

People judge you by your appearance – and your appearance is 80 per cent your clothes.

That's a lesson Liz Davenport learnt as a child in Western Australia's southwest, back when she was running up brown-paper dresses for her dolls on a treadle sewing machine.

After 40 years in the fashion industry, the Perth designer, who visits the Gold Coast often, says the principle still holds true.

"If you don't get your clothes right you are not empowering yourself to the greatest extent."

She says well-made, flattering clothes gives the wearer confidence – and the feeling is contagious.

"Garments are actually feelings on coathangers: They make you feel good, but they make other people feel good about you."

Liz, who started out as a teacher, is fond of maxims – and she has put a lot of them into a new book, *Liz: A Life of Colour*.

"I have no training at all as a fashion designer," she says. "But I have a passion for fabric and a passion for people."

After eight years as a teacher, Liz took a career leap in the early 1970s to become a fashion agent, representing Sydney and Melbourne designers in the west. One day a Perth retailer told her he was looking for grey flannel pants, so Liz decided to fill the gap.

When she asked her then-opposition for advice, the woman initially balked, then offered the use of her factory and pattern-maker. The pants became her "first hot item" and taught her a valuable lesson: "If you make something that people want they will buy it."

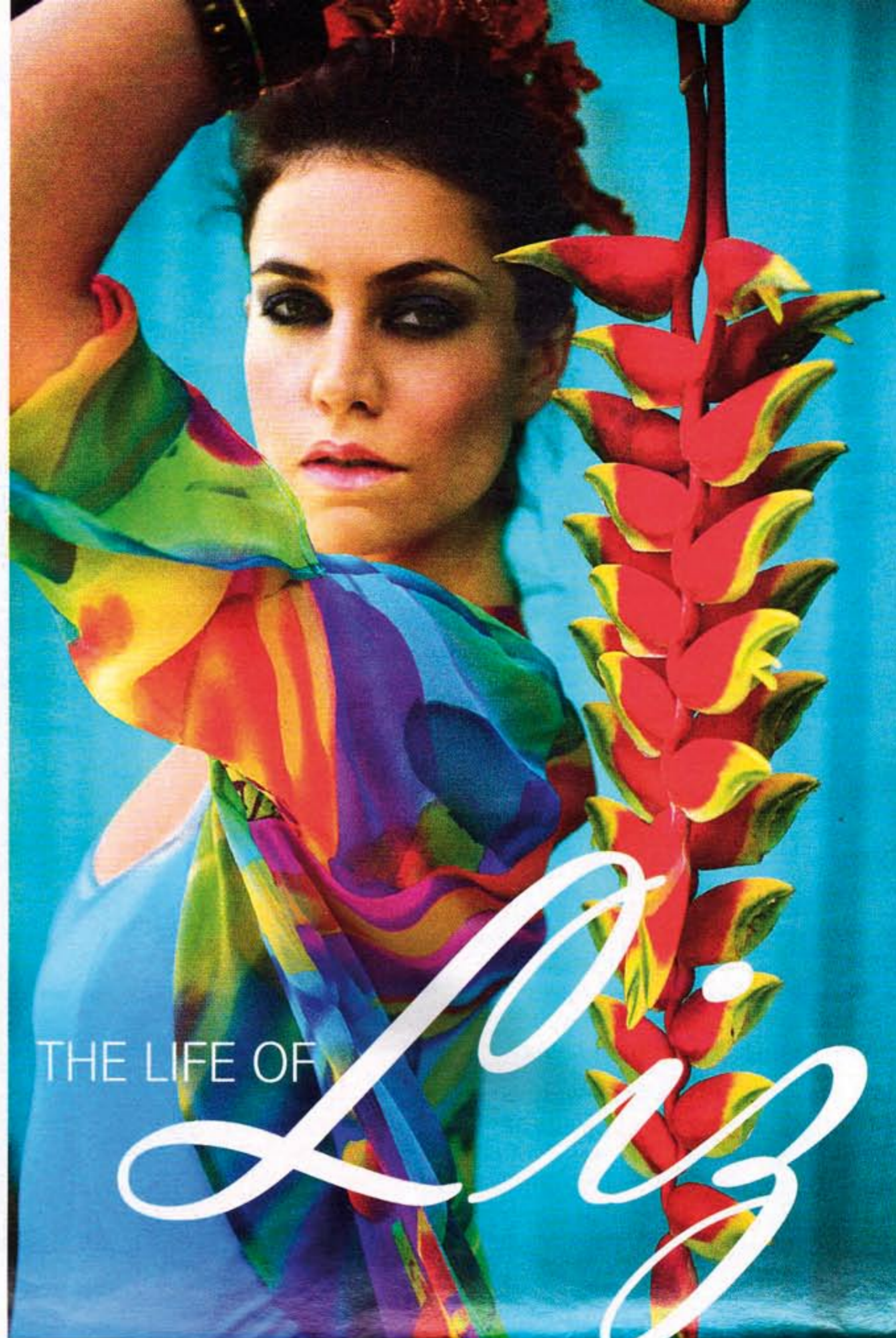
The lessons kept on coming.

"I worked out how colours worked on the body and then I worked them together for the best value," she says.

"I also discovered what makes perfect garments – what makes a perfect pant, what makes a perfect jacket, what to look for, even down to the fact that you should never buy a fabric that will get a sweat mark under the armpit and never buy something unless the buttons are in the right place at the bust point; all of those how-to things."

She engineered her garments to avoid common problems and used that as a selling point."

But she says the biggest lesson for any designer, and for any business person, is: "Supply the demand...



Find out what people want and give it to them."

The book spells out Liz's colour code; that is, putting items together in a wardrobe in a colour palette that multiplies virtually by 100 per cent every time you add a colour.

Huh?

"You've got colours of high multiplicity, which work and multiply very easily, and you've got colours of low connectivity, or low multiplicity, which don't give you much opportunity for expansion," Liz says.

Neon colours, such as lime green, have no multiplicity, while turquoise, cerise, taupe and black have high multiplicity.

"You can take out black and substitute it with navy and do any multiplicity that you like, but you can't put black and navy together."

Confused? You won't be, Liz says, if you follow the book's guidelines. It's all about "getting the best value that you possibly can out of the investments in your wardrobe".

In 1980 she came up with the idea of the "miracle in a suitcase" – 22 items that all work together and can fit into an airline cabin bag.

It was inspired by a single day when

she had to travel from Perth to juggle meetings in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. When she got back to Perth, she bought a case that was exactly the size of the bag airlines would allow on as hand luggage.

"I remember coming into my office, putting it on the bench and saying, 'How many garments will fit in this case?' I could fit 18 in the case, I could wear three and I could carry my coat. That gave me 22 and it was then I worked out what I could do with 22 pieces."

Liz says recent British research shows most people take 44 items on holiday and end up wearing 22.

She says she designs "intelligent clothes for intelligent people". That may be a 20-something who makes frequent business trips to Japan or a mother-of-the-bride who wants something she can also wear after the wedding. Then, of course, there's the woman wanting to look good for her school reunion.

"That's called the art of looking 10 years younger and one size smaller," Liz says.

Try wearing black jersey "to be slimmer around the hip" with some major colour around the face to make you look 10 years younger and very fashionable.