



Porsche She's Electric – Justine Cullen

07/10/2025 Porsche Cars Australia profiles some of the country's most successful driven women who are charging to the front of their respective fields.

Ask Justine Cullen what makes a great story – the one question every great writer is asked – and you'll get a thought-provoking reply.

"The most important question to always ask is, 'Where does it fit in the bigger picture?'"

Her response is a bit of a surprise. She doesn't mention anything about characters or dialogue. There's no reference to narrative arcs. And her reply isn't rushed or rehearsed, it's considered. It's as if her voice has gently grabbed the hand of the question's last word and started guiding it towards a new understanding.

Spend time reading her work and you'll agree it's a journey worth taking. As one of Australia's most respected voices in fashion, media, and publishing, Justine Cullen's reputation runs far deeper than her

sharp editorial eye and instinct for cultural storytelling. The former Editor-in-Chief of InStyle Australia and founding Editor-in-Chief of Elle Australia is a best-selling author and commentator whose intelligent reach into the tightest corners of our culture embodies the true meaning of an omniscient narrator. Reading her work is a memorable experience.

Driven insight

"I've always worked in fashion magazines and a good story is never what's just on the surface," she says, stepping out of the Porsche Macan at her family home, a restored white treasure chest from 1950 nestled amongst the green trees on Sydney's Palm Beach. "It's what it says about society at large. It's about who we are as people, where we are going and what we've learned. Diving into these has always driven me."

It's a fascinating glimpse into the world of fashion, where image is an entry door to deeper layers of insight about societies. Justine's revealing powers have shaped conversations around beauty, style and fashion for more than 20 years, steered by a crafted wisdom that took flight early.

"I was always obsessed with magazines. I grew up in a single-mother household and my mum loved markets. She would return home on Saturdays with copies of Cleo and Dolly. I remember being seven years old reading Letters to the Editor and how they met famous people and how they were surrounded by all of these wonderful products. It was a world I couldn't imagine being part of."

But she eventually did, and she took her first steps into that world as soon as she could.

"I started interning at any magazine that would take me during my high school holidays, after school and on weekends. It paid off. During my HSC year in 1993 I was offered a job at Girlfriend magazine. I spent a couple of years there and then moved to London to work for the BBC and the fashion magazine that accompanied its TV program, The Clothes Show. After four years I headed home to Australia and sought out a role as a beauty editor."

And for a good reason.

"I'd spied very early that beauty editors tended to become editors because they developed everything necessary to produce a magazine," she says. "They knew all of the advertisers, they knew how to write, how to shoot photography, and they knew the business."

"I became Beauty Editor at Marie Claire and then Deputy Editor at Dolly magazine. Shortly after I was expecting a baby. It was then I decided to freelance and during one of my gigs I was asked if I wanted to make a kids fashion version of Shop Til You Drop. We made this cool, cutting-edge magazine and it opened the door to the editorship."

Now an editor with an even faster-rising career, Justine would have been content, except, "There was

something else.”

“I always wanted to be editor of ELLE magazine. It was my favourite international title. I love that it was created out of post-war France by a serious journalist who understood that women had multitudes, and that you could care about fashion but you could also care about issues. All of that really mattered to me.

“When I heard rumors ELLE was being considered for Australia I immediately began making pitch documents and presentation decks. I campaigned endlessly to get that job. I was ridiculous about it; there was no world where I didn’t have that job. The idea of someone else getting it killed me.

“I somehow convinced people they should launch ELLE in Australia and along the way I got the job. It was a dream opportunity with my dream title. I got to staff it how I wanted and I got to bring to life my own vision of making it relevant to our market. For me, it was incredible.”

High-powered innovation

Justine maximised her freedom with ELLE, trying new things in a fast-changing media landscape.

“Everything we did was focused on creativity and innovation. We launched in 2013. Instagram had taken off. Digital media and social media were developing rapidly. We did new and interesting things like shooting a model five times to create a cover that resembled a flip book where you could turn different sections of her face to create 35 different beauty styles. We even created the world’s first magazine cover shot with an iPhone. We worked with Apple on that project. We shot the first ever cover of a woman breastfeeding. We created a cover using a mirror instead of modelling talent to celebrate womanhood. We had so much fun.”

Originality in the worlds of fashion and lifestyle might seem rare but Justine made it a regular part of her work building ELLE into an Australian institution. And her approach?

“I base everything off gut instinct,” she says, sitting in the outdoor sunshine of her Sydney home. “I’m a keen observer of the world. It drives the joy of research, which for me is a live experience.”

Today, Justine exercises her observation skills on Substack. Late-Night Snacking with Justine Cullen curates news and fascinating ideas for her many readers, and her podcast, The Late Night Snacking Trivia Game, “feels like your group chat went to pub trivia.”

“Substack has changed how I absorb information from the world. I wake up in the morning and suddenly I’ve got 30 people in my inbox with the most interesting ideas.”

It all fuels her passion for writing and communication.

“I love the craft of it. It’s very nostalgic for me. I think it’s one of the best ways to present ideas.”

Wisdom and true success

"Success doesn't pertain to some kind of happiness," Justine says. "Success is about personal freedom and creative freedom.

"There's a growing realization that the idea of climbing a ladder and taking a linear path to an end goal isn't necessarily a widely accepted definition of success anymore. Generation Z understands this better than my generation did. Success today is far more than owning items of status and achieving at all costs."

There's a real-world truth when Justine shares these views. For a writer who has won Editor of the Year and Magazine of the Year and lived an album of pinch-me moments it's a valuable conclusion for anyone listening. For Justine, her achievements are important but they're all eclipsed by one of her favourite experiences.

"The big thing I enjoy is looking out at an event or scrolling LinkedIn and seeing the achievements and successes of all the young women who have worked for me at various times, or who I discovered years ago as an intern. I'm so proud to have had a part in their lives."

Recharging

Witnessing the success of proteges is invigorating but climbing the high road to enjoy the view has taken decades of dedication. Her work has always been energizing and magnetic, almost negating the need to recharge.

"There's always a certain pleasure in doing the work that I've always been able to do," she says, "but last year I hit a wall with burnout. It made me rethink how I was living so we took our family off to Canada and lived in the middle of the woods for seven weeks over Christmas.

"I switched off my email and didn't even read. It's not until you give yourself some space that you can get clarity of mind. That recharge at the end of last year changed a lot for me.

"Sometimes you need to step back when you're a driven type of person."

But Justine and her family made one small addition after switching off and shedding during that long break.

"We got a dog, a Bernese Mountain Dog," she says with a laugh, and right on cue there's a bark in the background. "She forces me to put the laptop down at five and go for a walk. Cuddling a dog on the floor for five minutes can be the best kind of recharge."

A longer look at Justine's own bigger picture reveals that the road she's taken – from magazines to books to online publishing and podcasting – has kept her charged along the way, helping her to make the big transitions and keep climbing.

"I don't think there's anyone in publishing who hasn't had to pivot with their skills during the past couple of decades. You don't need to be a new dog to learn new tricks in publishing. A great story is always a great story, no matter what platform it sits on. The priority is always the experience you create for an audience and the bigger picture you give them. It's a bit like Porsche, really. Whether you put petrol in it or charge it, the driving experience is still the Porsche experience. And that's what matters."

woman with drive

woman with drive is an online content platform from Porsche Cars Australia that celebrates and empowers women with inspiring and vibrant stories. *woman with drive* has published a number of stand-out campaigns, including the Women at PCA Series. It also brings together Australia's trailblazing women at Porsche's annual Woman with Drive event during the annual Formula 1® Australian Grand Prix.

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