

CUTTING A FINE FIGURE

The setting may have been Shoreditch, but Rory William Docherty's debut at London Fashion Week boasted a distinctly Kiwi sensibility

words TESS DE VIVIE DE RÉGIE

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Rory William Docherty. OPPOSITE PAGE Runway images from Docherty's Spring 2026 collection, 'The Tides'.



For one's first appearance at a 'Big Four' fashion week, the stakes, obviously, are high. But ahead of his presentation at London Fashion Week back in September, Auckland-based designer Rory William Docherty put nerves aside and doubled down on the style signatures his label has become known for.

"I felt this was an opportunity to show a broader global audience what I do," he reflects of his Spring 2026 collection. "It certainly was not the time to have a panic moment and feel like, *Oh, my God, I need to change the brand*. Instead, I took the opposite approach and [asked], *What are [our] core DNA codes and pieces?*"

The collection, subtitled 'The Tides', is an ode to the haunting and rugged beauty of the New Zealand coastline. The idea was seeded by a camping trip to the Tutukaka Coast, north of Auckland, that Docherty took with his partner, Jordan, in January of this year. "Like all my collections, [the process] starts with drawing and painting," notes Docherty. "And the prints [this season] are bigger and bolder."

Fabrics featured in a palette of rich ochre and sea-foam green flecked with black, conceived to call to mind the texture and swirl of choppy waters. Patent leather skirts and jackets stood in for water-slick rocks, while handblown glass jewellery and embellishments suggesting the glint of sea glass were scattered throughout. Docherty signatures, established over the course of 10 collections, made a reappearance, like the tie-fronted painter's shirt, now extended into jumpsuits and dresses. The talent of a number of Kiwi artisans was also on full display. For the collection, The Lyttelton Hat Co. crafted hats from wool and woven straw, handblown glass beads came courtesy of Grinter Glass studio and the leather was the handiwork of Abigail Brodrick.

The preparation for London Fashion Week was "an emotional rollercoaster" for Docherty. "The preparation is intense, there are moments of anxiety and exhaustion and lots of long hours," he says. "I cried a few times. Like so many creatives, you put it all in and at times you think, *Why am I doing this?* And then it only takes one beautiful moment or seeing something come to life as you've envisaged it and it's all worth it." The show's location – at the Andaz London Liverpool Street hotel in Shoreditch, in a ballroom dating from 1901 – was a particular highlight. "It has this breathtaking glass dome in the centre of the room, which flooded the place with natural light," he describes. "It helped reflect this feeling of a quiet little oasis in the middle of bustling London and hectic fashion week."

"It's been quite a trajectory over the last two years," adds Docherty. Indeed, his debut on the international fashion week circuit came only in August 2023 at New Zealand Fashion Week with his collection 'Kahuria'. His sophomore runway presentation took place at Australian Fashion Week in May 2024. "It's been amazing to see the hard work pay off in a

relatively short period of time," he muses. "I think what people don't see is the years of hard work that's gone in beforehand to make that happen." Today, the line is

stocked in independent boutiques across New Zealand and Australia, including Scotties in Auckland, Plume in Christchurch, Carmargue in Brisbane and Sydney's Poepke.

Docherty was born in Sutton Coldfield, a suburb of Birmingham, and moved to New Zealand as a toddler. After training in fashion design at Massey University, he began working at Kiwi outdoor-wear institution Swandri at the age of 22. "I was there for a year, but at such a young age, I wanted to spread my wings and see what fashion at an international level was like," he reflects.

He moved to London and began working in retail at Yohji Yamamoto and Miu Miu. "I'm not sure I fully understood how subliminally that time would influence me," considers Docherty. "I absorbed the different fabrics that were used and looked at the way garments were finished." Later, he spent five years as a designer at Kiwi outfit Workshop Denim before founding his eponymous label in 2017.

Docherty's work has extended into the world of dance via his recent collaboration with the Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB). It came about when Shaun James Kelly, a soloist and choreographer in residence at the company, contacted Docherty to scope out his interest in designing costumes for *Home, Land and Sea*, an ensemble program of ballets presented by RNZB in July and August 2025 for which Kelly masterminded his own work, called *Chrysalis*.

"Throughout history, there have been so many designers that have designed for various ballets around the world," says Docherty. "It was an honour to be included in that story." Docherty created costumes in fabrics based on his paintings, with brushstrokes in organic contours and lines, reminiscent of slices of coloured marble. Those same designs later found form in three limited-edition bespoke coats, crafted in silk organza by the RNZB costume department.

Whether in Auckland or London, Docherty's commitment to "slow fashion" is a unifying principle across his work. "Collections evolve rather than flip every season," he says of his approach. "As I do something new, I'm mindful of the prints and colour palettes that I've done from seasons before, so customers can trust that it will work with the pieces that they've [already] bought. Because that's how I shop. We don't throw out our wardrobes every season and we absolute shouldn't."

It's a philosophy that rejects the sugar high of trend-driven, virality-fuelled fashion. "I have no interest in being cool," says Docherty. "If you're cool, it implies that at some point you're not going to be. I'd rather just do my thing and hopefully people will appreciate it – and those that do, will for a long time." HB