

london's calling

Gold Coast designer Ro London has a wild side, one that reveals itself both in the bold colours of her fashion creations and more significantly in her mission to protect and preserve the world's endangered species

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Larrabee the keeshond is a riot of silver and black-furred canine energy as he darts from desk to settee, table to chair and person to person.

"Larrabee, settle," orders Ro London in a voice as soft as it is persuasive and immediately effective. Larrabee chills out on the floor, laying his head between Ro's feet.

"Right, where were we?" asks Ro. "That's right, bears in Bangalore. Oh yes, and maximum security prisons in New Zealand."

There's never a dull moment when talking to Ro London. The Gold Coast interior designer turned fashion designer and ardent wildlife activist is full of stories.

It runs in the family. Between 1955 and 1982 Ro's father, Desmond Dunn, wrote 600 novelettes under various pseudonyms – Larry Kent, Morgan Culp, Shad Denver, Gunn

Halliday – for the US-based Cleveland Publishing Company.

These hard-bitten tales of tough cops, mean streets, vampish broads and cold-blooded murder were quintessential examples of pulp fiction, their colourful covers playing up gun-toting, steel-jawed guys and voluptuous dolls, their titles similarly lurid: *Stay Dead, Dame, Stand Up and Die, Miss Two-Time, Frame for a Dame, Hell's Little Angel* and *Destination TNT*.

"Yes, I remember Dad's books being around the house when I was growing up in Sydney," says Ro. "We had shelves full of stories featuring buxom women holding pistols."

Yet Ro's own story is also worth telling, its early chapters establishing the character of a woman who describes herself as a loner who's never lonely; its middle section detailing her business success; and its concluding chapters extolling her

dedication as she switches priorities to transform a life-long love of animals into a personal and professional mission for their protection and preservation.

Hence the bears in Bangalore.

"Yes, a lot of my work has been towards helping protect the endangered bears of Asia. Their plight is such a tragedy and their numbers are declining, but at least work is now being done in their name," says Ro.

"In Bannerghatta National Park, just a few kilometres from Bangalore, the bear sanctuary there has the gorgeous sloth bears that have been rescued from dancing on the streets in India.

"Then there are places like Agra Bear Sanctuary, also in India. My goodness, there are angels in our world and I found them there, in people like Geeta Seshmani and Kartick Satyanarayan, who run an organisation called Wildlife SOS.



"This extraordinary couple rescue and care for exploited and injured animals – be they bears, elephants, leopards or snakes – and they also prevent poaching, help rehabilitate communities, spread awareness and protect wildlife for generations to come.

"I've spent time in wildlife sanctuaries in places like India, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia for the phenomenal Mary Hutton, founder of Free the Bears Fund, and last year volunteered at the giant pandas reserve in Wolong, China. I have witnessed the excellent work being done around the world.

"That's why I launched my Sacred Fish Collections and Wildlife Crusader fashion labels, to support the animal welfare cause, to help with funding for care and feeding and so on, and to bring people into the sanctuaries and allow them to see and appreciate these awe-inspiring creatures as they naturally are.

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