

# David Fletcher Jones (1935-2011): A Man in Full.

David Jones was a restless, clever, difficult man; never still, seldom comfortable, rarely satisfied.

His world was full of things that needed to be done and done well – and if you weren't there to help get them done his way, you'd best get out of his way while he did them himself. Simple as that.

One long-time friend summed him up this way: "David would always say 'sorry', as in 'sorry – you're wrong!'"

Another man remembers arranging a first meeting with David. David told him the name of a country town and said he'd meet him there. "How will I know you?" asked the man. "You will know," intoned David.

Another, slightly deaf, unwittingly closed the boot of David's Alfa a little too vigorously. "Don't slam!" snapped David. The man slipped into the car, shutting the door behind him. David looked at him levelly and said: "That was a borderline slam."

Yet another, a lady this time, described him as 'a Renaissance man living in country Victoria - highly intelligent, able to turn his hand to anything'.

Pedant. Plain-speaker. Perfectionist. Polymath. Who was this multi-faceted David Fletcher Jones?

Firstly, and most tellingly, he was the son of Sir Fletcher Jones, the legendary clothing designer, manufacturer and retailer who flew in the face of capitalist convention by handing three-quarters of his business to his workers. Influenced by the Japanese reformer Toyohiko Kagawa, Jones senior was one of the most remarkable social activists in Australian history.

And David was every inch his father's son. A sense of fair play was in deep his DNA.

Born in Warrnambool in 1935, he was schooled at Warrnambool Primary and Geelong Grammar and went on to study Textile Technology at Gordon Technical College in Geelong. He soon joined Fletcher Jones and Staff where he would stay for 39 years, the last 12 years as managing director.

In addition to his 'day job', over the next several decades he served as: Deputy Chancellor of Deakin University; Commissioner for the City of Warrnambool; member of the State Training Board; member of South-West TAFE Council; director of the International Fibre Centre; director of the Australian Wool Corporation; member of the International Wool Secretariat;

chairman of both the AWC and IWS Textile Research Committees; and member of the Wool Research & Development Council.

Former Warrnambool City Chief Commissioner Carole Reid said working with David had been 'interesting'. As commissioners together, she believed their proudest achievement had been the support they gave the embattled Midfield Meats as the tiny company strove to become an export abattoir. Today, 15 years later, the Midfield group is a major employer in the city.

As a member of the Warrnambool Art Gallery Advisory Committee from 1992, David helped revolutionise the gallery's collection by liberating art-buying funds that had lain dormant and untouchable in Council coffers for years. Then he and his family added to this considerable kitty by donating even more money for acquisition. "I give a lot of the credit for the high standard of works in the Gallery today to David's passionate persistence," said Fellow trustee Janet Macdonald. Warrnambool City Council colleague Bruce Anson added that David was the driving force behind the formation of the Warrnambool Art Gallery Foundation in 2008. "The key role of the Foundation is to raise funds and encourage donations to assist the Gallery in acquiring works of art," he said.

From 1978, David managed his parents' philanthropic FJ Foundation then, in 1977, created his own – the Isobel & David Jones Foundation. Lawyer James Tait said both foundations were set up with 'to improve the lot of the people of the district'. They continue to fund activities and organisations as disparate as the YMCA, Toc H, the Life Saving Club, and a children's concert at the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival.

Meanwhile, back at the office, David was one of the very early adopters of new technology. He recruited systems man Bill Hewitt to computerise FJs manufacturing. "He could see how systems used in completely unrelated industries might be applied to the clothing industry. His ability to focus was amazing. And that was where he got his reputation as a 'difficult' man. He was just so totally focussed on what he was doing."

David dedicated an enormous amount of his time to the South West Institute of TAFE where he served as president from 2000 to 2003. Fellow SWIT member Patricia Varley said he travelled thousands of kilometres and devoted thousands of hours to the cause of rural and regional education. "He was a successful advocate at local, state and federal levels," she said. "And he took a roguish delight in winning a contest with the bureaucracy – or with anybody else for that matter."

But there was one bureaucracy he couldn't beat. When the Hawke government dropped protective tariffs in the early 90s, the world changed. FJs business manager Wayne Kraus, head-hunted by David from the Portland smelter in 1989, said the writing was on the wall in those tough 'recession years'.

“David was feeling the pressure as he watched the dismantling of his father’s legacy. He saw himself as the steward of assets that were being sold off, bit by bit, for a pittance. We were in ‘cash recognition’ mode – and David, a corporate warrior to the end, fought every inch of the way, always trying to do his best for his company. The inevitable retrenchments were especially hard on him.”

But it wasn’t all-work-and-no-play for the Renaissance man. Into his superhuman schedule he managed to shoe-horn some relaxation, David-style. He travelled. He skied. He sailed. He cooked. He read. He researched. He drank wine. And he built himself a beautiful two-storey house on the beach at Port Fairy. Literally. He built the house himself. Then he built another one – for his children.

A member of the Australian Lancia Register since 1979, he lovingly restored four classic cars – a 1928 long-chassis Lancia Lambda, a 1970 Lancia Fulvia, a 1928 Packard, and a 1951 MGTD – with a meticulous, almost-microscopic attention to detail, right down to sewing the upholstery. Once, returning from a European business trip, he carried a cylinder head in his hand luggage for fellow Lancia enthusiast Bill Jamieson. Since 1977, David had rarely missed the biennial Lancia Rally in Castlemaine. Even this year, ill, frail and only seven weeks from the end, he drove his friend Ron Hampson to the event after cautioning him not to slam the door of his beloved Alfa.

David Jones died on December 6 in Port Fairy Hospital, only 10 weeks after losing Isobel, his wife, philanthropic partner, and patient companion for 55 years.

He is survived by his children Anne, Susan and David and five grandchildren.

He was a restless, clever, difficult man; never still, seldom comfortable, rarely satisfied.

His world was full of things that needed to be done and done well – and David did them all.

Simple as that.

A grim irony: At 4pm on Wednesday 8 December, a mere 36 hours after David’s passing, the company that he and his father before him had built into an Australian icon passed into the hands of the administrators and ceased to be. Vale David Jones. Vale Fletcher Jones and Staff.

**- John Box**