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**THE DAY I
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"I'M GAY"**

**BUCKWHEAT'S
GAME
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STAR ALLIANCE



FROM THE EDITOR



The World Needs More Dolly

As we were heading to print, news broke of the death of the late, great Dolly Parton.

There are few superstars the LGBTQ+ community has loved as fiercely as Dolly. For generations, she gave us more than rhinestones, big hair and great songs; together with kindness, humour and the radical idea that everyone needs to accept each other.

Many of our readers will remember her refusing to judge, speaking warmly about gay fans, supporting same-sex marriage and standing against discrimination. Dolly once said, "everybody should be allowed to be who they are, and to love who they love." It was a simple philosophy, but one she lived with consistency.

She also gave the world "*I Will Always Love You*", a song made immortal all over again by Whitney Houston, whom Dolly will join in resting in peace.

Dolly's legacy will sparkle for decades, not just because of the songs, films or sequins, but because she made people feel seen. And for that, our community will always love her right back.

Olly & Matt xx



COVER | **BUCKWHEAT'S WORKOUT**
COURTESY OF THE CARTIER
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YOUR ex

UNAPOLOGETICALLY QUEER

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Webstar

DESIGN

Spinc Media

www.YourEx.co.nz

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YOUR EX's TALENTS



EDWARD COWLEY

is the pioneering Pacific LGBTQ+ drag artist Buckwheat, an Ambassador for Rainbow Games 2026, who inspires resilience and celebrates cultural visibility through vibrant performances, uniting diverse voices within our communities.



RAURETI ORMOND

(Ngāti Tūwharetoa) is an award-winning theatre-maker descending from the waters of Waiāhā and Whanganui Bay. His original works include 'Hāpaitia' and 'He Ingoa', and he is also a member of The Tīwhas.



JESSIE LEWTHWAITE

works in rainbow inclusion and awareness and likes to joke that she is gay for pay. She splits her spare time between co-chairing the Rainbow NZ Charitable Trust, being an exec for Rainbow Auckland and playing video games.



KERMATH

is the boy behind the Cuetone content machine, an award-winning creative production company specialising in bold, human-focused content for brands and organisations across Aotearoa.



GARETH WATKINS

runs PrideNZ, a community website exploring the voices and opinions of Aotearoa's rainbow communities through over 700 audio recordings of interviews and local LGBTQ+ events.



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RAINBOW GAMES READY



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D.I.V.A.S.!

BUCKWHEAT'S TOP FITNESS TIPS

Rainbow Games ambassador and proud drag diva

Buckwheat shares her top fitness tips to help everyone strut into October's Rainbow Games healthy, happy and ready for gold medal glory

D - DEDICATION

To achieve your fitness goals, dedication is absolutely non-negotiable! Whether it's hitting the gym six days a week or finding time to do home workouts, being dedicated means showing up even on those days when you'd rather stay cosy in bed. Remember, it's the little consistent efforts that lead to big changes over time. When you treat your fitness journey like a commitment to yourself, you'll see results that are as vibrant as your drag persona.

I - INTENSE WARM-UP

An intense warm-up is vital. Start your workouts with a powerful routine that elevates your heart rate! Spend 10-15 minutes doing dynamic stretches, high knees, jumping jacks, or lunges—whatever gets you feeling fabulous. An effective warm-up not only enhances your performance but also prepares your muscles and joints, reducing the risk of injury. It's like prepping for a show; you wouldn't step onto the stage without proper rehearsal, right? Treat your body to the same level of care to ensure a stellar performance in the gym!

V - VARIETY IN ROUTINE

Embracing variety in your fitness routine is crucial! Mixing strength training, cardio, boxing, and adventure running keeps things fresh and exciting. It stimulates different muscle groups and prevents boredom. Plus, trying new activities can make fitness feel like a celebration rather than a chore!

A - ACTIVE RECOVERY

Recovery is just as important as the workout itself, darling. Incorporate active recovery into your regime with gentle stretching or restorative yoga following intense sessions. Remember, hydration is key—keep that water bottle close! Nourishing your body with wholesome foods and giving it the love it

deserves helps your muscles rebuild stronger. It's essential to prioritise rest and recovery, as this is when your body repairs and grows. After all, we want to shine even brighter for our next performance!

S - SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

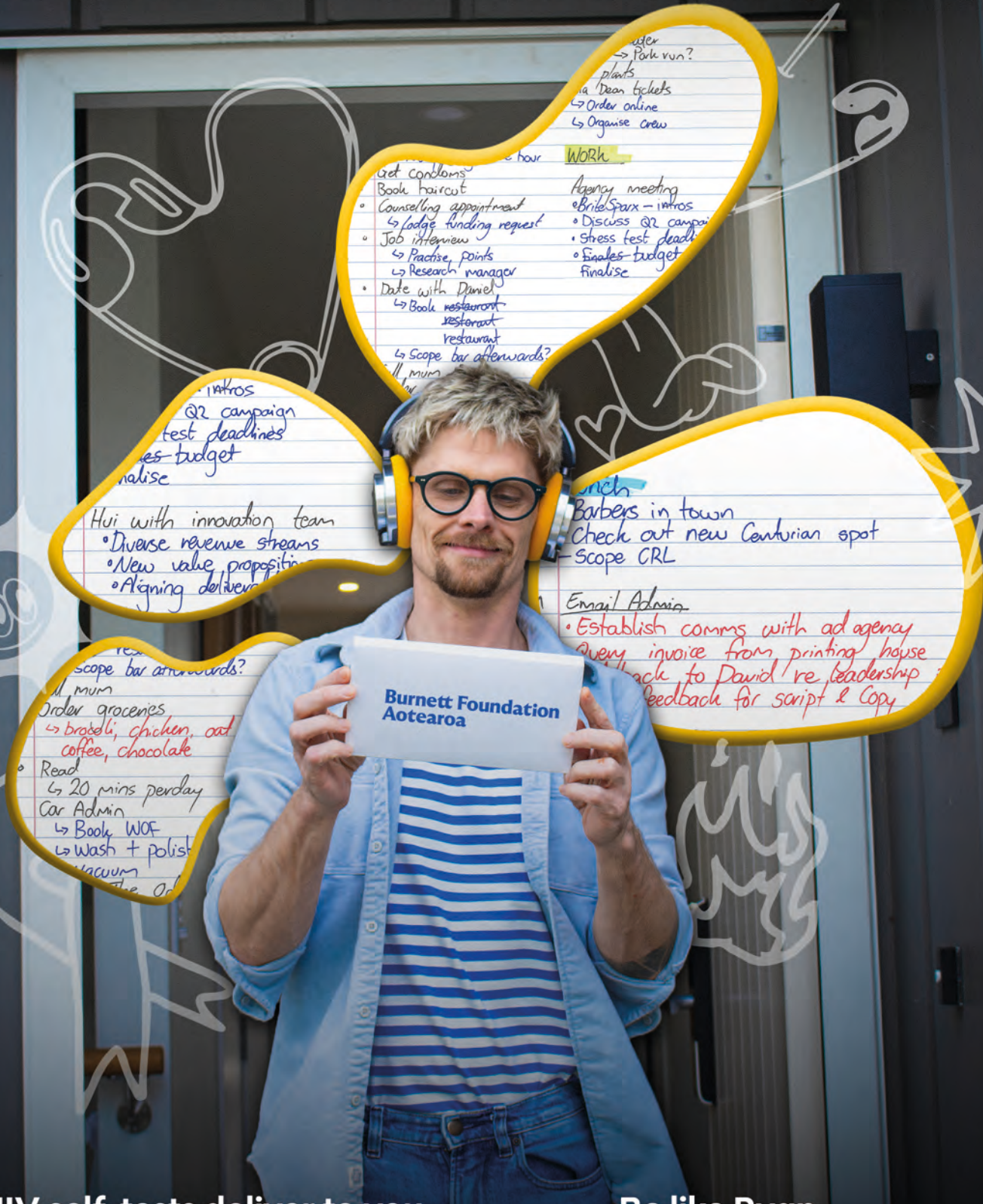
Engage with your fitness community for motivation and support. Share your goals with friends or join fitness groups online or in person. Participating in challenges or charity events can help you stay motivated while also giving back to the community. Building a strong network not only enhances your fitness journey but also cultivates a sense of belonging. Together, we uplift and inspire each other, creating an amazing support system that makes the journey so much more fulfilling!

So remember, darlings, by embracing these D.I.V.A.S. you're on your way to not just sculpting your body but enhancing your life. Let's strut confidently towards our fitness goals and inspire each other to shine!

Registrations close for the Rainbow Games on Friday 16 October, with the exception of running events, for which registrations close on Wednesday 16 September. For more information on the Rainbow Games and to register for any of the 13 sports at this year's event, visit rainbowgames.co.nz

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RAINBOW GAMES AMBASSADOR

THE DAY HUGO CHOU STOPPED HIDING



PHOTO | DAVID SHIELDS

RAINBOW GAMES AMBASSADOR

*Ahead of the Rainbow Games 2026, which starts on 29 October, RG ambassador **Hugo Chou** reflects on queer life at an all-boys school, taking his LGBTQ+ group to Lil' Gay Out and going home ready to tell his mum he was gay*

BY YEAR 13, YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS KNEW YOU WERE GAY, AND YOU WERE HELPING TO LEAD YOUR SCHOOL'S LGBTQ+ GROUP, BUT YOU HADN'T TOLD YOUR FAMILY. TELL US A BIT ABOUT WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE FOR YOU AT THIS TIME?

Year 13 felt like the easiest and happiest my life had ever been. I was in a really comfortable place academically, I was performing well in sport and music, I was a prefect, and I was surrounded by this incredible group of friends who made me feel like I was on top of the world. That stability gave me the confidence to pursue things I genuinely cared about. I founded a peer-support programme for younger students and became the leader of the Diversity/LGBTQ+ Group at Westlake Boys.

Being secure in those other parts of my identity changed the way I viewed something that had caused me so much anxiety before: my sexuality, and particularly the fear of being judged for it at an all-boys school. Eventually, I thought: I'm going to have to be myself at some point, so why not now? I didn't want being gay to feel like a taboo subject anymore.

The one place where that confidence hadn't quite reached was home. I still had all the classic questions running through my head: When is the right time? How do I tell them? What if they don't accept me?

Deep down, though, I knew my mum loved me endlessly. Looking back, so many of those fears were manifestations of the anxiety that can come with being queer and closeted, rather than a reflection of who she actually was. It started to feel wrong that so many people

knew this important part of me while the woman who loved me most didn't.

WHAT WAS THE LGBTQ+ GROUP LIKE WHEN YOU BECAME INVOLVED?

When I first arrived at Westlake in Year 9, I joined the LGBTQ+ group with this wonderfully naïve expectation that high school would be some profound new chapter of my life. I imagined walking into a room and suddenly finding this huge community of queer friends. Instead, I walked in and there were maybe three or four people there, including the teacher in charge. It was pretty depressing!

After that year, the student leading it graduated and nobody really took over, so the group essentially disappeared. It wasn't until Year 13 that I decided to revive it.

I would love to say I brought it back and suddenly dozens of students came flooding through the doors, but absolutely not. Our first meeting attracted about eight people, and eventually we settled at around four or five regulars. But I actually became really proud of that little group.

In an all-boys school, simply choosing to walk into an LGBTQ+ meeting could require courage. These students kept showing up, connecting with their community, having a yarn over lunch and creating a space where nobody had to explain or hide themselves.

Taking that group to Lil' Gay Out therefore felt significant to me. We weren't a massive movement. We were a handful of kids. But for the first time, we were taking our little school community outside the gates and connecting it with something much bigger. There was something incredibly meaningful about that.

CONTINUED...



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... CONTINUED

YOU'VE SAID YOU WERE THE FIRST PERSON IN YOUR SCHOOL'S HISTORY TO TAKE A GROUP TO AN EVENT LIKE THIS. WHAT DID IT TAKE TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN, AND HOW DID THE SCHOOL RESPOND?

Oh, the bureaucracy of it all: what a total pain in the ass.

Obviously, any school trip requires a decent amount of administration: approvals, transport, risk management and, worst of all, permission slips. But a permission slip becomes a completely different problem when you're taking students to an LGBTQ+ event. How on God's green earth is a kid who isn't out to their parents supposed to get a form signed saying, essentially, I'd like to go on a school trip to celebrate queer culture?

That was one of the biggest frustrations for me. Lil' Gay Out was this fabulous opportunity for young people to experience queer culture, meet other LGBTQ+ students and realise that there was a much bigger community beyond their own school. Yet the students who might have needed that experience most could also face the greatest barrier to attending. Thankfully, I had some wonderful teachers supporting me with approvals, administration and transport. Mrs Dawber, one of our deans at the time, was amazing.

There were still disappointing moments. I wanted to promote Lil' Gay Out at assembly, as prefects and clubs regularly did for other school events. The school refused. I was told it was for our own safety; announcing a gay event in front of an entire boys' school could get students too riled up and their reaction might be difficult to control. I understood the concern, but it was also deeply disappointing. Protecting queer students shouldn't require making us invisible.

TAKE US THROUGH THE LIL' DAY OUT ITSELF. DID ANY MOMENTS MAKE YOU FEEL PARTICULARLY LIBERATED?

We had gone from this tiny LGBTQ+ group sitting together at lunchtime at an all-boys school to suddenly being surrounded by queer young people from across Auckland. There was something incredibly liberating about being in an environment where queerness wasn't the unusual thing in the room. Nobody needed to whisper about it or wonder who might be watching.

The moment that sticks with me most was definitely the drag makeup session. It was incredibly fun and liberating, while simultaneously confirming that I had absolutely no idea how makeup worked. I was completely out of my depth.

Thankfully, so was almost everyone else. There was something really lovely about all of us collectively struggling to look fabulous. Suddenly you're laughing with people you've never met, comparing your questionable



makeup skills, putting glitter everywhere and connecting almost instantly.

That's what made the day special. It wasn't a seminar about what it means to be queer. We were simply allowed to have fun being ourselves. For young queer people who spend so much time monitoring how they speak, dress or behave, that freedom can actually be quite profound.

YOU ENDED THE DAY WEARING A RAINBOW HEART STICKER ON YOUR CHEEK, GLITTER, EYESHADOW, AND A PRIDE FLAG.

It became a much bigger moment than I expected.

Before leaving, I remember having to make a decision about what I was going to do with myself. I could wipe off the makeup, remove the glitter and rainbow heart, put the flag away and go home looking exactly as I always did.

Or I could let that day become a pivotal moment in my life. I was petrified about what might happen if I chose the second option. But underneath all of that fear was this incredible excitement. I wanted to know what life might feel like without constantly carrying the weight of the closet around with me. It was almost a pinch-me moment because I knew I was standing at a crossroads. If I went home like this, there was no pretending anymore. Something was going to change.

RAINBOW GAMES AMBASSADOR

So I kept everything on.

I distinctly remember standing outside our front door for what felt like forever. It was probably five minutes, but when your heart is racing it feels much longer. I was trying to construct the perfect sentence in my head: How do I start this? What words do I use?

I was fumbling over sentences before I'd even walked through the door. But I was determined. There was no backing away now. I had spent the entire day allowing myself to be openly queer, and I didn't want to walk into my own home and suddenly hide again. Eventually, I accepted that there was never going to be a perfect way to tell her. Coming out doesn't come with some beautifully written script where you say exactly the right thing... And realistically, I was about to walk through the door wearing eyeshadow, glitter and a rainbow heart while carrying a Pride flag. The nail was already firmly in the coffin.

YOU BEGAN BY ASKING, "DO YOU KNOW WHAT RAINBOW MEANS?"

After all that anxiety, I approached my mum and asked, very seriously, "Do you know what the rainbow means?" She didn't. I suddenly realised I had to explain the entire concept to her before I could even come out. The longer I talked, the more I was shaking, sweating and feeling my heart pound, all while she was sitting there playing Hay Day on her phone! Eventually, after years of anxiety and this enormous build-up in my head, I told her. And she basically went, "Okay," and went back to Hay Day. She then explained that she would love me no matter what because I was her child, and that all she wanted was for me to be happy. I cried and hugged her. Years of fear disappeared within minutes.

The one question that caught me completely off guard was, "Are you sure you want to be gay? I mean, it's pretty hard out there." To be fair to her, she wasn't wrong! But I think that question also showed how innocent and foreign queerness was to her. She

genuinely seemed to think I had looked at the available lifestyle options and selected "gay" despite its obvious disadvantages. It was funny, incredibly sweet, and so quintessentially my mum.

WHAT CAME NEXT FOR YOU?

I think so much of being closeted is about the fear of being found out. You become incredibly conscious of yourself: how you talk, how you move, what you wear. You tone down parts of your personality because you're terrified somebody might look at you and think, "He's gay."

After coming out to my mum, I came out publicly on Instagram. The response completely overwhelmed me. Friends from school, badminton and different parts of my life all converged in that comment section: more than 120 people congratulating me, supporting me and essentially telling me that being myself changed absolutely nothing about how they saw me.

I realised that the catastrophe I had constructed in my head wasn't waiting for me on the other side. Instead, there were all these people ready to embrace me.

From that day onwards, I decided that the only person who could really hold me back was me. I had spent enough time presenting this washed-out, edited version of myself because I was worried that the full version might be too gay, too loud or too much. Coming out killed a lot of that embarrassment. I chose to live loudly and proudly. Looking back at the kid who made that decision, I'm incredibly grateful that he was brave enough to give me the life I have now.

Hugo Chou will be playing badminton at the Rainbow Games 2026. Registrations close for the Rainbow Games on Friday 16 October, with the exception of running events, for which registrations close on Wednesday 16 September. For more information on the Rainbow Games and to register for any of the 13 sports at this year's event, visit rainbowgames.co.nz

TEND × YOUR EX

VAPING MORE VS SMOKING LESS

Dr Mataroria Lyndon answers your health-related questions

I'M 28, AND TWO YEARS AGO I MANAGED TO GIVE UP CIGARETTES AND SWITCH TO VAPING. I NOW VAPE THROUGHOUT THE DAY AND CONSUME MORE NICOTINE THAN I PREVIOUSLY DID. IS THAT STILL SIGNIFICANTLY SAFER THAN SMOKING, AND WHAT IS VAPING LIKELY DOING TO MY LUNGS?

Firstly, congratulations on giving up cigarettes! That's a really important step for your health. You might wonder if vaping is still safer if you're now using it more often and getting more nicotine.

Vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking, but it isn't harmless. The major difference is that cigarettes burn tobacco, producing thousands of harmful chemicals and carcinogens. Vapes heat a liquid containing nicotine rather than burning tobacco, so you're exposed to far fewer of those toxic substances.

If you're vaping throughout the day, you may be taking in substantially more nicotine, which can reinforce dependence and make it harder to stop. The aerosol you inhale can also irritate and inflame your airways, and we're still learning about the long-term effects of regular vaping on the lungs.

So while you've made a significant reduction in harm by moving away from cigarettes, vaping more doesn't necessarily mean you've undone the health benefits of quitting smoking. But it is worth thinking about vaping as the next thing to reduce, particularly if you're using it constantly.

The most important thing is: don't go back to cigarettes. Staying completely smoke-free is the biggest health win. From there, you can work towards reducing your nicotine intake and eventually becoming vape-free.



Download the Tend app or visit tend.nz
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Email: ask@gayexpress.co.nz

GAME CHANGER JESS REINER-REED

From being the only woman in the room to helping shape some of gaming's biggest titles, Insomniac Games Senior Project Director Jess Reiner-Reed talks to Oliver Hall about the release of Marvel's Wolverine, queer inclusion and the extraordinary evolution of game development

WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN LIKE AS A WOMAN IN A SENIOR ROLE WITHIN THE GAMING INDUSTRY?

Earlier in my career, when I was working at Santa Monica Studio on *God of War*, I started there around 2008, there were many times when I was the only woman in the room. And that still happens now.

On the positive side, I've seen much more diversity across development teams year after year. We now have a much greater mix of men, women and non-binary people, as well as many other forms of diversity across development teams, which I love. It makes for a better game at the end of the day.

When I'm in a room where I am one of the only women, or the only woman, I feel a responsibility to make sure I share my opinion and use my voice, because I'm bringing a different perspective to the table.

ARE THERE PARTICULAR AREAS OF GAME DEVELOPMENT WHERE YOU TEND TO SEE GREATER LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION THAN OTHERS?

I don't have any good statistics, but from my experience, we do have a Pride@PlayStation group focused on the LGBTQ+ community. I was involved in our Pride parade in West Hollywood this past summer.

At PlayStation, we want these different voices, and we want people to feel a sense of community. We get together to play games, hold different events and take part in charity initiatives.

That sense of collaboration and the joy of working together are really important parts of game development. It takes a lot of people and a lot of expertise to deliver something this big.



YOU STARTED WORKING ON MARVEL'S WOLVERINE IN 2020. HOW DO YOU STAY ENGAGED WHEN YOU'RE WORKING ON THE SAME GAME FOR SO MANY YEARS?

The fun part of game development is that every single day brings a different conversation or problem.

One day it's about boss fights. One day it's about blood. Another is about how Logan's body hair looks. There are constantly so many different elements involved in putting the final product together. I still get a kick out of it every single day.

THE MARVEL'S WOLVERINE TRAILER WAS CONSIDERABLY DARKER AND MORE GRAPHIC THAN INSOMNIAC'S PREVIOUS MARVEL GAMES. WHAT DO

YOU THINK WILL SURPRISE PEOPLE WHEN THEY FINALLY GET TO PLAY IT?

While we've shown some violent moves and that more mature tone in the trailers, there's also levity and fun in this game. I think people are going to be excited and surprised by that.

WE'VE SEEN JEAN GREY, MYSTIQUE AND SABRETOOTH IN THE TRAILER. CAN YOU TEASE WHETHER WE MIGHT ENCOUNTER ANY OTHER NOTABLE X-MEN?

In *Marvel's Wolverine*, the X-Men don't exist yet. We do, however, have a lot of Marvel characters that fans are going to get excited about. Even the enemy factions, like the Reavers and the Hand, come from the Marvel canon. So there are going to be details and names that fans will recognise.



HOW DOES THE SCALE AND STRUCTURE OF MARVEL'S WOLVERINE COMPARE WITH THE OPEN-WORLD SPIDER-MAN GAMES?

Logan is somebody who doesn't stay in one place for very long. He's more of a loner, and we have a narrative adventure that we're pulling him through.

It isn't structured as an open world in the way the Spider-Man games are. It's a story-driven adventure where we take you through all these different locations. We're going to Madripoor, Japan and Canada, and we get to explore.

WHAT ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING AI, HAVE ALLOWED YOU TO DO WITH MARVEL'S WOLVERINE THAT YOU COULDN'T HAVE DONE BEFORE?

For Wolverine, we worked on blood much more than we have needed to before. That includes things like blood directionality, making sure that when he swipes, the blood moves in the right direction. That's surprisingly important for immersion because it needs to make sense to your eye. We've also worked on how blood appears on snow or clothing.

There are so many smaller pieces of technology involved. I'm really proud that the game runs at 60 frames per second on the base PlayStation 5. The game looks beautiful.

Even that technical achievement reflects how we're always improving what we do with each game. There are so many little pieces that contribute to it.

DOES WORKING WITH THAT TECHNOLOGY GIVE YOU A SENSE OF WHAT GAMING MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN FIVE YEARS, OR WHAT DEVELOPERS MIGHT BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE ON A PLAYSTATION 6 OR 7?

Speaking for myself, with every game I work on, I'm blown away by the end product. I look at it and think, "How did we achieve something that looks this good, plays this well and feels this fluid?"

I felt that way making PlayStation 3, 4 and 5 games. At every iteration, wherever we are in the console lifecycle, I'm always amazed by the bar we're able to achieve.

NO MATTER HOW GOOD A GAME IS, PEOPLE ONLINE CAN DELIVER SOME BRUTAL FEEDBACK. HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THAT RESPONSE TO SOMETHING YOU'VE SPENT YEARS CREATING?

With any creative endeavour, and with the internet existing, people are going to have opinions.

You have to maintain a clear vision and stay confident in what you're developing. You need to know that you're making something you would want to play at the end of the day.

Marvel's Wolverine is released on 15 September on PlayStation 5 and is available to pre-order now at JB Hi-Fi. Pre-order bonuses include early unlocks of Wolverine's classic brown suit, reflective claws, +1 technique point and 4 PS avatars





PHOTO | DYKES ON BIKES AT THE SYDNEY MARDI GRAS PARADE 2025
BY GEORGIA JANE GRIFFITHS

'DYKE' & OTHER SLURS WE NOW EMBRACE

Jess Lewthwaite is trying to embrace reclamation, but some wounds take time to heal

I remember the first time someone called me a dyke. I was on the school bus, which I always hated. The school bus was where a lot of my bullying happened because you are trapped there, and all the kids were basically unsupervised. I lived about an hour away from my high school, so I was trapped for a long time, and bullying was a pretty standard way to fight the boredom for some.

I was about 13, and one of the cool kids came and sat next to me, which everyone who has ever been bullied knows is not a good thing. He pulled an X-rated magazine out of his backpack and started flipping through it, holding up pictures to me. After very resentfully pausing *Evanescence* on my Discman, I turned to him and asked him what he was doing. He looked

me in the eyes with a massive smile on his face and said, "I thought you'd like it, you're a dyke!"

Now, while my Gen Z readers go and quickly Google what a Discman is, I'll explain that I think it is a very common experience for lesbians to have had the word dyke used against us like this — as a slur. But something I'm noticing more and more is the use of this word by our community to describe ourselves, our events and our style. Almost like an umbrella or banner we are rallying to. So reclaiming slurs is nothing new, but before we fully embrace the word, I wanted to examine the impact a little closer.

History time! Learning is fun.

There isn't a tidy origin story for "dyke". The best guess is that it grew out of "morphadike", a butchered 19th-century way of saying "hermaphrodite", also a slur, aimed at women who weren't femme-ing correctly enough for whoever was watching. By the early 1900s, the meaner cousin "bulldyke" was already doing the

rounds, and for decades after, the word stayed as a weapon used against us, not claimed by us.

Then the '70s happened, and lesbian feminists did what we do best: took something meant to hurt and refused to let it. It got reworked into shorthand for a woman who's tough, independent and not asking permission from anyone. That same decade gave us Dyke Marches, Dykes on Bikes revving down parade routes, and Alison Bechdel's comic strip "Dykes to Watch Out For" carrying it straight into queer pop culture. So this reclamation isn't new at all.

Younger lesbians have largely grown up with "dyke" already softened by decades of reclamation work, so a lot of them use it the way you'd use "lesbian" or "sapphic", casually and without much weight attached. For plenty of women my age and older, though, the word still carries the exact tone of the person who yelled it at us from a moving car in 2003, and no amount of Gen Z reappropriation erases that memory. So are my 'Discman' and I just old and out of touch?

My advice to our younger community members is to lead with kindness. If you see an older lesbian squirm when you use the word, just know we are reacting to how others have used it, not how you use it. We understand it is still a slur in the wrong mouth, but still very much ours to use in the right one.

SEPTEMBERS TO REMEMBER

Historian Gareth Watkins highlights notable September dates for New Zealand's rainbow communities

6 September 1957

A large headline in Christchurch's *The Press* read "British Controversy On Vice Report". The article highlighted the newly released Wolfenden Committee's recommendation that homosexual acts in private between consenting men aged 21 or over should no longer be criminal offences. The Committee argued that it was not the law's role to intervene in people's private lives, except where necessary to preserve public order and decency or protect others from harm. In New Zealand, we were still 29 years from reform, so publicly supporting change could carry considerable social risk. Nevertheless, some people responded to the news. Two letters signed "End Legalised Persecution" appeared in response to the story in *The Press*. One challenged readers to consider whether New Zealand really needed to wait for Britain before reconsidering its own laws. The other argued that the harm caused by private homosexual behaviour was far less than the harm caused when the state imposed cultural conformity.

3 September 1995

Celebrated pianist Michael Houstoun performed a benefit concert for the New Zealand AIDS Foundation (now Burnett Foundation Aotearoa) at the University of Auckland School of Music. After several years performing overseas, Houstoun returned home in the early 1980s and became a familiar presence in concert halls nationwide. The concert was part of a broader community response to the HIV epidemic. While deaths from AIDS-related conditions had begun to decline from their 1992 peak, illness and uncertainty remained, with highly effective combination antiretroviral treatments not yet widely available. The Foundation, which had been at the forefront of the response since the mid-1980s, regularly drew on performers and other artists to support fundraising and public awareness. A couple of weeks before Houstoun's performance, the fifth annual AIDS Benefit Concert was held in Hamilton. And at the Foundation's AIDS Media Awards in December, Michael Parmenter performed a dance from *A*



Michael Houstoun

Long Undressing, his autobiographical solo work about living with HIV.

22 September 2019

The *Counting Ourselves* report was launched at an event in Auckland. It presented results from the first comprehensive national survey into the health and wellbeing of trans and non-binary people. The community-led survey received over 1,000 responses from people aged 14 to 83. Some findings were confronting, with seventy-one per cent of participants aged 15 and over reporting high or very high psychological distress, nine times the rate in the general population, and almost one in five reporting they wanted hormone treatment but had been unable to access it. However, the survey also recorded resilience and community, with fifty-eight per cent of respondents saying they provided support to other trans and non-binary people. At a later launch event in Wellington, researcher Jack Byrne urged people to use the findings as "an activist tool". The

survey results strengthened calls for accessible gender-affirming healthcare, inclusive schools and stronger legal recognition.

Heritage Spotlight

A useful tool for finding more information about queer (and general) ancestors is the NZ Ancestor Search Helper website. Developed by Luke Howison, this free site brings together historical search results from across New Zealand. Enter a person's name or upload an image of a grave marker, and the website will search multiple historical collections. Information comes from the Department of Internal Affairs, Archives NZ, Te Papa, the Alexander Turnbull Library, dozens of council and local cemetery databases, and military records. A search for Amy Bock, for example, returns photographs and records relating to court cases, marriage and divorce, along with catalogue entries for some draft film scripts originally held by the New Zealand Film Commission. Visit ash.howison.co.nz

OUT & ABOUT

EAGLE BRINGS THE SMILES

Auckland's Eagle Bar turned on the charm for another warm and wonderfully social night on Karangahape Road. Friends caught up over drinks, posed for the camera and settled into the bar's famously relaxed atmosphere, proving once again why Eagle remains a local favourite.



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PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



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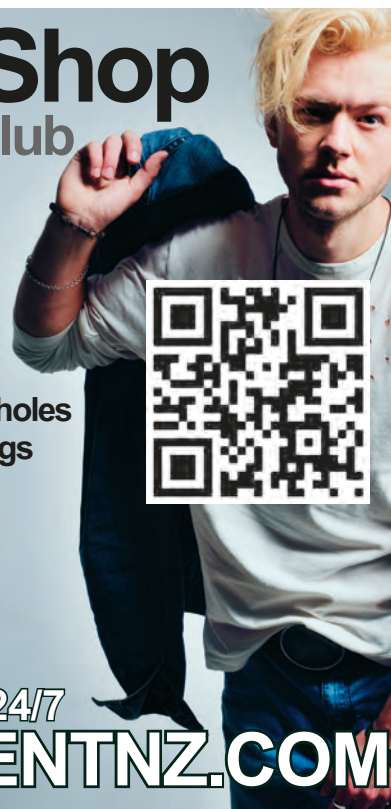
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VYBE:

BRINGING BIG DRAG ENERGY ACROSS THE TASMAN

Drag Race Down Under finalist Vybe promises glamour, campy and a taste of the golden age of drag when she makes her Palmy Drag Fest debut this October

PALMY DRAG FEST

When Vybe arrives in Palmerston North for Palmy Drag Fest, she knows exactly what she wants to give the audience.

"I'm going to give you drama. I'm going to give you campy, and I'm going to give you an absolute experience," she tells *YOUR EX*.

The Sydney queen describes her performance style as "extremely camp, extremely glam", although anyone hoping for an evening of acrobatics may need to look elsewhere.

"I'm not trying to do backflips, trips, flips and dips," she laughs.

What she may bring, however, is inspired by her current run on *Drag Race Down Under vs the World*.

"I've never brought this character anywhere except *Down Under vs the World*," she teases.

Could she perhaps be the wind beneath our wings?

"Oh, I don't want to say that," she laughs. "But I am a big fan of Beaches."

Now in her 15th year of drag, Vybe is a product of Sydney's celebrated showgirl tradition.

"As a gay kid in Australia, you're exposed to *Priscilla* very young. My family was also a big fan of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*," she says.

"The drag I first started with was very alternative, very kooky, very butt ugly, let's be real!"

It took seeing a Sydney production show in all its extravagance to inspire more.

"Just seeing the magic of drag at 100 per cent acceleration, full tilt, clam to the wall, it clicked something in my head," she recalls. "I had to grow into the glamour. As soon as I figured out that was where I'm at my best, I've never really left there."

By the time *Drag Race Down Under* came calling, Vybe had already spent years building her reputation in Sydney and had achieved several long-held career goals, including winning DIVA Awards.

She ultimately reached the final of season four, filmed in Auckland, before returning to the franchise for *Down Under vs the World*, which was filmed in Portugal.

While neither season was screened in New Zealand, both have given international audiences an introduction to the queen Sydney had known for years.

Her current season has also reunited her with Coco Jumbo, Vybe's flatmate of more than a decade.

Their friendship made headlines in 2017 when Vybe, Coco and fellow queen Ivy League stepped in after New Zealander Ivan Flinn was violently attacked in a homophobic incident on Sydney's Oxford Street.

Vybe says she still remembers the night vividly, calling it an honour "to actually have the opportunity to step in, help someone and make it known that Oxford Street is not a space for anything but love, respect and positivity," she says, before adding a typically Vybe warning: "We may be gorgeous women, but under the wigs we're butch men. So come correct or don't come at all!"

Vybe tells us she has watched Palmy Drag Fest from across the ditch through the socials of friends and fellow performers and says it has always been a bucket list gig.

"Seeing this gorgeous theatre with this incredible crowd, it's one of those things where you're like, 'I need to do that!'"

And for anyone still deciding whether to buy a ticket, Vybe has an important final message.

"Be gay. Be as queer as possible. Go out. Support your local venue. Support your local drag. If you've been considering doing drag but you don't know how, just fucking do it. Get out. Be in the scene. Be present. Be visible. And buy a goddamn ticket to Palmy Drag Fest!"

Catch Vybe at Palmy Drag Fest, headlined by the New Zealand debut of Miss Vanjie, on Saturday 3 October. Get your tickets now from palmydrag.com and Ticketek

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BAREFOOT DAYS, BIG NIGHTS AND THE QUEER MAGIC OF NEW YORK

YOUR EX's Matt Fistonich Discovers Fire Island Pines, Manhattan Bars, and Brooklyn After Dark



Matt in Fire Island

New York has always promised reinvention. It is a city where you can arrive as one person, disappear into its energy and return home feeling slightly more yourself. But for LGBTQ+ travellers, some of its most memorable experiences lie beyond Manhattan's familiar skyline.

Our trip began at Fire Island Pines, a predominantly gay enclave on Fire Island, just off the southern coast of Long Island. Reaching it from Manhattan involves taking the Long Island Rail Road to Sayville, transferring to the ferry terminal and crossing the Great South Bay. The journey takes around two-and-a-half hours from central New York, but the moment the ferry pulls away, city life begins to feel distant.

AN ISLAND OF OUR OWN

Arriving at Fire Island Pines feels like gaining access to an exclusive queer world.

Cars are virtually absent, with wooden boardwalks replacing roads and people moving between houses, beaches and the harbour on foot. The skyline is made up of trees, dunes and striking holiday homes rather than skyscrapers. The absence of traffic creates a kind of instant intimacy. You hear conversations, music drifting from decks and the rumble of wheeled carts being pulled towards the next party.

Days begin with long mornings beside private pools, afternoons on the sweeping Atlantic beach and seemingly spontaneous gatherings that can turn a quiet drink into a fully fledged house party. Swimwear is practically formal

attire, while invitations and introductions become the island's most valuable currency.

The house-party culture is central to the Pines experience. Groups rent large homes together, inviting friends and neighbours over for drinks, barbecues and dancing beside the pool. Some gatherings feel casual and communal; others appear to have been planned with the precision of a major event, complete with DJs, lighting and crowds spilling across multi-level decks.

Then there are the beach parties. Music, drinks and groups of beautiful strangers transform stretches of sand into open-air celebrations, with the Atlantic providing a spectacular backdrop. The mood is sexy and social, but the island's seclusion gives everything a sense of freedom.

Fire Island has been an LGBTQ+ refuge for generations. At a time when queer people could not dance or socialise openly in many mainland venues, the Pines and neighbouring Cherry Grove offered space to gather, form chosen families and live with fewer restrictions. That history remains present beneath the glamorous houses and barely-there swimwear.

SERVING TEA

Eventually, almost everyone gravitates towards the Waterfront, the compact social centre beside the ferry dock. This is where the Pines' famous progressive sequence of parties takes over.

Low Tea begins at the Blue Whale, the waterfront venue where the original Tea Dance



tradition was established in 1966. Running from late afternoon, it is the first major gathering of the day.

On Fridays and Saturdays, Middle Tea begins at 6pm at the Tryst Pool Club, adding dancers, DJs and poolside chaos to the procession. From 7pm, High Tea takes over the Pavilion, where the music becomes louder and the crowd tighter. By High Tea, the Waterfront feels like the centre of the gay universe.

BACK TO THE BIG CITY

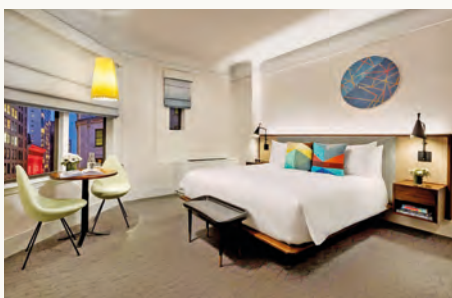
Returning to Manhattan brings a dramatic shift in scale, but not a shortage of queer nightlife.

Boxers remains an easy place to begin. The gay sports bar now operates two Manhattan locations. The Chelsea branch is an easy walk from Hotel Seville NoMad, while the Hell's Kitchen location adds a rooftop cantina to its mix.

TRAVEL



Matt in Hotel Seville Bar



Hotel Bedroom

Both deliver Boxers' familiar combination of outgoing bartenders, go-go boys, happy hours and a crowd that shifts from after-work drinks to dancing as the evening progresses. Despite the sports-bar branding, nobody needs to know the score to feel welcome.

Over in Hell's Kitchen, HUSH offers its own distinct energy. Craft cocktails, drag performances and club nights share the space with some of New York's most enthusiastic go-go boys. It is perfect for a playful, flirtatious night.

BROOKLYN AFTER DARK

Manhattan could easily fill every night of a holiday, but limiting yourself to one borough would mean missing an important part of contemporary queer New York.

A short subway journey takes you into Williamsburg, where an evening can begin with cocktails at a stylish listening bar, Mr. Melo, which pairs vinyl-focused music and Mediterranean-inspired food.

It is intimate enough for conversation but still possesses that particular Brooklyn quality of making everyone inside look as though they have just finished a photoshoot.

From there, head to ANIMAL. Its Brooklyn crowd feels slightly less predictable than Manhattan's venues, bringing together club kids, neighbourhood regulars and visitors looking to get lost in the music.

WHERE TO STAY: HOTEL SEVILLE NOMAD

Formerly The James New York NoMad, the historic 1903 Beaux-Arts property has refreshed interiors that balance the building's history with contemporary rooms, upgraded public areas and a sophisticated new lobby lounge called Il Bar.

Its residential-style seating and softly glamorous design make it equally suited to a pre-dinner cocktail or final nightcap.

The renovated gym is also impressively spacious by Manhattan hotel standards, with Peloton bikes and up-to-date Precor cardio and strength equipment. That becomes particularly useful after several nights of cocktails, pizza and questionable decisions.

Most importantly, the location makes the entire city accessible. NoMad sits close to the Empire State Building, Madison Square Park, Flatiron and multiple subway lines, while Chelsea, Midtown and the restaurants of Koreatown are all within comfortable reach.

Our gorgeous king corner room was high on the 14th floor, where windows opened the room to immersive views. Manhattan did not simply appear beyond the glass; it seemed to wrap itself

around us. Looking out from bed, we watched sunlight move across the surrounding buildings before thousands of windows gradually illuminated after dark.

The spacious room, wonderfully comfortable king bed and cinematic outlook made returning to the hotel feel like one of the day's highlights.

FLYING UNITED POLARIS

United Airlines' Polaris business-class experience made the long journey between New Zealand and New York considerably easier.

Our itinerary connected through San Francisco in both directions, with access to United's impressive Polaris Lounge during each transfer. On the return journey, the Polaris Lounge at Newark provided another opportunity to relax, eat and reset before flying west.

These lounges go far beyond the usual airport waiting room. Polaris guests can choose between buffet dining and a sit-down meal in a private dining space, enjoy a drink at the bar or freshen up in spa-like shower facilities before boarding.

On board, the Polaris seat transforms into a completely lie-flat bed, allowing the cabin to function as a restaurant, private workspace and bedroom depending on the stage of the flight. The thoughtfully presented menu, generous entertainment selection and attentive service helped the hours pass remarkably quickly.

The greatest luxury came on the San Francisco-to-New Zealand sector. After dinner, we converted our seats into beds and slept for virtually the entire journey home. Rather than arriving exhausted and spending days trying to recalibrate, we stepped off the aircraft feeling rested and largely free of the usual jet lag.

That comfort completed a holiday built around contrasts: beach houses and skyscrapers, barefoot afternoons and 4am dance floors, intimate cocktails and enormous parties.

Book your very own gay bucket list experience to New York and Fire Island Pines with United today! [united.com](https://www.united.com)



LILY ALLEN MAKES A SCENE

From MySpace breakout and queer favourite to marital fallout and an acclaimed comeback, Lily Allen is turning her private drama into theatre

Lily Allen has always known how to make a scene.

She emerged in the mid-2000s via MySpace, pairing sweet, ska-inflected pop with lyrics that could be funny, filthy and devastatingly cutting. “Smile” made her a star in 2006, while debut album *Alright, Still* established her as a songwriter unlike anyone else. Together with follow-up *It’s Not Me, It’s You*, her first two albums sold more than five million copies worldwide.

Then there was “Fuck You”, Allen’s gloriously blunt rejection of racism, intolerance and homophobia. With its sugary melody and unmistakable message, the song was enthusiastically embraced by queer audiences and became the kind of communal singalong that could make telling bigots exactly where to go sound positively joyous. Years later, Olivia Rodrigo invited Allen onstage at Glastonbury to perform it in protest at the US Supreme Court overturning *Roe v Wade*.

Allen’s relationship with fame proved more complicated. Albums, tabloid scrutiny and periods away from music followed. Her 2018 record *No Shame* earned a Mercury Prize nomination, before she stepped back from recording and found another outlet on stage,

acting in productions of *2:22 A Ghost Story*, *The Pillouman* and *Hedda Gabler*. She also kept her famously unfiltered voice in the public ear as co-host of the award-winning podcast *Miss Me* with her best friend Miquita Oliver.

Then Allen married *Stranger Things* actor David Harbour in Las Vegas in 2020 and later relocated to New York. When the marriage unravelled, the emotional fallout became raw material for her first album in seven years. Across 14 tracks, *West End Girl* tells an intensely intimate story involving desire, mistrust, stumbled-upon sex toys, and apparent infidelity. Allen has resisted presenting every lyric as sworn autobiography, describing the record instead as a fusion of fact and fiction, but the parallels with the breakdown of her marriage are impossible to ignore.

Allen has said she initially imagined telling the story as a play before ultimately turning it into an album. Now, with the record’s live incarnation, that original theatrical instinct has come full circle.

Rather than constructing a conventional concert around greatest hits and crowd-pleasers, Lily performs *West End Girl* in its entirety and track order. The effect is closer to watching a play’s narrative unfold than attending a standard

pop show, with staging, character and costume moving the audience through its shifting moods.

And the fashion is part of the storytelling too. Heightened, knowingly glamorous looks give Allen the air of a classic Hollywood starlet in a bruising domestic drama. It is pop performance treated as storytelling, rather than simply a sequence of songs.

It has proved quite the second act. *West End Girl* has amassed more than 275 million streams and brought Allen some of the strongest reviews of her career. Critics have called it an album-of-the-year contender and her best work in 16 years.

Now comes her biggest headline tour yet and her first New Zealand appearance in more than seven years.

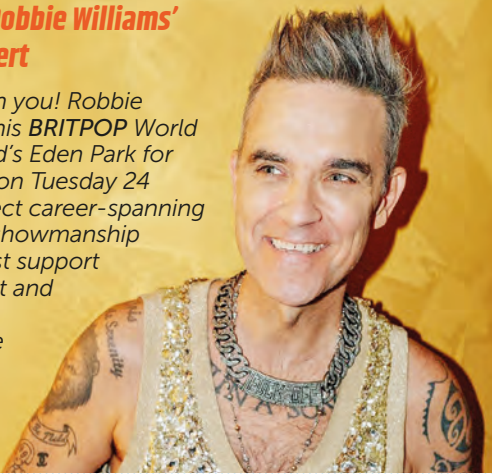
For an artist who built a career by refusing to keep quiet, turning a very public heartbreak into a stage show feels entirely fitting. Lily Allen is making a scene again. This time, quite literally.

Lily Allen performs *West End Girl* at Auckland’s Spark Arena on Tuesday 21 October.
Tickets from [ticketmaster.co.nz](https://www.ticketmaster.co.nz)

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2 x Tickets to **Lily Allen's** **Auckland Show**

Lily Allen returns to New Zealand for her biggest headline tour yet, performing acclaimed comeback album **West End Girl** live and in full. We're giving away a double pass to see the sharp-tongued pop icon bring her theatrical new show to Auckland's Spark Arena on Wednesday 21 October.



2 x Double Passes to **Heartbreak Hotel**

Love hurts, but it can also be hilarious. Eleanor Bishop and Karin McCracken's **Heartbreak Hotel** mixes memoir, science and music to explore the messy realities of heartbreak. We have two double passes to see the funny, raw and painfully relatable show at Christchurch's Court Theatre on Saturday 17 October at 7.30pm.

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STAY WHERE THE WORLD CAN'T FIND YOU: THE SECLUSION AND SERENITY OF SEASCAPE

Oliver Hall discovers that a stay at this architectural wonder is not about how it looks, but how it makes you feel and the ways that can change you

About a 30-minute drive from the South Island's picturesque volcano-rim town of Akaroa sits Annandale in Pigeon Bay (annandale.com). Annandale is a working coastal farm, set along 15 kilometres of the Banks Peninsula, that offers arguably New Zealand's most luxurious secluded accommodation. This includes three modern coastal villas and four beautifully restored historic properties, including the Shepherd's Cottage for couples and the Annandale Homestead for larger groups.

Each of the modern villas has been designed by renowned New Zealand architect Andrew Patterson, with a mandate to complement the land, not compete with it. Even though Andrew's firm, Pattersons, is responsible for iconic buildings like New Plymouth's Len Lye Centre and Christchurch's Ravenscar House Museum, Annandale houses some of his greatest works, such as the award-winning Scrubby Bay (which sleeps up to 14) and the romantic couples' retreat Seascape, our accommodation for an unforgettable stay.

You have two options for arriving at Seascape: a helicopter ride from Christchurch Airport, which can be done in a brief seven minutes or extended if you would like to see more of the coast, or driving to reception and leaving your car there. From reception, staff will take you on to the accommodation, with the option of touring the farm on the way. At this time of

year, the tour is a must, with newborn lambs bouncing around and stealing your heart as they frolic in this most picturesque setting.

Seascape is secluded in Whitehead Bay. As we drive down the peninsula towards it, it takes a while to spot the building as its natural roof blends into the hills.

You enter the villa to a suspended 70s-style bubble chair hanging from the ceiling, which sets the perfect tone for the stay: a swing seat dedicated to watching the waves.

The accommodation, while essentially a studio, is made up of a multitude of outdoor and indoor spaces, each with unique offerings to be enjoyed.

Time absolutely slows down lying out on the perfectly furnished deck with an outdoor fireplace that stretches towards the sea, complete with plush outdoor armchairs and day beds. There is such a therapeutic serenity to the waves lapping so close to you... and only you, creating a seclusion that is equal parts addictive and nurturing.

We wallow in the sunken spa bath and chat, then lie out on the day beds and barely utter a word. The stillness has taken us and we are simply seduced by the view. We do enjoy a brief stroll around the bay, but nothing that will compete with the number of calories we consume.

We arrived to find charcuterie and cheese plates waiting for our peckish presence. They have been prepared by Annandale's private chef Liam Summers (fresh off being head chef at Tussock Hill when it earned a Michelin star). Before our stay, we filled out a form asking about our dietary desires, and tonight he cooks for us at Seascape.

At this private dining experience, each course



is surpassed by the next. It is undeniably the best meal we have had, climaxing with crayfish in buttery pumpkin consommé and a perfectly cooked beef fillet.

The staff at Annandale can organise any activities you would like to enjoy in the surrounding area, but wisely warn that when you experience the accommodation, you may not feel like leaving it. We decide we will explore Akaroa once we have departed, but after dinner, from the comfort of the helipad lawn, just steps from Seascape's entrance, they organise a private stargazing session for us with Akaroa Stargazing (which I detail on the next page). We admire the moon through a variety of telescopes, while the restorative soundtrack of the tide lapping over the beach's pebbles plays and a local leopard seal keeps watch over us from shore. It is a magical end to the evening.

Breakfast and lunch the next day are delivered to our accommodation as part of the 'we create, you serve' service, meaning you can just please yourselves. Eat when you like. Sleep when you like. You're completely free.

Breakfast includes par-cooked poached eggs that you simply dunk into boiling water for 30 seconds, and beef brisket hash to heat in the oven. They are served with the most divine pickles (grown on the property).

The morning sun glitters across the bay. Seascape's design, with floor-to-ceiling windows and skylights, ensures you always feel more

AKAROA & THE BAYS



connected with nature and the elements, making it an incredible place to reset as you begin sleeping at night and making the most of the property during daylight hours. Ideal for night owls looking for a circadian restructure.

Talking to Andrew Patterson about his design, he tells me, “Seascape was about creating a primal direct relationship with the natural environment. A fire, cave, the sea, the land, and the weather.”

This rings true, as I stretch out on the L-shaped couch in front of the feature fireplace, looking towards the striking cliffs and across the sea to the Kaikōura mountains. A uniquely New Zealand view. The toilet shares the same outlook, meaning even ablutions offer time for reflection.

While lying in a giant bubble bath in the triumphantly designed bathroom, my niece calls from London to share her exam results. The joyful conversation inspires me to reach out to those friends I’ve been meaning to catch up with for ages. Laughter ensues as we reconnect over old memories and recent news. That’s the thing when life feels like it has slowed down. You realise you can make the time to connect with the people who matter.

During our stay we listen to The Beatles, The Weeknd, Michael Jackson and the new album from Sam Smith. Though different, each feels fitting for Seascape in its own way. Whether it’s McCartney and Lennon reminding us that ‘All You Need Is Love’, The Weeknd’s celebration of



modern excess, Smith’s soulful ease or Jackson and Quincy Jones’ collaborative masterpieces, every one of them seems to speak Annandale’s language of modern creativity meeting ancient natural beauty.

While a flatscreen is perfectly positioned to be watched from your king bed, everything about Seascape draws you to look away from screens and put down your phone. Your attention is instead taken by the breathtaking views and by experiencing the different spaces this retreat has to offer.

I’m amazed at how even a short stay at Seascape broadened my perspective and led me to reconsider life’s challenges.

If you are looking for a mental reset, stay somewhere specially designed to cut out the noise and encourage the luxury of introspection.

For those who appreciate architecture, getting away from it all and reconnecting with the



natural world, their partner and themselves, Seascape is the break you didn’t realise you needed.

For more information and to book Seascape or one of Annandale’s other extraordinary properties, visit annandale.com

THE AKAROA LOCALS LOVE

Oliver Hall discovers a harbour town where independent businesses thrive by championing each other

Sitting on the edge of its spectacular harbour, Akaroa has the kind of beauty that makes you want to slow down and stay awhile. Its Māori history, French colonial influence and position within the dramatic Banks Peninsula landscape give the town a character entirely its own. Just as striking is its tight-knit community of independent businesses. Locals enthusiastically recommend one another, producers stock each other's wares and there is a sense that everyone understands that a better Akaroa experience benefits the whole town.



PHOTO | JULIA ATKINSON-DUNN

AKAROA BUTCHERY + DELI

If you have booked self-catering accommodation, make this your first stop. Owners T Dunn and Julia Atkinson-Dunn champion independent New Zealand producers alongside meats and small-batch goods made in-store.

We grab one of their gorgeous totes that Julia has designed with Ico Trading, and fill it with store-made NZ pork sausages, free-farmed bacon, Akaroa salmon, Barry's Bay cheeses, artisan crackers and dips. It is less a butcher shop than a beautifully curated pantry of Aotearoa, and no food-loving visit feels complete without dropping in. akaroabutchery.nz

AKAROA STARGAZING

Akaroa Stargazing offers daytime and evening astronomy experiences, led by a family-run team. Founder Luca previously worked as an astronomy guide at the University of Canterbury Mt John Observatory before establishing the business in 2022.

He combines an academic delight in astrophysics and astronomy with uniquely Italian charisma. During our private session, he explains that our Sun is currently white but will eventually become a red giant. "I wonder if we'll tan differently when it changes colour?" I ask. Luca congratulates me on my silly question, reassuring me that a silly question is very different from a stupid one. Wise, funny and infectious in his enthusiasm, he makes this an Akaroa must. akaroastargazing.com



MA MAISON

With harbour views and an inviting dining conservatory soaking up the sun, Ma Maison makes a gorgeous waterfront dinner spot.

On our visit, house-baked bread arrives with smoked cheddar fondue before spicy prawn and pāua dumplings and Akaroa's famously fresh salmon. The drinks list is equally tempting. The Le Bons Bay Apple Pie cocktail, mixing vodka and apple juice with bitters and cinnamon syrup, is a fabulous warmer. mamaison.co.nz



THE LOCALS RECOMMEND...

Ask around town and recommendations arrive quickly. Start with cracking croissants from A La Baguette, then head next door to Crater Café for excellent coffee and cabinet food. Nomad Wholefoods is the spot for organic and spray-free vegetables, while The Seafood Kitchen builds its changing menu around fresh, sustainably sourced seafood that is impeccably prepared. For wine and a view, locals point towards Caldera Vineyard Estate, while Shamarra Alpacas, home to more than 170 curious residents, provides a guaranteed cuteness overload!

BLACK CAT CRUISES

Akaroa is famous for its population of Hector's dolphins, but the wildlife is only part of the appeal of Black Cat Cruises' two-hour Nature Cruise. You are travelling through an ancient volcanic crater, surrounded by dramatic sea cliffs and spectacular Banks Peninsula scenery.

Hector's dolphins provide delightful splashes along the way, while New Zealand fur seals lounge on rocky outcrops and seabirds soar overhead. Even if the dolphins are feeling shy, the harbour itself is the star. blackcat.co.nz



PHOTO | JULIA ATKINSON-DUNN

A Akaroa
& The
Bays

Discover more and
plan your visit at
Akaroa.com

TRUTH IS POWER

PITCH PERFECT: LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

*Raureti Ormond reflects on growing up gay in a rugby family, and how his relationship with his Pāpā inspired his new show, **Grass Roots***

So far, most of my creative practice has been steeped in my love of musical theatre, a form that lends itself to glamour, spectacle and beauty. But with my new show '*Grass Roots*', I wanted to challenge myself: to get a little bit ugly, a little bit "rougher" and to confront something I've needed to for a long time.

To grow up in Aotearoa is to know the sound of chanting as the teams go to battle on the living-room television. Beer-stained condensation escapes from the mouth as everyone gathers on the sidelines on a cold winter's day. At intermediate school, we even had "All Black"-themed mufti days to celebrate us taking home the World Cup. Whether you love it or not, rugby lives in every home, school and workplace in New Zealand. From berg to burrow, city to sea, there's just no escaping it.

I've been raised in a world where rugby was our lifeline. Quite literally, it put food on the table and a roof over our heads. My dad played a great game, becoming one of the

lucky ones who could pursue his rugby career professionally. His name is Wayne Ormond. People say he was a cult hero of NZ rugby in the 2000s. Apparently, he was pretty good... but I wouldn't be the best judge of that.

Growing up, we spent our weekends at the stadium or the clubhouse, amongst crowds of spectators. They all seemed so invested in what was happening before them. But my young eyes were always disengaged, daydreaming of some far-off Pixie Hollow. When the final whistle would blow, all the other young boys would crowd the sidelines while I was gunning to get home and tend to my Polly Pocket collection.

The other boys I was surrounded by all started taking after their rugby-playing fathers. They got strong and fast, while I was more sensitive and soft-spoken. We'd go to the park, and the rugby balls would come out. We'd play piggy in the middle, and I was always the little pig who couldn't keep up. They all dreamed of becoming like their dads while I dreamed of making it on Broadway as Fantine in *Les Misérables*; I still hold out hope.

As the years went on, I was constantly met with questions like, "What position do you play, son?" or "Are you just as good as your dad?" In fact, I couldn't tell you the difference between a ruck and a scrum.

For me, rugby became the image of grief and expectation. But it was also the image of my



Raureti Ormond

pāpā. My kind father has always loved me without condition. He drove me to choir practice and drama rehearsals. He now sits at every one of my shows with a proud smile on his face. He recently came to the opening weekend of 'Māreikura', a theatre show where I was not

Raureti but my drag alter ego Pānia. Isn't that awesome!?

I, just like my dad, have had the opportunity to live out my wildest dreams in front of big crowds. Despite the odds being stacked against us, we've both done it.

Grass Roots is a show that I've written as a love letter to my Pāpā and as a convergence of both our dreams. It explores the many ways in which rugby has taught me the true measure of what it means to be a man and celebrates the way my dad and I are the same. I may not have a number on my back, but I wear his last name with pride.

Grass Roots will be performed at Auckland's Te Pou Theatre on Wednesday 16 September and Wellington's The Hannah on Friday 18 September

PRESERVING RAINBOW STORIES

ARTICLE | OLIVER HALL

PHOTO | TASHA JOLLEY

Leilani Sio on community, queer history and bringing Carmen Rupe's legacy to Wellington Museum

Forty-five minutes from central Wellington, Leilani Sio (they/them) has found a place where they can disappear.

They live in a small village on the Kāpiti Coast, close enough to Pōneke for their work at Experience Wellington but far enough away to enjoy a degree of anonymity. The ocean is central to life there. Sio swims year-round with a local group they affectionately call "The Mermaids", adding that they are the resident "Merperson".

"They're mostly older women who unknowingly challenged my perspective on ageing and navigating your twilight years," Sio says.

"Winter is my favourite season to get to the moana, and I do it to keep sane."

As a Public Programmes Specialist for Experience Wellington, Sio creates ways for people to connect with museum collections, exhibitions and stories from the capital. Sometimes that means a talk or mini film festival. Other times it means handing more of

the creative power to communities themselves, as with Chosen Family Night during Wellington Pride Festival.

"Public Programmes Specialist is just a fancy way of saying I create ways for people to connect," they explain.

The breadth suits them. "There's no right way or wrong way of doing this job, there are no rules and yes, it is broad, and for my ADHD brain it's a marriage made in heaven."

Sio admits to constantly scheming ways to "reinvent the wheel", but experience has also taught them that bigger does not necessarily mean better. Some of the programmes they are

CULTURE

proudest of have simply created a room in which people can “come, listen, share and absorb”.

For Sio, those spaces matter particularly when they allow rainbow and Pacific communities to encounter their own histories.

“That it is my responsibility to help manifest change and steer the course of our community’s lives for the better,” they say. “This is my contribution, and currently it’s the best way I know how to ‘tautua’ to my village.”

They intend to keep doing it until a new generation takes over, they get too old, or, ideally, “until it is normalised and we no longer need the platform or space”.

Museums themselves are changing too. Sio is candid about the colonial foundations of institutions that historically determined whose objects, lives and stories deserved preservation.

“Are we there yet? No, but I’m incredibly hopeful or delusional. Take your pick,” they laugh. “Community-led programming is the transition and change from the museum’s colonialist roots.”

Now Sio is taking another step in that journey. Alongside Wellington Museum’s Senior Māori Curator Dr Jamie Metzger, they are co-curating an exhibition on one of the capital’s most enduring queer icons, Carmen Rupe, opening this October.

Carmen’s extraordinary Wellington years included the International Coffee Lounge on Vivian Street, the flamboyant Balcony nightclub, numerous other businesses and a headline-making run for mayor in 1977. She also became known for protecting and supporting people on the margins, including transgender people entering sex work or navigating transition.

But Sio’s relationship with Carmen’s story began long before this exhibition.

“I grew up hearing about Carmen through my mum, and through the queens in Wellington who would mention her when the occasion rose,” they say.

Their path towards Carmen also runs through another beloved Wellington figure, Chrissy Witoko, whose Evergreen

Coffee House became a haven for rainbow communities during the 1980s and 1990s. Sio previously helped create a Wellington Museum programme remembering Chrissy and the Evergreen.

“If it was not for this place and people like Gaye Hawkins and Des Cooper especially, I think I would have ended up a statistic,” they say of Evergreen.

Having dropped out of school at 14 while struggling with experiences they were not yet equipped to process, as well as their sexuality and gender, they describe Evergreen as “a lighthouse in what was a very, very dark place”.

That history helps explain why the Carmen exhibition feels like more than another project.

“I feel privileged to be researching Carmen’s story,” Sio says. “It’s an honour because she’s our origin story as a collective, as a community, and she’s Māori.”

They are especially interested in pushing beyond the familiar image of Carmen as big hair, fabulous clothes, coffee lounges and political provocation.

“It depends on what lens you are looking through,” Sio says. “If you put it through a Māori lens, how does it vibe now? A whakawāhine lens? Takatāpui?”

What has struck them most is how strongly Carmen’s Māori values flowed through what she built.

“What she achieved with the lounge and The Balcony provides a bar for all of us to follow,” Sio says.

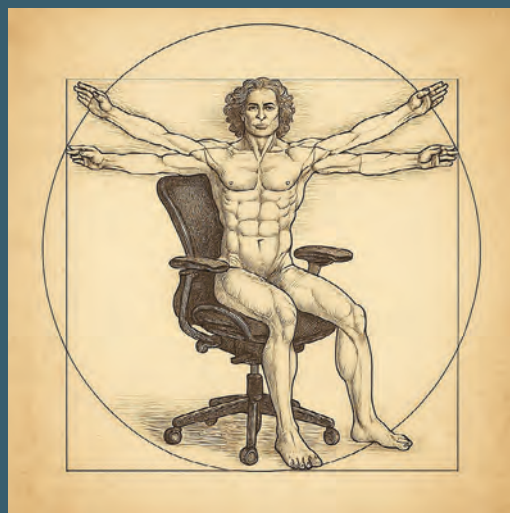
For someone whose work is about using history to help communities understand themselves, Carmen could hardly be a more fitting subject.

“To better self-reflect and inform the future as a community, our history is a way of holding up the mirror.”

This October, Sio is helping Pōneke look into it.

‘Arohanui, Carmen xx’ will be exhibited in Wellington Museum’s Te Wheke Gallery from 3 October - 17 February.

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It's more than just a house. It's your ideas brought to life through thoughtful design, skilled craftsmanship and high construction standards. Best of all, you can finally wave goodbye to the compromises, questionable colour schemes and mysterious DIY decisions that often come with an older home.

THE FREEDOM OF PERSONALISED DESIGN

Choosing to build rather than buy means you're not simply purchasing a property—you're

creating a lifestyle and a place where you can feel completely at home.

Every family and household looks different, and your home should reflect that. Professional home designers, such as the team at GJ's, work with you to develop a floorplan around how you actually live, rather than expecting you to adapt to choices made by someone else decades ago.

Building from scratch lets you have input into everything from room sizes and ceiling heights to bathroom locations, storage and kitchen extras, such as a butler's pantry. You might want flexible spaces for visiting whānau, a home office, an extra-glamorous wardrobe or an entertaining area big enough to host the whole rainbow crew.

The result is a home that feels like a perfect fit—not an approximation that will require expensive renovations before it truly feels like yours.

MODERN COMFORT AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

New Zealand's building standards have evolved considerably, giving modern homes some major advantages over many existing properties.

Contemporary construction can include advanced insulation, energy-efficient heating, effective ventilation and thoughtful design features that help create a warmer, drier and more comfortable home. That's especially

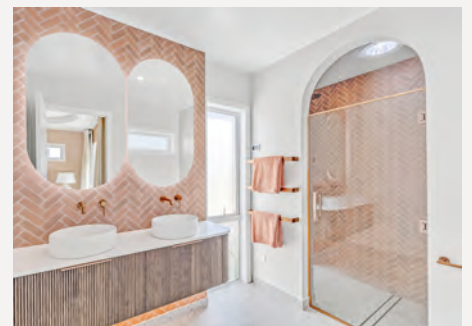
important during those chilly Aotearoa winters, when nobody wants to spend the evening wrapped in three blankets and arguing over whose turn it is to refill the hot-water bottle.

A newly built home may also help you avoid the costly surprises that can arrive with an older property. Outdated wiring, ageing plumbing, poor insulation and inefficient heating systems can all be expensive to repair or replace.

With a new build, everything is new, designed to meet modern expectations and covered by the relevant warranties—giving you greater confidence in your investment.

TECHNOLOGY FROM DAY ONE

Think about how much your life relies on technology compared with just 10 years ago. The internet connects us with friends and whānau, entertainment, work, news, shopping





and essential services—not to mention the occasional late-night scroll.

Today's new homes can be designed with high-speed internet infrastructure, home-automation pre-wiring, security technology and electric-vehicle charging capabilities from the beginning.

Retrofitting an existing home to meet modern needs can be expensive and disruptive. Even essentials such as fibre broadband, well-planned lighting, additional power points and heat pumps can involve considerable electrician bills and compromises to the home's appearance.

Building new allows these features to be incorporated neatly and strategically, so your home works for the way you live now while remaining ready for future technology.

OUTDOOR LIVING, YOUR WAY

For much of the year, outdoor living is a big part of life in Aotearoa—so why settle for a home that treats the backyard as an afterthought?

With a new build, you can create seamless indoor-outdoor flow that makes the most of sunshine, fresh air and time spent with the people you love.

Imagine wide sliding doors connecting your dining area to a covered entertaining space, a main bedroom opening onto a private



deck, or an Italian-inspired loggia with an outdoor fireplace. Perhaps your dream includes landscaped gardens, a safe space for children or pets, or the perfect setting for Pride-season parties and long summer evenings with chosen family.

When these areas are included in the original plans, the indoor and outdoor spaces can work together as one cohesive design. Adding comparable features to an existing house later can be more expensive and may never achieve quite the same natural flow.

THE JOY OF CREATING SOMETHING NEW

There's something deeply satisfying about creating a home from the ground up—a place that reflects your values, supports your lifestyle and celebrates who you are.

From choosing the floorplan to selecting colours, finishes and fixtures, every decision helps shape a space that is uniquely yours. Whether your style is calm and minimalist, bold and colourful or somewhere fabulously in between, a new build gives you the freedom to express it.

Working with experienced and respected home builders, such as G.J. Gardner Homes, helps turn that vision into reality while guiding you through New Zealand's consent processes, building requirements and construction journey.

The result is more than a new house. It's a warm, efficient and welcoming home designed for your household—whatever form that takes—with the reassurance of knowing it has been built to modern standards and made to last.

GET STARTED ON YOUR NEW HOME

If you're considering building a new home instead of purchasing an existing property, talk to your local GJ's team today.

They can help you explore the possibilities and begin creating a home where you, your partner, your whānau and your chosen family can feel comfortable, proud and completely yourselves.

Talk to your local GJ's franchise today (or visit www.gjgardner.co.nz) and design a home that captures your style, suits your lifestyle, and inspires you every day.

GOING TO THE DARK SIDE: MY LOCKWOOD HOME'S PITCH BLACK MAKEOVER



How careful preparation and Resene Waterborne Woodsman CoolColour™ in Resene Pitch Black gave Matt Fistonich's classic Kiwi timber home a bold new chapter

There is something unmistakable about a Lockwood home. The timber is its character, with grain, warmth and strong horizontal lines that make these homes instantly recognisable.

After years of facing Aotearoa's sun, wind and rain, however, my timber was ready for a refresh. So, I gave the exterior some well-earned attention and took it somewhere dramatically darker with Resene Waterborne Woodsman CoolColour™ in Resene Pitch Black.

And when I say darker, I mean the house fully entered its goth era.

GOING BLACK WITHOUT HIDING THE TIMBER

Choosing a black exterior was always going to make a statement, but I did not want to hide what made my Lockwood special.

Resene Pitch Black is a deep black wood stain. Unlike an opaque painted finish, Resene Waterborne Woodsman penetrated the timber

while allowing its natural character to remain visible. The familiar grain and lines were still there; they were simply serving a sharper, more contemporary look.

The finished result was bold and architectural, with plenty of drama — the tasteful kind, not the reality-TV reunion kind.

WHY COOLCOLOUR MATTERED

The obvious consideration when taking a timber house this dark was heat. Dark exterior colours generally absorb more heat than lighter colours, which can place additional stress on timber.

That was why I chose Resene CoolColour technology. It uses special pigments designed to reflect more of the sun's heat than the standard version of the same colour, helping to reduce heat-related stress on the substrate.

CoolColour did not make black behave exactly like white, so I checked that the colour and coating system suited my cladding. That quick homework gave me confidence before committing.

PREPARATION MADE THE DIFFERENCE

The glamorous part was watching the house turn black, but the quality of the finish came down to what happened first.

I checked the existing coating and dealt with any loose or weathered areas. Because compatibility matters, an unknown, clear or

film-forming coating is worth discussing with the team at a Resene ColorShop before applying a penetrating stain over it.

I also treated any moss and mould with Resene Moss & Mould Killer, then cleaned, rinsed and allowed the timber to dry thoroughly.

I skipped the waterblaster. High-pressure cleaning can damage timber fibres and leave marks, especially when the grain will remain visible through a stain. A gentler clean took a little more effort, but it helped protect the surface I was trying to show off.





Once everything was clean and dry, I masked the windows and joinery, protected the surrounding areas and lightly sanded where required. Not exactly the red-carpet moment of the project, but absolutely worth it.

TESTING PITCH BLACK

Wood stain responds to what is underneath it, so timber species, existing colour, weathering and absorbency can all influence the finished appearance.

Before tackling the whole exterior, I applied a test patch to a representative area. It showed me how Resene Pitch Black looked on my actual Lockwood timber, how much grain remained visible and how the colour developed with each coat.

Think of it as a dress rehearsal — far better to check the look before sending the entire house onto the runway.

BUILDING UP THE BLACK

I thoroughly stirred the stain before and during application to keep the colour evenly distributed. Working from the top down, I completed one board at a time and followed the grain.

Keeping a wet edge was important because overlapping onto an area that had already dried could create darker lap marks. With a colour as strong as Pitch Black, even application was the secret to a polished finish.

I also avoided working on timber that was too hot or in harsh direct sun. Resene lists a

minimum recoat time of two hours at 18°C for Waterborne Woodsman CoolColour, although I allowed the conditions on the day to guide me and made sure each coat was properly dry before continuing.

I chose to apply a third coat. Resene advises that two coats provide greater heat-reflective performance than one, while three perform better again; beyond three, there is no discernible improvement in heat reflectance. The third coat helped me get the system right while the ladders, masking and everything else were already in place, plus it gave the ideal Pitch Black look that I was after!



THE FINISHED TRANSFORMATION

Resene Pitch Black completely changed the mood of the house. Its silhouette looked stronger, the horizontal lines appeared sharper, and the surrounding greenery seemed brighter against the dark exterior.

Most importantly, it still looked like a timber home. The grain remained part of the story, and the Lockwood character had not disappeared beneath the makeover.

It was the best kind of glow-up: dramatic enough to turn heads, but respectful of what was already there. She may have gone to the dark side, but she kept her roots.

KEEPING IT LOOKING FABULOUS

Upkeep is simple: I give the exterior an occasional once-over and will refresh the stain when it begins to look weathered. No maintenance melodrama required.

A BOLD NEW CHAPTER

This project was about more than changing brown timber to black. It was about respecting the wood, preparing it properly and choosing a product designed to help manage the challenges of a very dark exterior colour.

Because Resene Waterborne Woodsman is waterborne, cleaning up brushes and equipment with water while the stain was wet was straightforward.

The result was exactly what I had hoped for: a contemporary new look that celebrated the home's original character rather than covering it up.

My Lockwood had officially gone to the dark side — and honestly, black suited her.

Ready to give your own timber exterior a glow-up? For colour inspiration, product information and advice for your project, visit resene.co.nz or head into your local Resene ColorShop.

BEACHFRONT LIVING

Six properties for sale where the sand, surf and sea views are practically part of the floor plan

▼ 159 The Strand, Onetangi, Waiheke Island

Seconds from the sand at Onetangi, this three-level waterfront residence takes beach-house living firmly into luxury territory. A lift connects the beachside tiled foyer and bar with expansive living spaces and bedroom suites above, while a chef's kitchen, spa-like bathrooms, terrace, spa pool and beautifully finished boat shed complete the escape.



▲ 6/10 Marsden Road, Paihia, Northland

With Paihia's waterfront quite literally across the road, this fully furnished ground-floor apartment makes every morning feel like a holiday. Two bedrooms, two bathrooms and open-plan living flow onto a private patio, while two secure car parks, wheelchair-friendly design and the Edgewater Palms infinity pool make Bay of Islands living beautifully effortless.

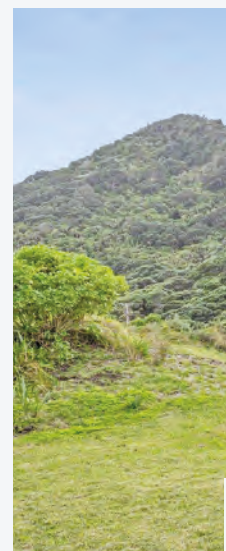


◀ 91 Tutukaka Block Road, Whangarei

Fronting the sand of sheltered Church Bay, this beautifully maintained Tutukaka home offers the kind of old-school Kiwi beachfront position becoming increasingly hard to find. Updated kitchen and living spaces open towards the harbour, while three bedrooms, covered entertaining areas, internal garaging and a standalone double garage provide plenty of room for seaside toys.

▶ 36 North Piha Road, Waitakere, Auckland

Tucked into sought-after North Piha, this classic elevated bach puts black sand and rolling surf at the bottom of the garden. A dune track leads directly to the beach, while a newly built deck with sun canopy captures sweeping ocean and cliff views. Established greenery and wonderfully wild Monkey Rock provide the finishing touches.





▲ 148 Clifton Road, Te Awanga, Hastings

Set across 4.1 coastal hectares, this Paris Magdalinos-designed Mediterranean-style retreat brings clay tiles, inset windows and sun-soaked spaces to the Te Awanga shoreline. A one-bedroom villa, three-bedroom cottage, studio, swim-gym spa and Mediterranean gardens sit among uninterrupted views stretching from Cape Kidnappers and Mahia to Napier.



▲ 9/180 Marine Parade, New Brighton, Christchurch

Directly opposite New Brighton Beach, this near-new three-level townhouse turns Christchurch's coastline into everyday scenery. Two bedrooms, two bathrooms and light-filled open-plan living are joined by a private balcony, while sea and pier views from the upper floors put the beach, He Puna Taimoana Hot Pools and New Brighton's cafés within easy reach.



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Time to make a move to Hawke's Bay?

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A RECORD 29 RAINBOW ORGANISATIONS JOIN GIVEOUT DAY 2026

GiveOUT Day will return for its fifth year in 2026 with a record 29 Rainbow organisations taking part and an ambitious \$150,000 fundraising target

Hosted by the Rainbow New Zealand Charitable Trust (RNZCT), the annual campaign is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest Rainbow fundraising event and aims to increase the impact of public donations through matched corporate funding.

Businesses contribute to a shared match pool, with \$65,000 already secured for this year's campaign. Public donations are then matched dollar-for-dollar from the pool until the available funding is exhausted, meaning a \$50 donation can become \$100 for a participating Rainbow organisation.

GiveOUT Day has raised close to \$300,000 for more than 60 Rainbow organisations during its first four years. Almost \$100,000 was raised for 25 groups last year, while the 29 organisations confirmed for 2026 represent the highest level of participation since the campaign began.

"Our community needs our support at all times, but especially in times like these," says Jessie Lewthwaite, Co-Chair of the Trust. "GiveOUT Day is an authentic grassroots way for everyone to support Rainbow organisations and the community."

The 2026 campaign also coincides with the 40th anniversary of Homosexual Law Reform in New Zealand. RNZCT expects to surpass \$1 million in total Rainbow giving this year and celebrate its 100th Rainbow Scholar.

Supporting the campaign as Glambassadors this year are Buckwheat, Louisa Wall, Steven Oates, Luke Bird and Anita Wigl'it.

"I'm so excited to be involved again with the GiveOUT Day! Supporting and celebrating

our rainbow communities is so important, creating spaces where everyone feels seen, valued, safe and proud to be exactly who you're meant to be," says Glambassador Luke Bird.



Glam & Give to launch campaign

The campaign will officially begin with Glam & Give, a cocktail fundraiser at new sponsor venue Radisson Red Auckland on Thursday, 8 October.

Doors will open at 6pm, followed by the official launch at 7pm, entertainment and the Trust's charity auction.

"Glam & Give is about celebrating beauty with purpose," says Tegan Hall, Co-Chair of the Trust. "When we combine glamour, generosity and community, we can create something truly special."

Returning GiveOUT Day sponsors include Kiwibank, L'Oréal Groupe, Z Energy, Toitū Takatāpui, YOUR EX, Rainbow Auckland and Lion. New partners for 2026 include Skittles, MediaWorks and Radisson Red Auckland.

Early bird tickets for Glam & Give are priced at \$45, increasing to \$55, and are available at www.galabid.com/giveoutday. Proceeds will support RNZCT's community grants and scholarship programmes





Get Tickets Here



GLAM & GIVE 26

CELEBRATING THE LAUNCH OF GIVEOUT DAY 2026
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RAINBOW NEW ZEALAND CHARITABLE TRUST.

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