly sold on *Wolf Play*.

"Honestly, I resisted at first! I hadn't read or seen it, and I had my eye on another play. But the Artistic Director suggested I read it, and the second I did, I knew – this is me. I fell in love with it immediately."

Her instincts were right. Since its premiere, *Wolf Play* has become one of the most acclaimed new plays on the international circuit, winning the 2023 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play. For Burns, though, it's less about awards than about the connection with audiences.

"My hope is that people come out of this play and say, 'That was a bloody good play,' and that they want to spend more money on seeing more theatre. Money is tight everywhere in the arts. If people come and see this and leave excited for more, that's the goal."

QUIETLY POWERFUL

For all its stylised boxing and theatrical invention, Burns says the moment she treasures most in *Wolf Play* is one of the simplest.

"Queer people want families just as much as anyone else. The difference is that sometimes there are barriers – financial, legal, or cultural – that heterosexual couples may not face. This play holds all of that complexity."

"It's a scene where Ash, the boxer, sits with the child and they're just eating cereal together. Nothing much happens, but it's about connection – the thing we're all searching for. Amid all the chaos and pain, a moment of true connection is about as good as life gets."

That philosophy seems to guide Burns in her own work as well. Known for her generosity as a collaborator, she describes her directing approach as one of trust.

"Trust the actors, trust the writing, trust your designers. My job isn't to be a god of the work; it's to bring the right people together and guide their ideas into a distilled, beautiful piece."

WHY SUPPORTING QUEER THEATRE IS SO IMPORTANT

Burns is clear about why audiences need to show up for *Wolf Play*.

"The only way we'll see more plays with queer people living their lives – not just being defined by trauma – is if people come and see them. So come. Support it. That's how we make space for more stories like this."

Wolf Play runs 18 October – 22 November 2025 at The Court Theatre, Christchurch. Tickets at courttheatre.org.nz

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Mischievous and affecting, Hansol Jung's *Wolf Play* deftly explores the intricacies of the families we choose and un-choose, and how far we would all go to defend our pack.

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FACE

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My tip: Start twice a week and build up. Pair with a simple hydrating serum if you are nervous about sensitivity.

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My tip: I use this on shoulders and arms where skin can feel less firm. It is about improving overall tone, not just chasing aesthetics.

Retinol is an investment in your skin's future. It will not give instant results, but stick with it and by next spring you will be thanking yourself.

REDEFINING ANDROGyny:

Adrian Williams's Genderless Elegance



Adrion Atelier.

Angus McDougall meets the designer behind Adrion Atelier, a fashion label that blends bold self-expression with couture-level tailoring and structure.

I have always been drawn to fashion that leans into tailoring, structure, and a touch of the dramatic. Clothes that feel considered, sculpted, and unapologetically a little extra. Which is why, at this year's New Zealand Fashion Week, discovering Adrion Atelier felt like finding a label that speaks my language. These are not high street prices, but they are investment pieces you carry in your wardrobe forever.

I had the privilege of previewing the latest collection and meeting the man behind the label, Adrian Williams. Over sparkling water we spoke about his vision for exploring structure, fluidity, and the deconstruction of cultural boundaries. When I shared that I often dress in a very androgynous way, he said something that has stayed with me: "When you lay the fabric down it has no gender. It is about how you shape it, fold it, and allow it to exist."

That philosophy is woven through his entire collection. Adrion Atelier pieces are designed to be worn by all, merging feminine and masculine elements into something that feels effortless,

elegant, and quietly rebellious. Couture energy, but with the accessibility of a local designer you can actually buy from.

The Marq Shirt in beaded mesh (RRP \$545) is a piece I need in my wardrobe immediately. Worn loose and drapey, it delivers that relaxed oversized look I love. Tucked into the Brat Doll Pant (RRP \$679), it transforms into something sharp and sophisticated—the kind of outfit that makes a room pause without you saying a word.

Another piece I cannot stop thinking about is the Fitted Hybrid Puffer Jacket (RRP \$990). A tailored take on winter outerwear, it feels next level. Yes, we are stepping into spring, but I am already plotting my après-ski look for next season, and this jacket will be the centrepiece.

What I admire most about Adrion Atelier is that gender has no boundaries in Adrian's creations. These are clothes that celebrate expression. They are elegant, a little bit extra, and unapologetically built for individuals who want their style to show off what lies within.

Adrian's own background makes this ethos even clearer. Hailing from South Africa, he grew up in a culture where vibrant colours are celebrated, clothes are expressive, and dressing up is an art form. That spirit carries into his designs, with each piece created for those who value standing out, not blending in.

Adrion Atelier is available at adrionatelier.com and at The Shelter in Ponsonby.



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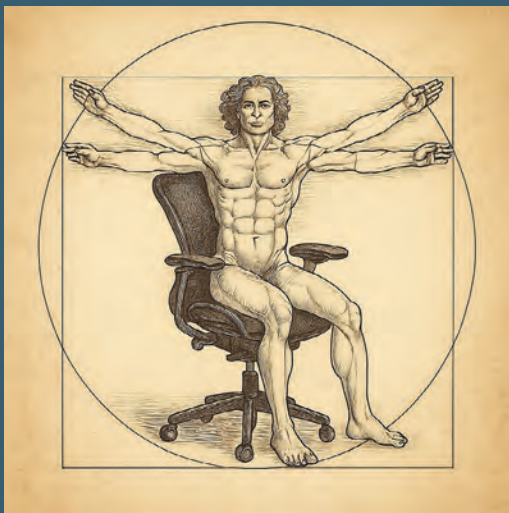


Fitted Hybrid Puffer Jacket.



The Marq Shirt.

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2 x Splore Tickets

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The 2026 festival lineup is stacked: headliners include Röyksopp, Sister Nancy performing with Legal Shot, Nightmares on Wax, and General Levy (w/ DJ Awira). You'll also catch local talent like Tami Neilson, Estère, Romi Wrights, Half Queen, GoldTooth, and more across six stages.

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We're giving away three Boostlab packs, each containing Goody Goody Sun Drops (a lightweight, dewy SPF serum that layers under makeup and keeps your skin glowing all summer) and Collagen Plump Eye Cream (gently hydrating and smoothing, targeting fine lines around the eyes). boostlabco.com



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Dr Mataroria Lyndon answers your health questions.

ADDRESSING YOUR HEALTH CONCERNS

AS A PARENT OF A YOUNG TRANS PERSON, HOW CAN I BEST SUPPORT THEIR HEALTH JOURNEY?

Supporting a young trans person starts with listening, affirming, and learning. Your acceptance and support are among the most powerful protective factors for their mental and physical health.

Create a safe, non-judgemental space at home and be an active advocate for your child in healthcare settings. This could mean making sure their chosen name and pronouns are respected, helping them find trans-affirming clinicians, and attending appointments with them if they'd like support. If they're considering gender-affirming care, work with healthcare professionals to understand the options, pathways, and timelines. Ensure your child feels informed and empowered to make their own decisions.

Encourage healthy routines with balanced nutrition, sleep, exercise, and activities that support mental wellbeing. Let your child set the pace of their journey - some may want to socially transition now, while others may explore medical options later.

Above all, let them know you love them exactly as they are. Your tautoko (support) and aroha (love) can make a profound difference to their resilience, confidence, and long-term wellbeing. Whānau may also find it helpful to connect with support organisations such as InsideOUT, RainbowYOUTH, or Gender Minorities Aotearoa.

Download the Tend app or visit tend.nz

Got a health-related question? Email ask@gayexpress.co.nz

www.yourex.co.nz

URGE
EVENTS

URGE'S
28TH

22nd NOV 9pm
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**Burnett
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iTICKET

YOUR ex
UNAPOLOGETICALLY QUEER



PHOTO | JIM DIVINE

THE WORLD'S GREATEST ARTS FESTIVAL

*Edinburgh in August is like nowhere else on Earth. For one extraordinary month, this elegant, cobblestoned city is transformed into a sprawling, open-access carnival of creativity. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the world's largest arts festival, and **Oliver Hall** believes experiencing it should be a bucket-list essential for queer culture-lovers everywhere.*

But it's not just the dizzying array of theatre, comedy, drag, cabaret, music, dance, and performance art that makes it special—it's the city itself. Edinburgh is a masterpiece. A city of towering spires, dark Gothic flourishes, lush green crags, and ancient alleyways that tumble down towards the sea. And yet, it rarely gets name-checked alongside Europe's famously photogenic cities. I'm here to say it deserves to be. Edinburgh is every bit as striking as Prague, and perhaps more so when it's buzzing with artists and audiences from every corner of the globe.

Edinburgh also feels incredibly queer-friendly, especially during the festival. Even without a Pride parade in sight, rainbow flags adorned shopfronts and cafés. Gender-neutral bathrooms

were easy to find. Venues wore their inclusivity on their sleeves. The festival seems to attract the kind of open-minded, kaleidoscopic crowd where queer artists and audiences feel right at home.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY

Let's be real: hotels in Edinburgh during August are expensive. Like, wild. But there's a great-value option hiding in plain sight: Summer Stays at Edinburgh University. University halls are transformed into simple but comfortable accommodations for festivalgoers. You get a private room and hearty breakfast in a location close to the action, without paying sky-high hotel prices.



Tolbooth Tavern.

MUST VISIT

Between shows, head to Tolbooth Tavern on the Royal Mile. This pub has serious history—it started life as a tollbooth in 1591, became a prison, and has been serving pints since 1836. You can still see the original brickwork by the front door. Inside, it's cosy and classic, the perfect place to try haggis, locally brewed beers, or a whisky flight! I spotted there are over 70 different whiskies on their menu.

UNMISSABLE SHOWS

Now, onto the good stuff. I saw dozens of shows, but here are seven standouts that left a lasting impression:

AN ADEQUATE ABRIDGEMENT OF BOARDING SCHOOL LIFE AS A HOMO (UK)



An Adequate Abridgement of Boarding School Life As A Homo.

PHOTO | MATT HIND

TRAVEL

Two charismatic leads take us through the complex experience of being gay at a boys' boarding school. At times harrowing, but mostly hilarious, this is a rich, layered piece of theatre, with a thumping Britney soundtrack. The first play from young actor/writer Ned Blackburn suggests he is a star to be watched.

FOUNTAIN LAKES IN LOCKDOWN (AUS)

The Kath & Kim episode we all needed and never got is here! Art Simone, Maxi Shield, and co. revisit Fountain Lakes in 2020 when Melbourne was the most locked-down city in the world. Art & Co. have really thought to include everything you love about Kath & Kim, from Brett's infidelity to Sharon's Irish dancing, Kath & Kim's post-show wine time, there's 'look at meh', Prue & Trude and plenty of chooky necks, as we relive the craziness that was lockdown.



Fountain Lakes In Lockdown.

SLUGS (CANADA)

Created by Canadian gay/trans duo Creepy Boys, this is a chaotic, anarchic art-punk response to a world with rising disparity and Western societies determined to flirt with fascism. What is the antidote to cure this endless doom? Nothing! This subversive shenanigan promotes scrolling through dog memes while the world burns, via a vortex of techno, puppets, full-frontal nudity, and anarchic joy. It was wild, unhinged, and full of queer resistance disguised as absurdism.



SLUGS.

LEGLOCK (UK)

A one-man MMA play sounds unlikely, but Leglock absolutely floored me. Performed by actor Taylor Uttley (*The Archers*) and written/directed by upcoming playwright Lowri Mathias, this is a physically intense, emotionally layered dive into working-class masculinity.

James, a 16-year-old amateur fighter, has just won the biggest fight of his life, as Mathias' storytelling focuses on a generation obsessed with their physique who have given up on tertiary education after seeing university's minimal impact on their parents' success. A bold and brutal gem.



Sugar.

SUGAR (NZ)

The brilliant Kiwi production team of Bullet Heart Club (*Daffodils*) present a modern-day take on *Pretty Woman* that's determined to have a happy ending. Tomáš Kantor stars in this solo queer cabaret that centres around a non-binary sex worker. Set in Melbourne and backed by a soundtrack of queer pop icons (Troye, Chappell, Gaga), *Sugar* is raw, joyful, and full of charm. Kantor is a star in the making, with warmth, wit and emotional precision that belies his age.



Sad gay AIDS play.

SAD GAY AIDS PLAY (UK)

Andrew Doherty skewers the tropes of tragic queer theatre in this darkly hilarious meta-parody. Pitching his show to Arts Council England, Doherty finds himself forced to exaggerate queer trauma for funding approval. What results is a farcical satire where the performer both critiques and embraces stereotype. It's a whip-smart, fourth-wall-breaking romp that laughs in the face of gatekeeping.



Little Squirt.

LITTLE SQUIRT (AUS)

Darby James' musical cabaret about queer sperm donation might just melt your heart. It's funny, sweet, and sneakily profound, as James takes us through his journey from curiosity to the unexpected yearning for children of his own. With sea shanties, witty asides, and genuine vulnerability, *Little Squirt* finds a way to make reproductive bureaucracy both moving and marvellous.

There is no other city in the world where you can see seven life-changing shows in a single week, climb a mountain before lunch, and eat haggis by candlelight in a 400-year-old pub. If you've never been to the Edinburgh Festival, let United Airlines fly you to this queer dream destination. Book your flights at [United.com](https://www.united.com).



PHOTO | JULIA SOLONINA

HIGH CLASS & HIGH ALTITUDE:

MY DREAMY UNITED POLARIS JOURNEY

Oliver Hall flies Auckland to Edinburgh on United Airlines' Polaris Business Class

Flying long-haul isn't usually something I look forward to, but flying United Airlines' Polaris Business Class turned my recent trip from Auckland to the UK into something I genuinely enjoyed. It felt less like a means to an end, and more like part of the holiday itself. Between cosy lie-flat beds, luxe lounges, and incredible food and service, United really knows how to make travel feel special.

PREMIER PERKS FROM THE GET-GO

From the moment I arrived at Auckland Airport, things felt easy. I breezed through

check-in in the Polaris Premier line, occasionally glancing over at the economy queue as it began to snake further back. It was already giving "worth it".

As a Polaris passenger, I had access to Air New Zealand's Koru Lounge, which is a fab space to relax before a long flight, with panoramic views of aircraft landing.

LIE-FLAT BEDS = LUXURY IN THE SKY

Boarding was smooth, and stepping into my Polaris Business Class seat, I instantly felt cocooned in comfort. The seat itself is cleverly tucked away from the aisle, with a personal little "hallway" of sorts, featuring a lamp, table, and storage compartment before you even reach the seat itself.

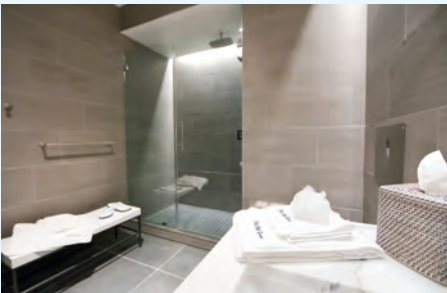
Waiting for me were a plush cushion, a cooling gel pillow, Saks Fifth Avenue bedding (which felt far superior to most business class linen), and a beautiful Therabody amenity kit, which has everything you need, from eye masks and ear plugs, to eye serum and hand cream.

Shortly after boarding, the crew came around with welcome drinks and pyjamas, while I dipped into United's Apple TV selection and finally got around to checking out *Severance* and *Slow Horses*.

For dinner that night, I went for the seared beef fillet, accompanied by a glass (or two) of port, and some warm nuts to snack on (oo-er). The wine list was impressive, and when I asked the crew for a red recommendation, one flight attendant suggested the Shafer 'One Point Five' Cabernet Sauvignon, and had poured me a glass before I'd even finished asking. "You've only got 11 hours, no time to spare!" she grinned.



PHOTO | EVAN WISE



THE POLARIS LOUNGE: SFO'S CROWN JEWEL

Transiting through San Francisco was a dream, thanks to United's Polaris Lounge, which easily tops my list of favourite airport lounges. Spread over two levels, it's sleek, stylish, and has everything a tired traveller could want.

First stop: the shower suites. These are beautifully designed with dark slate tiles, rain showers, and every amenity you could think of, from toothbrushes and cotton buds to full-sized body products. There's something so refreshing about showering mid-journey, it completely resets your body clock.

From there, you can choose your own adventure: nap in a quiet suite, catch up on work overlooking the runway, or head to the restaurant-style dining lounge. I did breakfast properly—watermelon juice, avocado toast, and Greek yoghurt with wild honey, all made to order! It was fresh, vibrant, and exactly what I needed before the next leg.

THE UK LEGS: EDINBURGH IN, HEATHROW OUT

Flying into Edinburgh was such a treat, United's route network is extensive and flexible, which meant I could tailor my trip to suit my travel plans. On the return, I flew out of London Heathrow, and the United Club Lounge there had its own charms.



After eating my way around the UK, I opted for something lighter: miso vegetable curry with stir-fried greens, topped with pumpkin seeds and crispy shallots. They even had Beavertown Neck Oil IPA on tap—my fave British beer! I finished with a rhubarb juice with zinc, a little immune boost before flying.

THE FLIGHT HOME

Once back on board, the food reached new heights. I started with a creamy buffalo mozzarella salad with pickled asparagus and roasted garlic vinaigrette—delicate, flavourful, and surprisingly fresh for airline food.

For mains, the garlic roasted chicken breast with caramelised carrots, fingerling potatoes, and chilli butter hit every comfort note. I paired it with a glass of French rosé (*Whispering Angel*,

2022) and felt like I was flying in a dream. For dessert, I may have combined the dark chocolate delicé with United's iconic build-your-own sundae service. No regrets.

Even with a shorter transit due to a delay, customs and baggage in San Francisco were a breeze, and I still made time for one last shower and dinner in the Polaris Lounge: giant prawns in citrus, asparagus mac & cheese, and perfectly cooked green beans. Bliss.

Back on the Auckland-bound flight, I skipped the meal and went straight into sleep mode, fully reclined in my lie-flat bed, snuggled up in Saks bedding (be sure to request the extra comfy mattress topper), and feeling truly rested.

UNITED MADE TRAVEL FEEL... FUN AGAIN

If I had to sum up the Polaris experience in one word, it would be *ease*. Every step of the way, check-in, lounges, onboard, transit, and arrival, felt smooth and thoughtful. From the luxe little touches (hello, pyjamas and port) to the genuinely warm crew, it was an experience I'd happily repeat.

For queer travellers, and anyone who just wants to travel in a way that respects your space, your rest, and your body, it's a standout.

Book your next trip in United's Polaris Business Class now at [united.com](https://www.united.com)





READY TO GLOW UP YOUR GARAGE?

SLIDE INTO SERENITY WITH A TEST DRIVE OF THE NISSAN ARIYA AT YOUR LOCAL NISSAN DEALER, OR HEAD TO [NISSAN.CO.NZ](https://www.nissan.co.nz) FOR ALL THE DEETS.

ELECTRIC, ELEGANT, UNAPOLOGETICALLY DIFFERENT

THE NISSAN ARIYA MIGHT JUST BE YOUR NEXT GREAT LOVE!

Matt Fistonich finds Nissan's ARIYA glides in with poise and purpose, all sleek lines and zen energy, with sharp Japanese styling, a sculptural 'shield' front, and a minimalist interior that feels more boutique hotel than traditional car cabin - elevating EV expectations.

THE ARIYA is Nissan's first fully electric SUV, think of it as the X-TRAIL's more sophisticated, all-electric big sibling. It's got that confident energy without trying too hard. Depending on your flavour, you can get up to 498 km of range (WLTP) in the long-range model.

Matt took the dual-motor e-4ORCE version out for a spin to find it delivers 290 kW and 600 Nm of torque, enough to get this two-tonne glamazon from 0 to 100 km/h in just over five seconds. More than enough punch for drag brunches, beach weekends, or those last-minute missions to pick up your bestie from the airport.

THE DRIVE: SMOOTH OPERATOR

On the motorway, the ARIYA is blissfully composed. It filters out road and wind noise like a pro, while the all-wheel drive keeps things planted, even when Tāmaki Makaurau throws a greasy downpour your way. The ride is firm but comfy, with just enough feedback to keep things fun.

Push it a little, and she responds, not with shrieking theatrics, but with graceful confidence. The ARIYA may not be a drama queen, but she knows how to make an entrance.

RANGE AND RECHARGE

With a WLTP rating of up to 498 km, your mileage will vary depending on the weather, terrain, and how heavy your foot is. But don't stress, even with real-world conditions, the ARIYA easily covers a full week of inner-city cruising and social swanning before needing a recharge.

When you do plug in, fast-charging up to 130 kW means you can go from 20 to 80% in about 35 minutes, ideal for a quick juice-up between flat whites. At home, an overnight wallbox charge fits neatly into any routine.



INTERIOR GOALS

Step inside and it's giving: clean lines, curated calm, and tech that's subtle but smart. The dashboard is low and elegant, flanked by a chic twin-screen display. The vibe is less cockpit, more luxe apartment lobby.

Physical switches are minimal, with sleek haptic touch controls, a high-design flex that some might love and others... might yearn to replace with a dial.

The zero-gravity seats? Heavenly. Think proper support for those long roadies to the bach or out-of-town gigs. There's even a sliding centre console to suit your vibe, practical, yes, but also fun.

SPACE FOR DAYS

The boot serves 466 litres of cargo capacity, more than enough for weekend bags, a case of wine, a ring light, or your entire drag wardrobe (minus the 6-foot angel wings). The back seats fold down flat if you're hauling bigger stuff.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Nissan ARIYA isn't here to replicate Tesla minimalism or German swagger. Instead, it offers quiet luxury, Japanese precision, and a refreshingly unique take on what an electric SUV can be in Aotearoa.

For those ready to make the electric leap, without compromising style or substance, the ARIYA might just be your perfect match.



New Nissan ARIYA
An exhilarating 100% electric experience.

THE FRONX IS HERE TO SLAY AFFORDABLE SUV WITH BIG CITY ENERGY



Matt Fistonich discovers that Suzuki is bringing fresh energy to the compact SUV scene with the Fronx — a stylish, smart, and city-savvy crossover that's ready to turn heads.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Admittedly, "Fronx" is a bit of an unconventional choice — Suzuki says it's a blend of "Frontier" and "Crossover", but we prefer "X-factor". Either way, don't let the name fool you. This just-under-4-metre crossover brings serious inner-city energy and is perfectly sized for squeezing into tight street spots — be it outside your favourite brunch haunt or at the gym car park.

SMALL SUV, BIG QUEER ENERGY

Inside, the Fronx punches well above its class. It comfortably fits four adults (drag-inclusive) and offers 300 litres of boot space — enough for your groceries, Pride outfits, or the pot plant you swore you weren't buying from Bunnings. Need more room? Fold the back seats and you've got up to 600L of storage.

And the price? Snatch the base model for under \$31,990+ORC and an extra \$1,000 for the two-tone edition (with sleek black roof).

LOOKS THAT WORK THE RUNWAY

The Fronx is low-key fabulous. The modern LED lighting, coupe-like silhouette, and vibrant colour options (yes, there's a zesty orange) are matched with an interior that feels more luxe than budget.

Inside, it's faux-leather chic, the dashboard is impressively refined, and the layout leans stylish over busy. It's the type of car that looks more expensive than it is — a queer icon in SUV form.

FEATURES YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED

Suzuki's packed the Fronx with tech usually found in pricier cars:

- Head-up display
- 360-degree surround-view camera
- Heated front seats
- Qi wireless charging

Plus, it comes with all the safety gear — without the incessant nagging. Most alerts can be turned off with physical buttons. No overbearing beeps every time you breathe, and the speed sign alerts give a subtle flash rather than a full drama moment. We love a non-judgemental queen.



READY TO MEET THE FRONX IN PERSON?

VISIT YOUR LOCAL SUZUKI DEALERSHIP OR HEAD TO [SUZUKI.CO.NZ](https://www.suzuki.co.nz) TO EXPLORE THE RANGE AND BOOK A TEST DRIVE TODAY.

EASY ON FUEL, EASY ON THE PLANET

Powered by a 1.5L mild hybrid engine, the Fronx isn't winning drag races (0–100km/h takes a chill amount of time), but it's frugal — using just 5.4L/100km of regular 91. That's perfect for saving money and reducing emissions.

City driving is smooth and responsive thanks to the hybrid assist system. It even has paddle shifters if you're feeling sporty on your Sunday drive to the farmers' market.

FINAL WORD: THE CAMP COMPACT YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED

Sure, the small SUV market is packed — think Hyundai Venue, Kia Stonic, Mitsubishi ASX. But the Fronx stands out with its quirky charm, clever features, and undeniable lifestyle appeal.

Whether you're a city-based queer buying your first new car, downsizing, or simply vibing with the idea of an affordable, easy-to-park crossover that's *not* giving "mum's school run" — the Suzuki Fronx deserves your attention.

It's more than a compact SUV. It's a compact SUV with attitude. And babe, we are so here for it.

HECK YEAH, WE FLY THERE.

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with our United Airlines and Air NZ alliance



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