

# WHEN BOY MEETS PEARL

Celebrities are driving the latest jewellery trend for the fashionable young men of Generation Z

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**K**irwan Mactaggart can pinpoint the moment he first considered wearing pearls.

At a staff Christmas party in December, "some of my co-workers were having a conversation about men wearing pearls and how it's really cool and that it would suit me if I wore them", Mactaggart tells *The Australian*.

"I like listening to fashion advice from girls in particular because I feel they have a better taste for it, not that guys are tone deaf to it."

Seed planted, soon thereafter, "my nanna dropped off a whole bunch of jewellery boxes at our house and I saw a necklace in there — unfortunately the one she had was a bit too small".

A quick search on Facebook marketplace soon connected him with a short string of freshwater pearls for \$120 — and he's rarely been seen without it in the months since.

The 20-year-old from East Fremantle in Perth, who plays guitar and keyboards with rock band Koi Pond, and also works as a bartender, is one of many young men who have taken up pearls with aplomb.

"Pearl jewellery has been popping up a lot in the menswear space lately, and we probably have Harry Styles to thank," Jake Millar, editor of *GQ Australia*, tells *The Australian*.

"Whether the chunky strand of pearls he's worn on an off-stage or the single dangly pearl earring he rocked at the Met Gala a few years ago, he has helped take it from the fashion fringes into the mainstream.

"Now you can barely open TikTok or Instagram without seeing stylish young guys decked out in pearls from Gen Z favourite Vivienne Westwood or a host of other brands."

Sydney stylist and creative director David Bonney concurs, saying the celebrity influence is "100 per cent" leading the charge, adding that "musicians and sports stars are the most significant fashion influencers for men".

He cites the Kickstarter as Pharrell Williams taking to the catwalk for Chanel's Metiers d'Art collec-

tion back in 2016, draped in long Coco-worthy strands. ASAP Rocky is another style guru for young men, "so if the champions an idea, a year later it has trickled down to fast fashion land", says Bonney.

Mactaggart, as well as being swayed by friends, concedes: "I actually did Google 'celebrities wearing pearls' to see if it was a thing. ... I would say my favourite celebrity rocking them was ASAP Rocky. I think he's a pretty cool dude, he was wearing them a few years ago."

While short, choker-length strands have been the most popular pearls, celebrities have also taken to wearing a single earring, foil chains and bracelets.

The autumn-winter 2022-23 men's catwalks in January were filled with not only men in jewellery, but pearl jewellery.

Fendi offered chokers worn over knitted neck warmers, while Dolce & Gabbana sent out jangling necklaces of crystals and pearls.

"Young man's game" Of course, the trend coincides with the rise in gender-fluid dressing, thanks to Gen Z's embracing of self-expression through fashion.

Bonney believes pearls are very much "a young man's game", for those that have "an individual approach to style".

"That said, men in their teens and 20s are really open to the idea of gender-fluid style, so we're seeing pearls appear across the spectrum of retailers, from Mikimoto X Comme des Garçons to Asos and Culture Kings."

For those men willing, there are myriad ways to add a little lustre to their accessories repertoire.

Granted, in the fashion realm they are usually faux pearls, or freshwater pearls, being much more affordable than the real thing.

But the ripple effect is being felt throughout the broader pearl industry.

James Brown, managing director of Pearls of Australia, which owns Broomie's Cygnet Bay South Sea pearl farm and also the Brooken Bay akoya farm on the Hawkesbury River in NSW, says that while there are undoubt-

edly historical and aristocratic precedents for men in pearls, "for this era, it's new".

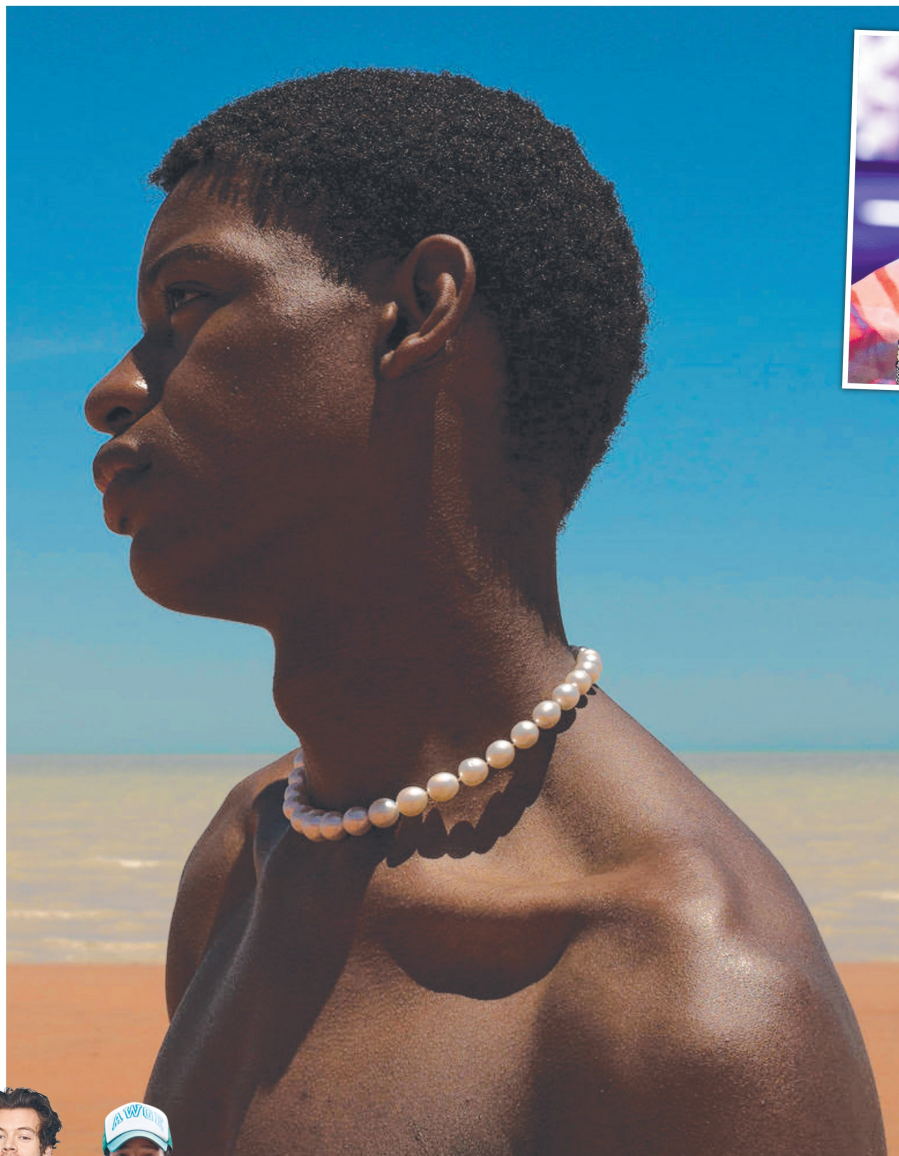
"When was the last time you saw a man wearing a pearl necklace?" he asks *The Australian*.

"What I find fascinating is that it's not only young males that are leading the charge on this, but from what I've seen (they do) look like (they're wearing) the classic Mikimoto strand, which might be freshwater, the classic small, round pearl strand worn almost like a choker, quite tight."

Brown is also intrigued by the origins of the trend.

"It's purely a fashion thing, following a rock star, or is there some other subliminal stuff as well? Part of me hopes that they do start to make some connection to the ocean."

"I doubt there's some deep, meaningful connection to sustain-



Willie Creek pearls, above, for #WeWear Australian campaign; (from far left) Harry Styles, ASAP Rocky and Kirwan Mactaggart wearing pearls; inset top right, pearls on the catwalk for Dolce & Gabbana in Milan last month

MAINT PICTURE: CLAIRE HART

ability, but even if it's just a loose link to a 'natural' product from the ocean, that would be cool as well."

'Less is more' Of course, way back in 2002, Australian pearl company Autore started to explore this genre of jewellery.

Founder Rosario Autore collaborated with Olympic gold medalist Ian Thorpe on a collection of pearl jewellery, championing chokers and bracelets featuring a single South Sea pearl on a rubber band with metal detailing.

"He was ahead of the thread," says Ruby Autore of her father.

The younger Autore has herself launched a diffusion line for the company, Autore Moda, which next month will release a line of men's pearl jewellery.

While non-Gen Z Australian men may balk at the idea of wear-

ing pearls, there are ways to incorporate them into your accessories game.

A number of brands, including Pearls of Australia, Kailis and Paspalety, offer cufflinks, or bracelets featuring a single pearl.

Brown says that the bracelets, which Pearls of Australia has offered on a neoprene band for a number of years, are "a constant" in the company's sales.

He adds that a single pearl, on a choker or bracelet, is "almost part of the Broome uniform".

"If you go on any of the small Kimberley cruise boats, more than half of the men working on them will be wearing one. It's just that easy-to-wear connection to the iconic environment."

Kailis' Explorer collection is aimed at men, and includes bracelets with beads in tiger's eye, turquoise, lava stone and gold or silver, with a single-statement pearl.

"They are little expressions of style," says Eithne Healy, Kailis marketing manager.

"I think people are a little bit more bold with their choices, particularly since the pandemic."

"People are buying what they want and what is an expression of who they are rather than just going for the safest option."

She adds that the turquoise-and-pearl bracelet "looks great with a crisp white shirt".

Millar advises a "less is more" approach when starting out.

"A single band of pearls can be quite chic, but you probably don't need to go the full Audrey Hepburn pearl stack for the weekend brunch run," he says.

"For newcomers to the trend, maybe start with a simple bracelet and take things from there."

Bonney likes the approach taken by a number of celebrities, to "mix metal chains with the pearls, I think that's a more all-seasons approach, and looks less like you've raided your mum's jewellery case."

"I think (pearl necklaces) look great just on a white T-shirt, but equally a beautiful pearl earring with evening wear is a confident flex."

Mactaggart has been "quite surprised" how well received his pearls have been.

"I come from a small country town where people aren't so open to new ideas as they are in Fremantle, so I thought they'd be a lot more ribbing about it, but everyone thought I suited it straight away. I was confident in myself wearing them and I think that showed."

"They're something people are always pointing out or complimenting me about when I first meet them."

Have his friends started to follow suit?

"Well, after seeing Mactaggart in his necklace, the lead singer of Koi Pond has bought his own."

"He was like, 'Sorry, man, I'm stealing your style.'"

## Festival fever soars as pandemic fears ease

THE BUZZ  
GLYNIS TRAILL-NASH

When the Melbourne Fashion Festival kicks off on Thursday night, organisers and ticket-holders alike will be celebrating a return to normal after two years of pandemic disruptions for the whole events industry.

"Clearly, there was a big demand to get back to runway and events," Yolanda Finch, acting

chief executive of MFF, told *Buzz* of the flurry of ticket sales that saw many shows sell out in less than two days.

"We've got a fairly magical moment in Victoria where restrictions and regulations are at a place where, while it's been challenging to organise, the experience of the event themselves will be in the glamour mode we were accustomed to pre-Covid."

The consumer-driven festival, the largest fashion event in the southern hemisphere, is now in its 26th year.

"It's looking so exciting, it has got the best parts of everything we've learnt through the Covid ex-



Event excitement is growing for the start of the 2022 Melbourne Fashion Festival on Thursday

perience plus some of the hallmarks of the traditional festival format," Finch said.

Runway shows will largely be held at ACMI at Federation Square, where a pavilion has also

been set up as a hub for the duration of the 10-day event.

The gala opening with David Jones will take place against the backdrop of the Queen Victoria Market, while the "epic" closing

show will be held at the Margaret Court Arena, Melbourne Park, in front of an anticipated crowd of 5000.

In addition, there are workshops, exhibitions, talks and films to take in, with many of the events free to the public.

For more information and tickets, see [melbournefashionfestival.com.au](http://melbournefashionfestival.com.au).

### Work in progress

And, while we are happy to be distracted by the glamour of the festival, spare a thought for what goes on behind the scenes.

Being just the second major event in Melbourne this year, after the Australian Open, came with its own set of challenges.

"When we truly started production on this festival in earnest, the events industry hadn't even existed three weeks prior," said Finch.

"We had to work with suppliers that had to custom-build structures that they had to sell off in order to survive (the pandemic)."

"Being able to operate at all a bit of a miracle. The (events) industry itself hasn't come back to full strength, but we're helping them and they're helping us."

### Helping hands

Fashion charity Thread Together has partnered with the festival this year and, with the flood situation unfolding in Queensland and northern NSW, the response will be more needed than ever.

Thread Together, now in its 10th year, takes end-of-season unsold stock and distributes around the country to those in need via 500 welfare charities and agencies.

As part of the festival partnership, participating designers were invited to raise \$5000 via consumer activities, while consumers at-

tending were invited to add \$5 to their ticket price.

For every \$5 raised, one person can be supplied with a new wardrobe of 20-35 items.

So far participating designers include Aje, Orotan, Ginger & Smart, MJ Bale and Macgraw.

"We're striving to be the umbrella organisation that keeps excess clothing in circulation at its highest value," Anthony Chesler, Thread Together's chief executive, told *Buzz*.

"To be nominated as the partner charity by the Melbourne Fashion Festival is helping to make a further statement that we are an organisation working at scale."

"The reason we exist is to give clothing to people in need — but that clothing needs to be new — and to keep brand-new clothing in circulation out of landfill."

Chesler anticipates that the

current flood crisis will be "the largest natural disaster we've had to support with clothing relief", far outweighing that of the bushfire season two years ago given the locations and number of homes already impacted.

Chesler said orders are already coming in from aid agencies to clothe those flooded out of their homes, with clothing already on the way, roads permitting.

"We're here to respond. We (work with) the partners on the ground to make sure clothing is given with (the) highest amount of dignity."

The charity currently receives no government funding, and relies solely on donations from brands, financial supporters and volunteers.

For more information, or to make your own donation, head to [threadtogether.org](http://threadtogether.org)