

Feisty

NEEDLE

words DENISE IRVINE
photography ASHLEE DeCAIRES



NEED ALTERATIONS? SEE US FOR

HEMS, REPAIRS,
RE-STYLING, TAILORING
WEDDINGS/GOWNS
LIGHT FURNISHINGS
DRESSMAKING

CATERING FOR ALL SHAPES
AND SIZES

PROUD TO BE KIWI OWNED SINCE 1996

Feisty Needle

Alterations and repair specialists for men and women

534 River Road, Hamilton | 07 854 9693

www.feistyneedle.co.nz | [feistyneedle.bridgetbonnar](https://www.facebook.com/feistyneedle.bridgetbonnar)

Deborah Parker says it should be a pleasure – a joyful thing – to get something new for your wardrobe.

But quite often, in her line of work, she sees the opposite. She has women customers who've struggled to find what they want; they've bought a garment in desperation because it is "sort of okay", and then they take it into Deborah to get her to alter it, to make it fit properly.

Deborah runs Hamilton's Feisty Needle business which specialises in clothing alterations, tailoring and dressmaking, and she spends a lot of time reshaping clothes, including wedding dresses, for her customers. She's situated in a blue stucco building on River Road, opposite Fairfield Bridge, and you can't miss it because there's always a show-stopping mannequin out front dressed in a bright and bold Feisty Needle creation.

Because as well as getting your clothes shortened, mended, relined or totally reinvented, you can buy a meticulously made limited edition dress, blouse or skirt at Feisty Needle. These all channel shapely vintage styles from the 1930s to 1950s, and shopping at Feisty Needle is guaranteed to be a joyful thing. You can buy off the rack, or have something made to order.

Deborah and her team (fellow seamstresses Denise Turner, Ruth Fulford and Suraya O'Brien) want women to embrace the changes that happen to their bodies, and to buy clothes that flatter rather than camouflage. Deborah says, "We have women who come in and say, 'I can't wear a dress', and then they'll put one of ours on and suddenly they've got a waist, they've got shape, and they look great."

When Deborah bought the long-established River Road business in late 2012 and she rebranded as Feisty Needle, she continued to do a wide range of clothing alterations ("we always love a challenge") but gradually became aware of the need among her women customers for bespoke dresses that fitted perfectly.

So she and her staff began making such garments under the Bridget Bonnar label, each one in gorgeous colourful cotton fabrics decorated with flowers, birds and various art deco designs. Bridget Bonnar dresses are styled with elegant sleeves, darts, piping, cunningly placed pockets, maybe a high waist or a dropped waist, and a skirt length that skims neatly over the knees. It's vintage with a contemporary twist.

The label is named in honour of Deborah's Scottish grandmother, Bridget Bonnar, who lived near Glasgow. Deborah was born in Scotland and Bridget looked after her for the first year of her life. Bridget was a strong woman who knitted, made bread and cared lovingly for her family and friends. Although Deborah immigrated to New Zealand with her parents as a one-year-old, she says Bridget's influence and spirit has stayed with her always.

Deborah comes from a long line of home sewers on both sides of her family, and her mother worked as a machinist. She taught her daughter to sew perfectly, but Deborah was always more interested in poking about in op shops and re-modelling vintage garments than she was making something from scratch.

She remembers a black vintage dress she wore for years; it had beautiful fabric and a deep V neckline. "If I ever saw that fabric again I'd make another one."

Deborah was schooled in Hamilton; she has travelled widely, living in Britain and Germany, and at one stage she had a vintage clothing stall at London's Camden Market when everyone except her was into tartan and punk fashion.

She worked as a hairdresser for 25 years, and says she's always loved helping women to look beautiful. At Feisty Needle, she's keeping up the good work.

Feisty Needle

535 River Road | 07 854 9693 | feistyneedle.co.nz



**NEED ALTERATIONS?
SEE US FOR**

HEMS, REPAIRS,
RE-STYLING, TAILORING
WEDDINGS/GOWNS
LIGHT FURNISHINGS
DRESSMAKING

CATERING FOR ALL SHAPES
AND SIZES

PROUD TO BE KIWI OWNED SINCE 1996

Feisty Needle

Alterations and repair specialists for men and women

534 River Road, Hamilton | 07 854 9693

www.feistyneedle.co.nz | [feistyneedle.bridgetbonnar](https://www.facebook.com/feistyneedle.bridgetbonnar)