

## History of Iconic Newmarket Fashion Store Saks and owner Julian Reynolds

1979 – 2012

**Julian Reynolds:** owner of Saks was born in Gisborne, one of 6 children. Julian attended Gisborne Marist and came to Auckland to board at Sacred Heart Boys' College. His first memories of Newmarket include visiting the Olympic Pool. Julian was a strong swimmer and represented his school. Much later in life he competed successfully in Masters' Games swimming events. It was during one of these events that he met his second wife Raewyn.

Julian's work history is in the clothing and textile business. Working as an agent for several NZ manufacturers, (for over 20 years), and in menswear retailing. But it was while canvassing the Newmarket area, (during a stint working for the new radio station, Radio Pacific), that he saw a vacant store, a gift shop called Aladdin's Cave, that he started dreaming of owning his own store. He was keen to get into retailing and living close to Newmarket he saw the area's potential, even though at that stage Newmarket was considered a "drive through" area. Only one other entrepreneur, Kevyn Male, had been brave enough to open a fashion store there - 3 Bears.

Against all advice and with enormous conviction, he bought the lease to a long, narrow store, Aladdin's Cave. However, soon after acquiring the lease, a real estate salesperson told him, "When the leases run out the store is being sold for demolition". Julian did his impulsive, yet prescient, trademark thing and bought the building.

**Sak's** concept began in May 1979. With the help of family and friends (one of whom, Stephanie Jones, would later become a co-director), the store was stripped and transfigured from a 12ft wide 7ft long dark hallway, into a magical boutique for men and women. The architect was Graham Murray. The store reopened on 1 August 1979.

**Stephanie's story:** Stephanie tells how, in the late 70's, she placed an ad in the paper, when looking for accommodation, Julian answered, and they became flat mates. Stephanie, like members of Julian's family and friends, was appalled when Julian announced he had purchased a building in Newmarket. Little did Stephanie know at the time that she would become an important part of the Saks Team.

**Saks**, quickly established itself and within 6 months of opening, a mezzanine was added, specialising in men's suits. The word was out among Auckland businesspeople, (in a noticeably fleeting time) that Saks was the place to go for selection and service. Many of these original buyers stayed loyal clients the entire time (33 years) that Saks traded.

One famous brand that was stocked was Hardie Amies. Hardie Amies, (Sir Hardy Amies, "dressmaker to the Queen"), flew over from London for the opening of this extension. He was quoted as saying that he was "delighted that someone in New Zealand was catering for the more sophisticated end of the market".

Shortly afterwards Julian made his first trip to Europe to secure top menswear labels. A highlight of this trip was the discovery and purchase of raw silk jackets from Hugo Boss, an instant hit!

With the change into imported merchandise and the growth of the business, former flat mate Stephanie was persuaded to join the business and it was Stephanie who encouraged Julian to add womenswear. She said many women whose husbands now had a selection of top European labels, felt cheated that they were not being catered for in the same way. The womenswear salon was added in 1984 when the company expanded into adjacent leases. This was a major re-fit. Two architects, and a team of builders took 10 months to enlarge the store to twice the size. New Zealand women now had the choice of exclusive European imports of high quality fabrics, superb cut, and design.

This was also the year that Saks invested in their first computer and began to market themselves directly to their clients with direct media. Saks led the market in direct mail communications.

Early in 1987 another part of the building was annexed for additional womenswear with larger street frontage. Julian and Stephanie spent months each year visiting their valued suppliers around the world and looking for contemporary design ideas. Stephanie left in 1988.

A break from day-to-day business, living in Italy in 1991, recharged Julian's batteries and his faith in the design and quality of European fashion, including the likes of Brioni, Ermenegildo Zegna, Versace and Escada. Julian's extended visit to Italy had also established a reputation with the principals of these labels, who had come to respect the self-titled - "Newmarket Shopkeeper", as a business partner. It was this faith in him that led to Sak's appointment as the sole New Zealand outlet for Brioni, arguable the best-tailored clothing in the world.

In 1994 Saks building went through another renovation, a huge undertaking, as the building was completely torn down. Julian reports - "The new wood, glass and stainless-steel building has a warm, welcoming ambiance." Dick Frizzell was commissioned to design a mural which adorned the front of the building. The mural was 2.1 meters long, the theme was a Celebration of Life in Auckland, 7 themes telling why it is a great place to live. A bar was also installed and quickly became the hub for informal hospitality. During the rebuild (6 months) trading continued from temporary premises.

The Weekend Shop, downstairs in the new building, included such labels as, Gant, Polo, Boss and Versace Jeans Couture. The business-wear for men featured Zegna, Boss, Strellson, Brioni, Versace and Valentino. Ladies were well catered for with labels such as Escada, Escada Sport, Steilmann, Mondri, Adrienne Vittadini and the Giorgio Armani Designed Bagutta & Mani.

For Newmarket, the new Saks was audacious in its scope. The fashion industry held its breath as Saks became the re-born home to the leading labels and designs of Europe, challenging more timid retailers with a flamboyance so characteristic of its owner!

In 1997, while celebrating his 57<sup>th</sup> birthday and looking forward to his marriage to Raewyn Smeal, Julian decided that the next phase of Saks' development would be better served with him relinquishing day-to-day management responsibilities and assuming the role of chairman. The role of general manager was entrusted to Theresa Dods.

Every successful business is reliant on competent staff, a true team effort. Julian, after 33 years of employing staff has experienced the good and bad. From trustworthy, loyal employees to those who disappointed. Some of the “gems” who worked at Saks over the years include Julian’s father and two sisters, Stephanie Jones (Tattersfield), Jodi Marley, Jill Elliott, Jo Olsen, Mark Willetts, Harry Howe, Colin Tennant and Kenneth Webb to name a few.

Retirement (or temporary retirement) for Julian included camper-van excursions with Raewyn - two trips to Europe and spending 2 years in Outback Australia. A far cry from the glamour of Saks.

Building their dream home near the Whangarei Heads was a major project. The decision to sell Saks proved to be easier said than done. Selling to Landmark Properties in 2006, and then to the Lusso Group in 2008, (a sale which was never completed), saw Julian & Raewyn taking control again in 2010.

Saks offered a unique shopping experience for both men and women.

Saks closed in 2012.

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