

Resolution of Council

17 May 2021

Item 3.1

Vale Carla Zampatti

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

The death of Carla Zampatti at Easter reverberated not only through the world of fashion but across many sectors of Australian society.

Yes, she made her name as a fashion designer, but she was also a champion for women, a successful businesswoman, a mentor, a philanthropist and exemplar of multicultural Australia.

Her flair for fashion manifested itself from a very young age. Born in 1942 into a farming family in northern Italy, she started a “dress shop” in the farmhouse attic when still a child. Her family migrated to Australia, arriving at Fremantle in 1950.

At primary school, a teacher called her Mary because Carla wasn’t a name that was used in Australia! So it was “Mary” Zampatti who left school at 14 to work in a local general store.

A few years later, in 1963, she came to Sydney where a lucky meeting with the head of a production house making women’s blouses led to a job as his “girl Friday”. But the design and dressmaking skills she had learnt at a workshop in Perth quickly led to her appointment as head of design.

Her marriage to accountant Leo Schuman brought two changes: she reverted to the name Carla and in 1965, encouraged by Schuman, started her own label.

The timing was excellent as her stylish but streamlined and very wearable clothing appealed to the new women coming into the Australian workforce.

Her first photo shoot for her own label took place in front of the Sydney Opera House, at that stage still under construction. It could be seen as symbolic of the new and more confident Australia that was emerging, and the new era of engaged and active women.

Following her divorce in 1970, Carla as a single mother with a young child could not get a bank loan for her business and she had to borrow from a cousin in Perth to forge ahead.

Yet by 1972, she was able to open her first boutique in Surry Hills, with clients including Susan Peacock, Anna Murdoch and Penfolds heiress Rada Penfold-Russell.

Her clothes worked for everyone: for actors, politicians, women executives, Crown Princess Mary of Denmark and for women wanting a “special occasion” outfit.

Her design skills were sought by the car industry to customise car interiors and by manufacturers to add glamour to everyday items like swim-wear and sunglasses.

Outside her “day job”, she poured her energy and considerable skills into many causes. Her first board appointment, fittingly, was to the Dante Alighieri Society and many others followed. She was an early member of Chief Executive Women; she was on the board of the Sydney Dance Company, the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the European Australian Business Council and was a trustee of the Sydney Theatre Company Foundation.

In 1980, she was named as the Bulletin-Qantas Australian Businesswoman of the Year and yet, 19 years later, when she was announced as the chair of SBS, there were jibes in some quarters about a mere “fashionista” taking on such a significant role. Yet it was one she filled successfully for a decade.

She later noted that “Here we were, fast approaching the 21st century, yet the idea of a woman in authority still raises eyebrows”.

In 1987, she was made a member of the Order of Australia, and in 2009, a Companion of the Order of Australia. In 2008, the Australian fashion industry gave her its highest honour, naming her as Australian Fashion Laureate.

“Mary” Zampatti became a huge contributor to her adopted country, despite the difficulties she faced.

The recent revelations from Canberra underscore the challenges still faced by women and give us a renewed appreciation of the truly pioneering work and the very real achievements of Carla Zampatti.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor), seconded by Councillor Scully –

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons present stand for one minute's silence to mark the life of Carla Zampatti;
and
- (B) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to Ms Zampatti's family expressing the City's
condolences.

Carried unanimously.

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Note – The Lord Mayor expressed condolences to Carla Zampatti's children, Alex Schuman, Allegra Spender and Bianca Spender, and acknowledged the presence of Alex and Allegra.

Note – All Councillors, staff, press and members of the public present stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect to Carla Zampatti.