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Fashionable family firms

FASHION
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with Renata Gortan



Liz and Peter Davenport, Geraldine and Jackie Recek of Simona, and Bianca Spender and Carla Zampatti.

While anyone can boast shopping is their favourite sport, only a few can claim that they have tailor's chalk running through their veins. For designers who follow in their family's footsteps, fashion is in their blood.

Carla Zampatti-spawned Bianca Spender, and family-owned labels such as Simona and Liz Davenport have up to three generations working together.

The team behind BillyDream Sleepwear, Debbie and David Bennett, are fourth and fifth generation fashionistas. Debbie's great-great grandfather opened a menswear store in Newtown in 1886 and she followed her father, Ron Bennett, into the rag trade.

While Debbie, 55, has always been in fashion, David, 30, cast off his suits in favour of PJs.

"I was in the corporate world for

seven years but when fashion is in the blood it comes a time when you want to be part of it," he said.

Debbie joined the family business as soon as she left school.

"The whole family talk about fashion, breathe it, we spoke about business over the dining room table."

For David, creating a label with his aunt was a way of joining the family business while forging his own brand.

"We could have put it under the Bennett Apparel Group label but we wanted to give it its own identity," he said. "I couldn't have done it on my own, it was better to do it by leveraging the other businesses," he said.

Bianca Spender, 36, rebelled against

following in her mother Carla Zampatti's footsteps by doing a commerce degree, but couldn't shake the fashion bug so after doing a short course she went to Paris.

After coming back to Australia, Spender worked for Zampatti before branching out on her own.

"I creatively wanted to expand my ideas and they needed their own space to represent them well," she said.

Jackie Recek, 27, always knew that she was going to join the family business, Simona, which celebrates its 50th anniversary next year.

"Every since I was little I've been coming into the office," she said.

"There was no pressure coming

into it, my sister Kelly and I were very happy to come into the business. My grandmother trained as a Swiss pattern maker, my mum is interested in the fabric side, my sister is in the retail side and I'm involved in design — we all have our own things."

Just like Bennett, Peter Davenport, 33, explored the corporate world before joining his mum and sisters at Liz Davenport. "I spent a few years working as a lawyer," he said.

"I focus on the financial and legal side of things of the business."

After managing everyone else's brands, including his sister's Katie Davenport label, Davenport will launch a menswear brand next year.