

WHEN Cairns Hair Salon & Art gallery owner and stylist Marcia Ebdell-Blanch accepted an invitation to work behind the scenes at the recent Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival (VAMFF), the last place she expected to find herself was strutting the catwalk.

After all, that was the domain of the glamorous models who owned the main stage - a stunning, gleaming, white, 50-metre strip -- at the Central Pier, Docklands, set up to showcase one of Australia's most celebrated fashion events.

Marcia was a part of Team Schwarzkopf, hand-picked from around Australia and New Zealand to work under the direction of renowned session stylist Kenneth Stoddard, of La Boutique. And after a gruelling regime of preparing up to 60 models a day, even the most committed stylist is allowed to let her hair down.

"The opportunity was there for myself and another member of the team to go up to watch the GQ Menswear show," Marcia says. "We jumped at the chance to see the models we'd just styled in action."

"But by the time all of the 5000 ticketed guests were seated, the only way we could get to our seats was to walk straight down the middle of the catwalk in the full glare of the lights in front of a packed house.

"Naturally, we tried our best to strike a pose but I'm certain no-one was convinced we were part of the show," she laughs.

This is yet another big Australian fashion show Marcia's been involved with, having previously travelled to Brisbane for Mercedes Benz Brisbane Fashion Festival "MBBFF" In August.

Marcia is a very accomplished Session Stylist with over 27 years on the International scene, from London to Paris, from Film sets to Television or Music Videos to Theatre and then there is the editorial work and of course high end Fashion events, so a return to her roots is welcomed.

And while it may sound glamorous to rub shoulders with the highest echelon of Australia's fashionistas, the reality is quite different.

Under the watchful eye of Kenneth Stoddard - a veteran of the industry whose work frequently features on the cover of Vogue and Marie Claire - the pace and demands of the brief

are relentless.

They tong, tease, iron, blow-dry, caress and ultimately, ensure the final 'look' of each of the 30 models is perfect for every show, twice a day, for eight days.

"Kenneth is known to be a bit of control freak, that's what makes him so good at what he does and ensures the Quality of work that goes out, I understand this as I am the same within my Salon on a day to day basis. I quality check and oversee constantly to keep our standards & achieve Customer satisfaction.

"So, it's the ultimate test of your skills and time management. You need to be very experienced and knowledgeable about what has to be achieved and the time it will take to do it because the catwalk waits for no-one.

"Backstage in the wings before the show, you can be putting in an extension, fitting a fascinator, adjusting a head dress or applying product & dressing the hair; you have to have a quick and keen eye to scan all models fast for imperfections to correct and you literally have a few seconds with each model - and then they're on stage.

"It's hard work and very fast paced, but also very rewarding when you see the models on the catwalk, the cameras flashing and the reaction of the crowd. It's all a bit of a frenzy."

The bright lights and excitement of VAMFF and the cream of The Fashion Industry may seem a long way from the busy Hair & Beauty salon Marcia owns and manages at Stratford in Cairns. But in Marcia's mind, the satisfaction of a job done well and to the client's expectations is just the same.

"It's always amazing when that finished result comes together as you've visualised. Whether it's a model on the catwalk or a client walking out of the salon with a new style or colour, it's what drives us every day."