



# RUNWAY REALITY

*Vanessa Ortynsky sat down with 24-year-old designer Benjamin Alexander ahead of what was his solo debut at New Zealand Fashion Week.*

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A model walks the runway during the Benjamin Alexander show during New Zealand Fashion Week 2019.

*“It’s so important to us that we respect our workers and the people around us.”*  
– Benjamin Alexander

**Congratulations on your first solo NZFW show! What made you decide to show this year?**

It was an easy decision. We [Benjamin, his sister Alishia and friend Catherine] knew that we wanted to launch the Benjamin Alexander brand and put on a show this year. It was a good time to be part of fashion week with so many new designers showing. And it’s back at the Town Hall, where it all began.

**Can you tell us a bit about the process of creating your collection?**

It was very honest and open. This collection is based on moments in time and real experiences. It is cohesive, but there are elements within it that remind me of different parts of my life leading up until now. It consists of 16 looks and 24 pieces and everything in the collection is ours (shoes included).

**What was your Project Runway experience like?**

I genuinely loved the entire reality show experience and I didn’t think that I would. I had never imagined I’d be on a reality show. [Ben won New Zealand’s first series of Project Runway in 2018.]

**With sustainability being the theme at NZFW this year, what does that mean to you as a designer?**

Sustainability has always been second nature to us. It’s not something that we’ve had to think about or consider because it’s who we are. I come from a sustainability masters programme [Whitecliffe Master of Fine Arts in Fashion Sustainability]. It’s so important to us that we respect our workers and the people around us. It’s also about love and honesty and being completely transparent about what you do. No one is perfect, but we’re open to that conversation, willing to change and move things forward.

**How many collections do you plan to release per year?**

I think we’ll release twice a year, the collections aren’t necessarily seasonal. The world is so global and our customers travel, so it’s irrelevant to do winter coats for winter.



Ben's Lotus Top (available late 2019) pairs with Benjamin Alexander x Mi Piaci Jan Slingback in Black Leather.

Image: Mi Piaci

**Any career highlights so far?**

The experience of building the business and the lead-up to New Zealand Fashion Week in such a short amount of time has been a highlight for us. We don't have a huge team, so we learnt and did everything on our own merit. The past year itself has been a highlight and the show will be the peak.

**Did you enjoy working with Mi Piaci?**

The collaboration with Mi Piaci has been straightforward, seamless and an absolute dream. They understand what I represent and I get what they represent. There are five styles (with various colourways) in the collection.

**Do you have any favourite spots in New Zealand?**

I love the Coromandel. Every year, for 14 years, the family would go to the Coromandel for two weeks over the summer. My favourite beach in Auckland is definitely Bethells Beach.

**What's next for the brand?**

There are two exciting things in the pipeline that we're working towards, but they are very much under wraps. We'd love to eventually open an international store and have a few exciting projects in the works, but everything's currently under wraps.

**Retail NZ AWARDS 2019 HIGHLY COMMENDED**

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