

In conversation with Lucy Jones.

After graduating in Fashion Textiles in 1978, Lucy launched her Lingerie business in 1980, having worked as a designer for a high street Lingerie brand. Her fresh and innovative designs sold in to the best department stores and boutiques in London and across the country, followed later by stores in Italy, Germany, France and New York.

Over the decade, she honed her talent for beautifully designed and detailed lingerie, alongside consultancy and part time teaching at key universities in the UK and overseas, which ultimately led to a full time career in fashion education. Her passion for lingerie never left her, neither did the desire to relaunch her brand.

Here is Lucy herself, telling us her story behind past and future business plans, recent career choices and what to expect from her new and exciting collection.. enjoy!



Skater dress cami-knicker in myrtle silk satin 2017.

Tell us about how you started Lucy Jones Lingerie way back at the beginning of the 1980's...

"I always had the drive to start my own business - all the way through my final year at Liverpool Polytechnic - that was my goal. During that time I was drawn to vintage lingerie and underwear - the styles that pre-date the advent of Lycra and other stretch technologies in fabric. In those days style lines and fit were all-important - and I loved (and still do) the discipline of creating this type of close fit and design detail in other ways.

But, on graduation, when I was offered a job as a Lingerie Designer with a large London based design company, the dream of starting my own business was put on one side whilst I learnt the trade, and gained experience of the commercial sector. It was here that I began to see a gap in the market - it was two gaps

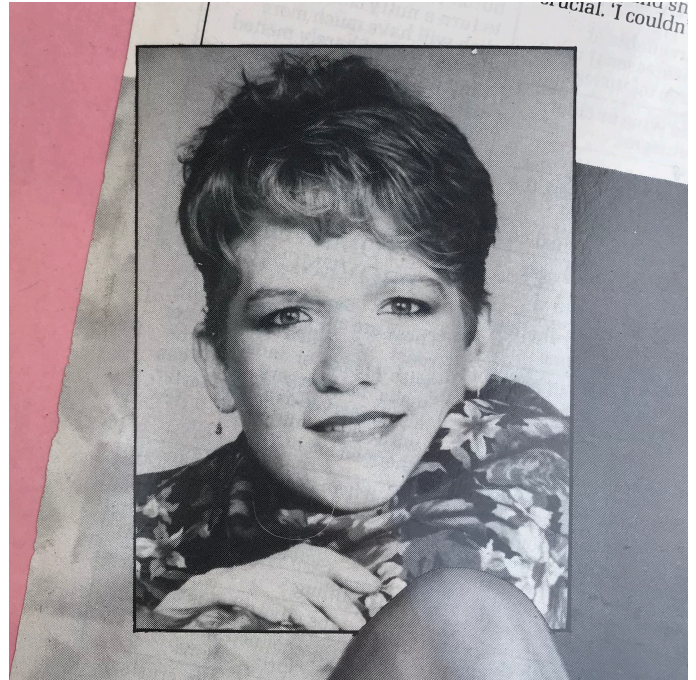
really - one which was the chasm that separated lingerie and fashion, and the other which was the lack of luxury, design led lingerie brands - everything was very traditional and conservative in the lingerie market back then."

Where did you study?

"I studied Fashion and Textiles at Liverpool Polytechnic (John Moore's University) it was a great place to study.

At Liverpool we were taught the couture method, toiling everything from concept to prototype. We then made paper patterns from the calico toile which is the French couture method, it was the very best foundation.

Liverpool back then was really gritty and interesting! (40 years later it is a fabulous city - almost unrecognisable - but still edgy though!) In the 70's, the Art School was creative and energetic with fantastic resources. There were only twelve of us in fashion, and another twelve students in each of the other areas, printed textiles and knit and weave. It was a magic time. We worked alongside Fine Art, Sculpture and Graphics students, so got to know everyone across the art school. It was a very creative time - right at the start of the Punk movement, with wonderful music, and the cultural eruption which ensued, Liverpool was definitely the place to be.



What inspired you when you were young - what sparked this interest in fashion?

I had always been a designer-maker - right back to my early childhood, sewing and making was my major pastime and pleasure - I was obsessed with designers like Jean Muir, Ossie Clarke and Celia Birtwell, Bill Gibb, Gina Fratini, and Zandra Rhodes. As a young teenager passionate about clothes and fashion, these designers helped me to set high standards in design and also the finish of my garments - whether it was a dolls dress, a pair of trousers, a Tartan tailored coat or an evening dress. My goal, when I was younger, was to become a sample machinist - perhaps working for one of the Parisian couture houses - I knew that designers had to have them to make their designs come to life. I thought that as one of my talents was making beautifully finished garments, that this was what I would do. It was a tutor at Kidderminster College (where I did my O and A levels) who suggested that I too could become a designer - and apply to one of the Degrees which were being offered at the new polytechnics in the UK! This was a totally amazing thought, but one that I fully embraced, (only 12 colleges offered BA Honours in Fashion Textiles back in 1975), so, my career path changed somewhat and I am glad it did. I did my research to find out where I wanted to study - I think I visited most of the polytechnics and art schools offering fashion - but Liverpool was the one for me.

Why and what made you start your own business?

"At that time - 1979 - I read an article in Bodyline (a trade magazine which was around in the 1970's), about a lingerie boutique owner who had been let down by an overseas brand - she talked about how difficult it was dealing with overseas companies (it was back then) - and as the article gave the contact details of the shop and the owner, I contacted her and arranged a meeting where I talked through my ideas, goals and aspirations about starting my business - and she encouraged me to take the first steps, and gave me my first order! This was the push that I needed. So I handed in my notice at Kayser Bondor

and moved back to Liverpool. In the early 80's the country was in a deep recession, and Liverpool was in a shocking state - derelict buildings - unemployment, disengaged youth. However, I tapped in to the grants and funding which were available through the Liverpool City Council. I was offered a suite of four offices on Victoria Street in the City Centre - rent free for two years! So I moved in! I was also awarded a grant to assist me in buying machinery and equipment, due to the fact I would become an employer - and there were loads of people out of work with the skills I needed at that time due to a large manufacturer in the area which had recently closed down."

So, how did you start?

"At first though I was on my own - doing everything - from designing pattern cutting, making and selling. Organising trips to London to meet buyers and show them the range - which of course, married fashion with lingerie. This had produced a fresh new take on the very traditional classic type of lingerie, or the tarty boudoir garments edged in scratchy lace which were around at that time - to be worn but not to be seen - whereas mine, on the other hand, were definitely to be seen peeping through - underneath your Maxfield Parrish suede jacket- or underneath your tennis dress - or just for the hell of it - on its own."



Observer. 1980

So, Who were your customers back then?

"An agent contacted me after an article had featured my start up business in a newspaper which had heralded Lucy Jones as the 'newest most exciting lingerie designer' on the block'. This connection and subsequent increase in reach and sales volume was a real turning point. My stockists increased from out of town stores to Harrods, Fenwicks, Rigby and Peller - then later, Harvey Nichols which became my major stockist in London, alongside a specialist boutique, also in Knightsbridge, called Bradley's (which is no longer there). I also had short periods of business selling a cheaper diffusion line to Peter Jones of the John Lewis Partnership, but supplying all of them was not sustainable because everyone wanted exclusivity and my collection and fabrics did not really allow me to supply pieces for specific stores. The London department and specialty stores added to small specialist boutiques around the country - some of which are still in business today, such as Susan Hunter Lingerie in the Westbury Mall in Dublin which is a beautiful shop selling carefully selected Lingerie brands - selling to all sorts of wonderful and exciting customers in Dublin. The owner always used to let me know if celebrities bought my lingerie. There was one occasion when super models Naomi Campbell, Christy Turlington and Linda Evangelista had visited the shop, and became owners of my lingerie.

Lucy Jones lingerie was regularly picked by the press for editorial - it was so new, so fresh. My trick had been to take what were essentially fashion colours and prints so the lingerie would look contemporary. The collection was design led and used no lace to trim the edges. I re-imagined shapes and made them modern, little dropped waist mini- slips, french knickers which were more like cute shorts, the softest unstructured cami-suspenders which were comfortable to wear, so that

women didn't feel like trussed up chickens - they felt beautifully feminine. My USP definitely was the fact that there was no edging lace, coupled with fashion colours, which made my range look really different - but sometimes it was not always easy to persuade buyers that what I was producing was lingerie - some of them saw it as fashion....but I saw this as a good thing, a bonus really, and something that aligned with the lingerie as outer wear trend which was being picked up by the press - and is, again, once more very much the look de jour in 2017"

What about getting orders from overseas buyers?

"I had started doing trade fairs with the British Knitting and Clothing Export Council (much later this became the British Fashion Council) and started showing at the Salon de la Lingerie in Paris. This was an important Trade Fair for me - but it was a hard nut to crack - I had a year or two of not selling a thing - lots of interest - but no orders - I was comforted by more established businesses, 'they like to see if you are around for a while before they commit...' - it was hard. But when the buyers did come back, and the orders were written - it was a great feeling. I explored several other trade fairs such as Igedo Dessou in Dusseldorf and Harrogate Lingerie Exhibition which were both successful for a few seasons - but the Salon de la Lingerie in Paris was the most important for me, and I exhibited every February for eight years."



Lucy Jones Collection show.

The design and cutting room doubled up as the pack- and- wrap department when we had completed orders, and it was all hands on deck to get the orders prepared for dispatch."

You must have many special memories...what are the best ones?

"One Christmas in the early 80's, Harrods - Way in had ordered 100 of our tiny tie- sided briefs, they wanted them to be special 'point of sale' stocking filler gifts . I designed a see-through gift packet just big enough for the folded silk briefs to fit in, plus one of the Lucy Jones square swing tickets - which acted nicely as the branding mechanism. Each of the packets had a ribbon loop to enable it to be hung on the Christmas tree or be attached to the Christmas stocking. Producing one hundred of a style was mind-boggling and really challenging (we were much more used to making 8 - 10 of a style - more exclusive - but we completed the order in good time for the Christmas delivery. That year we had a Lucy Jones

Where was the Lucy Jones Lingerie made?

"It was made in the production room in Liverpool, 'Lucy Jones Design Studio' was a hive of industry. Four interconnecting offices provided ample space for cutting, machining and packing. I was very determined right from the start that I wanted control of the production to ensure that all the processes and methods were those that I had initiated, to ensure that the quality was consistent and exceptional.

At the height of the business there were four staff - two machinists and a lovely girl who was the daughter of one of my neighbours, who assisted with cutting, studio management and hand finishing. I was an extra machinist - of course - each machinist used to make the entire garment in one go from the cut garment, before passing it to the hand finishing area for attaching the spaghetti straps, trade mark tiny bows, and trimming back the scalloped edges with tiny gold scissors.

Lingerie window display in one of the Harrods windows! At the same time that year 1983, Vogue magazine did a feature on Lingerie and gave Lucy Jones Lingerie a full page - the Skating Dress cami-knicker which was our best selling design (and is set to become so again) was featured being worn by the fabulous model Talisa Soto, photographed by Alex Chatelain. It was an amazing Christmas and a combination of wonderful achievements and recognition.

I think the other milestone achievement was selling to Barney's of New York, who became one of my most highly prized stockists towards the end of the 80's, I had visited New York on a selling trip with my business partner. We had managed to get appointments with a few of the lingerie buyers from department and specialty stores, and Barney's was the one which came up trumps. It was a really great order which selected lounge wear and lingerie across the collection themes- a really deep and coherent order. After returning to the Liverpool studio, we managed to produce the order very quickly, so supplied them early - they were impressed! So much so that they wanted to see my new line in the Autumn of 1988 to make a fresh order - for Spring 89 delivery. But that sadly coincided with the business decision made by my backer / business partner at the time, to close the books of Lucy Jones Designs Ltd. I had no more money - the bank had assisted all they would, and I didn't want to put any more of my family's money at risk. So that was that. This was a gut- wrenchingly difficult time - luckily I was already working in Higher Education as a part time lecturer, which put me in a very good place to apply for full time positions. I was appointed as Lecturer in Fashion Design at Manchester Polytechnic in 1989 - and didn't look back. It was too painful."



How did your career change in to the teaching profession?

"Throughout the 1980's I had been teaching part time in local colleges, this was in addition to running the studio, and a means to earn extra money. I really enjoyed this mixture of professions - each one rewarding for different reasons. But as awareness of the Lucy Jones Lingerie brand grew through national press coverage, I was invited to deliver specialist projects at some of the bigger colleges and Universities providing fashion design degrees at the time - namely Ravensbourne, Chelsea College of Art, Nottingham Polytechnic (Nottingham Trent University), and Liverpool Polytechnic (John Moore's University). This gave me very valuable experience and greatly contributed to what was to come later."

How did you like teaching full time after being self employed for such a long time?

"The Teaching profession which took over as being my full time job took a while to gel with me, as I was grieving the loss of the business which had kept me for the best part of a decade.... I seriously missed the creativity, the cutting of cloth and the whole process - from making to selling. But gradually- as these things do - teaching design took hold of me and I began to really enjoy the discipline, mentoring, performing, and designing new projects, working with industry and working within a team of other lecturers. The interaction with students was terrific too - I was, in those days, not much older than them - and having had my own label and having been in business throughout the decade really resonated with them as aspiring designers. So they were good times."

So tell us a bit about your teaching career, and did you do anything else besides teaching?

"My career had changed - I did not hold back - progressing from university teaching to a year spent overseas working for an Australian high street fashion company as their Production Manager, exposed me to the mass production industry out of China and Hong Kong - again, providing great experience of a sector of the industry hitherto not experienced. I was thrown in to sourcing factories in China for production, and fabrics and trimmings from Hong Kong, to running the sample room, creating specification sheets for factories in remote areas of rural China to huge developing cities like Guangzhou. There was lots of travelling which I loved, and a lot of working with Chinese producers and makers which was fascinating and very rewarding.

After returning to the UK, the teaching career picked up again with a more senior position, this time teaching at the University of Salford, where I had a number of roles, from teaching fashion design, to creating a specialist Sportswear and Streetwear course, to teaching Fashion Theory - where strangely, I was most happy. Working with students on the aspect of the fashion design programme which many of them really struggled with, was both very rewarding and satisfying. Back then I was literally one week head of my students in terms of the syllabus - but I really enjoyed this research and delivery roller coaster - it was very challenging and fast-paced, and I gained loads of experience through using new teaching methods which produced great results - this interest in student engagement and teaching methodology was, and still is a sustained interest throughout my teaching career.

In early 2004 I was offered the position of Subject Director of Fashion Textiles at the University of East London this was the role that I had been aspiring to for some time, and it was where I remained for ten years. the Fashion Textiles department offered highly regarded courses in Fashion Design with Marketing, and Printed Textiles, but the University wanted us to grow our port-folio of courses, and It was then that we created a brand new programme in 2005 called Fashion Futures. It was a degree which focussed on trend forecasting - an emerging industry then - where students first learnt that fashion was about luxury communication lifestyle, culture and identity, then they learnt all about research methods, how trends happen and what is important to know when finding out what consumers want before they realise they want it. It was a great course - ahead of its time."

What was your last teaching post?

"The final move was to Singapore in 2013, where I led the Department of Fashion Studies at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts until 2016. I had known of the institution and some staff at NAFA for a number of years, as I had visited Singapore many times through work, and pleasure. So the opportunity to work there alongside a fantastic team of staff was too good to miss. Teaching international students in an international setting was such a culturally challenging and rewarding way to draw a close to a full time career in Higher Education. I loved it."

Now you are re-launching Lucy Jones Lingerie. Why now?

"The time is right - it's been in the ether for a while - there has been a consistent interest in lingerie for a number of seasons, and I know that my design aesthetic is still very different - there is nothing really like it. There are many more brands out there than there were, so lots of competition - but, Lucy Jones Lingerie is a high-end brand - beautifully fashioned with exquisite fabrics and beautiful colours. There are a

number of other brands in this sector but it's all healthy competition....I am very happy to be re-joining what is now in many respects a very different industry - but in others ways it's still the same - people love exquisitely designed and beautifully made lingerie - it's the intimacy and love one feels for each piece - it is a very special sector of the fashion market."



So are you designing a brand new collection?

"I am using the wealth of designs and patterns that I still have from the first time around in the 80's - I have had to tweak a couple of designs to align with today's attitudes and sensibilities - but on the whole the aesthetic and the design is perfect for now....I have used the same silk satin backed crepe - and in addition, have sourced a beautiful silk satin which has a wonderful hand painted / dripped effect - it is crafted by hand in Italy - it's fabulous. Look out for it!

I have designed new garments too - one is a brand new invention - not seen before - I cant wait to show this! The others will be coming on line a little bit later - maybe February 2018 - but it's so exciting creating, and designing my brand of lingerie again."

Her latest collection is drawn from key pieces from her extensive archive of designs which have been tweaked in line with 21st century sensibilities and attitudes..... to love, live, sleep and dream. Keep up to date by following her instagram @lucyjoneslingerie and website lucyjoneslingerie.com.

Lucy Jones.