



Runway to lift-off



Jason Sullivan pivoted from international modelling to a highly successful career in interior and landscape design.



Designer-to-the-stars, Jason Sullivan, talks to *Peninsula Living's* Joe McDonough about his "crazy" journey that started with a modelling career straight out of school.

When we catch up with Jason Sullivan, he's in Byron Bay working on Shelley Craft's new home.

The world-renowned interior and landscape designer - who calls Manly home - has no shortage of celebrity clients in his growing portfolio. Think Cameron Diaz and Sam Worthington, but we'll come back to that.

It's not at all surprising, when you consider Jason's an A-lister in his own right.

Fresh out of school, he was signed by Chadwick Models - and was in his early 20s when he was getting his makeup done in the chair next to Naomi Campbell for a London show hosted by Stella McCartney.

The globetrotting then began - Paris, Milan, New York - and he was right in the thick of what he calls the "supermodel era".

"Once you're in that industry, you quickly realise that everyone's the same, but it's really exciting at first," he says.

"I was working for Valentino and Armani, doing these shows for these really big clients in my early 20s.

"There were Puff Daddy parties, Kate Moss, Claudia Schiffer, it was a really wild time to be a part of all that."

He took a step back from the glitz and glamour of the catwalks to come home to Manly, spend time with his family and focus on his second love - design.

In 2008, working with a design firm three days a week as an assistant, Jason felt he was floundering. Then, by chance, his flat-mate at the time noticed a 'designers needed' advertisement for a reality show called HomeMade.

"He gave me the number, it sounded a bit Big Brother but I auditioned anyway and then basically forgot about it," he recalls.

"I was holidaying in Mexico with all my friends over New Years Eve and didn't listen to my phone for a few days.

"I'd missed calls from my agent, and when I got onto him, he's like, 'They're desperate for you for the show. You're the character they need', and they apparently kicked someone out to put me in.

"So next thing I was flying back and within a day I was in this house doing this reality show. It was such a whirlwind, and then I had to design eight houses in eight weeks."

He laughs recalling how he was portrayed as the "ditsy, spiritual model" on the show, but there was no denying his ability, as he beat another well-known designer Darren Palmer in the final despite being the most inexperienced contestant.

"The company I worked for, prior to the show, was designing homes all over the world, so I worked for a great company but I think maybe the producers thought I was more experienced than I was. So each room I was doing, was the first time I was given the responsibility of doing an entire room myself," he reveals.

"Each week, when you got to the new house, you just wanted to throw up... You'd have about two hours sleep and then be given an entire house to do from Monday to Friday.

"I turned up to filming quite buff and I was just a rake by the end, but the hard work paid off, it really helped launch my design career."

In the months after the show wrapped, Jason appeared on A Current Affair for helping to renovate a house for six children who'd lost both parents in the same week to cancer - an emotional experience having just lost his own father.

Then fast forward through a guest judge and mentor spot on The Block the following year, and Jason is back in the US, after an agency shows interest in a television show he's pitched.

Working up a sweat on a treadmill at West Hollywood's Equinox gym, none other than Cameron Diaz steps on the machine to his right.

They knew each other from his previous life as a runway model and when he told her he was designing homes, she told him she had a new place that needed a facelift.

They arranged to meet up at The Standard in New York the following week, and after several bottles of wine, Cameron invited Jason to design both her New York and LA pads.

She was shooting *The Other Woman*, and Jason ended up spending that night in the Boom Boom Room partying with a cast list

that included the likes of Kate Upton and Leslie Mann.

He has since designed the interior of Sam and Lara Worthington's LA mansion, and a string of other properties of the wealthy and influential both in Sydney and abroad.

Jason, who's been working in collaboration with CPlusC Architectural Workshop, has been shortlisted for the World Architecture Festival Awards two years running.

But he believes an upcoming Manly project, which he and CPlusC were awarded the same week he spoke with *Peninsula Living*, will be his piste de resistance.

"We're aiming to build Australia's most eco-friendly house in history," he says excitedly.

"I'm a huge believer in sustainability, so I feel like my career has been leading up to this moment." **P**