

NAILED IT

Kester Black is making its mark on the gift industry with its cruelty free, non-toxic nail polish. RACHAEL GAVIN meets its creator.

Launching a nail polish brand was a happy accident for Kester Black founder Anna Ross. The Melbourne-based New Zealander was actually looking for a way to colour her silver jewellery designs when she decided to try nail polish for the task but found a lack of cruelty free options so she made her own.

"I thought it would be a nice addition to my rings that were selling really well at the time... and then [nail polish] just totally took over," she says.

Creating a formula that is free from toluene, DBP, formaldehyde, formaldehyde resin, and camphor wasn't easy. It took about 12 months of research such as comparing other brands and looking at how chemicals affect the machinery used to make the mix.

"When you mix nail polish colours in a factory that has previously used formaldehyde and things like that, it actually shows up positive in your nail polish test if you ever test for it. So not only was it really difficult to come up with a formula, it was even harder to come up with a manufacturing company that would change all of their equipment, so that it hadn't been in contact with formaldehyde and all the other nasty chemicals for years and years and years," Ross explains.

As well as being non-toxic, Kester Black nail polishes are also vegan and not tested on animals. This passion for ethical treatment of animals is relatively recent for Ross who became interested after a housemate showed her a documentary on the issue. She stopped eating meat the same day.

"I was so ignorant and unaware," she explains. "So as soon as I became aware I decided that I wanted to do something proactive about

it, not in anybody else's faces, not to affect other people, but try and do the best that I could."

She certainly has. By running her brand like a fashion label and marketing her nail polish as a designer product she is introducing consumers to an ethically made product without them realising.

"I put a lot of effort and focus into creating it to be a designer product and the cruelty free, vegan thing was secondary. I didn't think anybody would really care about that so I pushed it and promoted it as a design product. I also didn't want consumers to have to consciously make a decision that was ethical or not."

Ross initially intended to sell her products in fashion stores with the idea that people who didn't want to spend a lot of money on a new dress might instead buy nail polish. Now Kester Black can be found in design shops and after noticing customers are buying the products as gifts, she is targeting that area of the market as well.

"I find that when I do markets people buy it for Christmas presents as well, which is really fascinating—everybody loves nail polish, everybody buys it for their friends, you can't have too many nail polishes. It's just another colour for another event, for another outfit so it's a really good gifting idea."

Kester Black nail polish colours are inspired by what's in fashion. Ross uses Pinterest and a Pantone book as reference points. She then ties in colour choices with a theme. Her range features 15 summer and 15 winter colours with five new shades each season. The five least popular from each collection get replaced with the new additions.

Fans of the brand can also purchase nail art guide, *The Hand Book*, which was a collaboration between Ross and Trophy Wife salon owner Chelsea Bagan. The duo have also worked together to create Trophy Wife nail polishes.

In the future Ross hopes to add other cosmetic products to the Kester Black portfolio such as moisturisers, but her aim is to inspire others to follow her lead in creating non-toxic, ethical products.

"I would love my nail polish to create a bit of a trend with other nail polish brands and other cosmetics that they all go cruelty free and they all go carcinogen free, so I hope I can inspire other people to change the way they make their nail polish," she adds.

"You want something that looks nice, works well and has a whole lot of good points behind it, you know? There are lots of brands that are eco-friendly and really great product and they have really good company values, but they have awful packaging and bad colours, like it should be so simple. I think that all beauty products should be eco-friendly or not tested on animals. I can't understand why we have to research for days and days and days just to find out about one product we may or may not use."

The nail polish has had a massive response since launching in late 2012. Ross has found there is a demand for ethical nail polish and has been featured in some of Australia's top blogs and magazines.

"It was a huge risk what I did. I invested a lot of money and time and effort into doing something without really considering whether it would make me money, so I've done a lot better than I ever thought I would and it's awesome."

This is pretty good for someone who was just looking for a way to paint her jewellery. "I never planned any of it. Isn't it funny how that works out? I never thought I'd be making cosmetics, that's for sure."

"I love it. I'm just really glad. I believe everything happens for a reason." ♦

