

# The best in the west

A Perth fashionista encourages indigenous innovation.

The spirit of Australian garment design and innovation flows generously through the body of Carol Hanlon. Her name is little known in Australia, yet her international achievements are startling.

From a small office in Belmont, Western Australia, she has arranged to send an Australian designer to the Hangzhou fashion week in China, another to Kuala Lumpur for Asia Fashion Week, and another to the Hong Kong World Boutique.

Some of her designers are just back from New York Fashion Week, while others have been showing in London, Paris and Dublin. One of her designers, Lilla Gagliano of the Kaninda label, has been invited to display in Milan next year. They are members of a new generation of Australian designers heading in the same direction as international darling Collette Dinnigan.

Hanlon has also established a business that brings Singapore garment designers to colleague Sally bin Denim, who dyes their bolts of silk in traditional designs using traditional WA indigenous methods. The visitors then take the fabric home for cutting into garments meant for the world trade.

Peter Westfield, director of the annual Australian Innovation Festival, is one of many Australians and foreigners somewhat dazed by

Hanlon's energy and enterprise. "She got 14 separate events into this year's festival," he recalls. "It was an astonishing achievement."

Hanlon launched her first trade exhibition in Belmont in 2003 as TCF Australia Uncovered. The initials stand for textile, clothing and footwear. In July last year, she launched a business skills project to uncover design talent in remote and regional Australia, particularly among indigenous, multicultural young women. The project, funded by a federal small business culture program, and the WA Office of Multicultural Interests, has uncovered, mentored and trained designers in WA regional centres such as Broome, Wickham, Geraldton and Pinjarra. Hanlon's activities are, for her, non-profit, but for the talents she discovers they are potentially rewarding in both cash and international business opportunities.

A lot is achieved on the smell of an oily rag. No professional models to display her designers' work? She wheedled \$500 from the City of Belmont to pay for training ten young women in the art of modelling.

"We're finding a lot of international interest in Australian indigenous designers," says Hanlon "and I'm being approached by a lot of people from



Collette Dinnigan's designs (above) herald a new generation of Australian designers.

other parts of Australia to see how they can replicate what we've achieved here.

"Thousands of women living in isolated and regional areas of Australia have innovative, creative ideas. Grassroot support for designers – that's what we need in each state and territory of Australia."