

Ultrafine Merino stars in Paris

A-list celebrities and international models were treated to the best Merino wool Australia has to offer at an exclusive event at Paris Fashion Week to celebrate one of the world's most promising young designer Alexander Wang.

Guests at a private dinner party for the exclusive retailer Colette were presented with gifts of ultrafine Merino shawls from the Jemala company from Victoria. Australian Wool Innovation, which introduced its top suppliers to Wang to help create his new Merino looks, has sourced what are unquestionably some of the most luxurious wraps available. They are made from extremely rare, ultrafine Australian Merino wool, with each finely woven shawl made from a world-record-setting calibre of fleece; so fine that 8 km of yarn are needed for each wrap.

Each specially bred Merino sheep is raised in a sheltered habitat to protect its precious fibre from the elements. Protective jackets ensure perfectly uniform Merino wool. The result is a fibre that is softer, yet stronger than cashmere – and is available exclusively from Australia. It's extremely rare: every year enough fleece is shorn for only a few thousand shawls.

During the event Alexander Wang commented on the fineness of the fabric, which the wool created. "I worked with Australian Merino for autumn 2009 to create a more refined and tailored collection. The feel of this scarf is simply incomparable. I hope our guests liked it as much as I do," he said.

Director of Jemala, Ian Gill said the decision to partner with a young designer like Alexander Wang was not only good for Jemala, but good for Australian wool growers. "The current trend in marketing used by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) needs support and expansion. Raising the profile of superfine and extrafine Australian Merino Fibre by exposure to emerging and established designers is a powerful and logical starting point. We have to convince each new generation of the unique properties of Merino fibre to wean them away from their cotton and synthetic world. To do this we require continuous funding so that this can be built into the thinking processes of all Australian Merino fibre growers. This must be as fundamental to our thinking as shearing, and subject to the same scrutiny that the fleeces must undergo each season. We need to support ourselves, by strongly supporting this comprehensive marketing programme," he said.

"I've found a keen hardworking band of enthusiasts at every point of contact I've dealt with at AWI. Whether in Hong



Supermodel Milla Jovovich at the event with a Jamala shawl

A model wears one of the exclusive Jamala shawls

Kong, Paris, Shanghai, Tokyo, New York or London, I've found a passionate knowledgeable staff supporting our efforts in marketing," Gill said.

Alexander Wang's new partnership with the AWI owned Woolmark brand inspired his choice of the shawls. For more than 40 years, the Woolmark brand has recognised and supported many of the world's biggest names in fashion design – including Karl Lagerfeld and Yves Saint Laurent whose early careers were given a helping hand by winning the prestigious Woolmark Prize in 1954.

Brenda McGahan, CEO of Australian Wool Innovation, said: "The Woolmark brand is proud to support a talent as amazing as Alexander Wang. It's all part of our commitment to supporting the future of fashion and making wool the natural fibre of choice for designers the world over."

Last month in New York Alexander Wang showed his sophisticated side with a new collection featuring Australian Merino. The designer debuted a series of tailored styles for autumn 2009, featuring innovative woven fabrics during his Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week. Wang worked with AWI and its supply chain partners to select Super 110s with an exclusive finish and a 90/10 Merino-cashmere blend giving a rich and supple handle. Individualist detailing such as origami-inspired draping and thick Australian Merino dreadlocks showcase appeal that is as signature as the fabric itself.

"The performance and beauty of extra-fine Australian Merino fibre was crucial in creating these looks," notes Wang. "The results are modern, luxe pieces with exceptional craftsmanship and detail – while also fluid, breathable and encouraging natural movement. The soft feel and design versatility is inspiring." ●