

# AT Banter Podcast Episode 304 – Aille Design

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

braille, fashion, cowbell, beads, community, disability, beadwork, designing, wear, dress, clothing, blind, hear, people, ryan, design, accessibility, impaired, important, alexa

## SPEAKERS

Steve Barclay, Lis Malone, Jake, Alexa, Rob Mineault, Ryan Fleury

### **Rob Mineault**

Hey and welcome to another episode of AT Banter

### **Steve Barclay**

Banter, banter.

### **Rob Mineault**

Hey, this is this is of course the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault and joining me today Mr. Ryan Fleury is back. In black. Actually, I don't know if he's wearing black.

### **Ryan Fleury**

I couldn't tell you. Yeah, there you go.

### **Rob Mineault**

And the cowbell of course has made a triumphant return which is clearly we're all very excited about as well.

### **Ryan Fleury**

Sounds like.

### **Rob Mineault**

Yeah, I mean, we didn't really miss you, but we missed the cowbell. Hey, also here and Mr. Steve Barclay.

### **Steve Barclay**

Where? Oh, no, that's me. Okay. Yes.

### **Rob Mineault**

And Miss Lis Malone.

**Lis Malone**

Hi. And I'm definitely I'm always wearing black.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah. Those Spanx.

**Lis Malone**

Right. Black Spanx. That's it.

**Rob Mineault**

there you go. Yeah, this is this is this is something with I feel like this is the first time all four of us have been together in a podcast for many weeks.

**Ryan Fleury**

It has been a while. Life's getting away. Yeah.

**Rob Mineault**

So we heard a rumor, Mr. Fleury, that, that you missed last week's show, because you're doing a little something we'd like to call sitting on the board of directors in a meeting for AEBC.

**Ryan Fleury**

That is correct. Yes. I decided I wanted to get more involved in the blind, partially sighted, deaf blind community. And so somebody nominated me to be treasurer on the board, and I said no. And then it came around to a second round of nominations, because there was an empty director's seat because somebody had to step down. And somebody else nominated me to be director and I thought, well, I can't really say no twice. So here I am. I've got two years as a director on the board of the Alliance for the Equality of Blind Canadians.

**Lis Malone**

Do you hear that? Just ask Ryan twice for anything and he'll say yes. I did hear you know, twice in a row. That's it. That was my takeaway.

**Rob Mineault**

Absolutely, yeah. That's a really good point. All right. Well, I'm just writing down a note here to ask Ryan for 20 bucks twice.

**Ryan Fleury**

Alexa is like, ask Ryan twice to buy a t shirt.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah, okay. And then give him half an hour to forget that he said that.

**Ryan Fleury**

You got to ask me a second time.

**Rob Mineault**

Well, okay. All right. Enough silliness. Let's get to it. Because we've already we've already sort of hinted at this now. So Hey, Ryan, now that you're back, why don't you tell people just what the heck we are doing today?

**Ryan Fleury**

Sure. We're excited to have with us the founders of Aille Design, which is a fashion company here in Canada. And with us are Alexa and Jake, the founders of Aille Design. Welcome, everyone.

**Alexa**

Hi, good to be here.

**Ryan Fleury**

Glad you could join us.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah, absolutely. We are actually really excited about today's show, even though we are not fashionistas are by any stretch of the imagination. But we've actually been talking a lot about fashion and adaptive fashion and I really feel like this is a this is a growing field. And I'm excited to get your guys's take on it and sort of learn a little bit about your company. So why don't we start out by just giving us a little bit of background about about each of you and then just a little bit of a little bit of background about the company?

**Alexa**

Yeah, absolutely. So I'm gonna start first, my name is Alexa. And I'm the one who first started the company. And it actually originated as a research project when I was studying fashion at University in Toronto, at Ryerson, now known as TMU. And really early on in school, we kind of just learned that diversity, inclusion and equality, they weren't really dominant aspects of the fashion industry, nobody was really working towards it, it was kind of just there. And so I knew that by the time I was in my fourth year of school, I really wanted to focus on that and being able to work with a disability community. And in the end, that ended up being the visually impaired community. And it was a result of putting Braille on clothing to create a beautiful message, it was all through beadwork. And a few years later evolved into being an actual business, there was just such demand and positivity around it. So that's kind of where it all happened. For me. I didn't previously know anyone who was visually impaired, I just really loved fashion, really loved Braille and found a way to combine them all to create more inclusivity in the world.

**Jake**

Still impresses me every time I hear.

**Ryan Fleury**

So how did you get involved Jake?

**Jake**

Yeah, so my name is Jake. And I got involved partially by really falling in love with Alexa over the course of this process. She had started this as a research project. And she says, before we met, but on our very first date, she was telling me about her work on this, I remember having a moment of kind of, you know, don't screw this up, I realized how impressive it was what she was working on. So you know, I've been around involved for a while. And I myself have a background in business and finance and some analytics work. So as this was starting to go from research project into the demand for a business, that's when I started getting involved was helping take this and actually turn it into a business, getting the business account set up helping to do the finance work, inventory ordering. So we've kind of developed this partnership, and this relationship now, or Alexa is very much the design side of this. And I'm very much the kind of business and logistical side of the company. So we've been working on this together now since really, the business started in early 2020. So it's been a little over two years now of you know, a lot of blood, sweat and tears grinding pretty hard. But um, here we are today, and it's doing well and continuing to do well and hopefully stays doing well. So yeah, and in just the past few months, we actually both decided to leave our full time jobs to pursue Aille Design. So now Braille fashion has not only started as the research project, but it's evolved into our livelihood, and honestly couldn't imagine doing anything else.

### **Ryan Fleury**

And Alexa, are you visually impaired?

### **Alexa**

I myself am not. So to this day, I can now say that almost all of my closest friends do have visual impairments. But I myself didn't actually know anybody prior to starting the project. It was really just learning about the lack of inclusion in the industry and wanting to get to know more people from the community to learn about what we could change and what challenges were already kind of being faced.

### **Ryan Fleury**

Yeah, the reason I asked is because earlier today, I listened to an interview you did with the Breakfast TV, or one of the outlets anyway and you were saying you were in a mall or a store looking at a beaded piece of clothing. And that's when you kind of put Braille and fashion together. Like, how did you leave it know what Braille was if you didn't have any involvement with that community?

### **Alexa**

Yeah, so I mean, I went to school for fashion, but I've always loved design of all sorts. And so while I know Braille is a code, I first sort of thought of it as the design of a code. And I thought it was so fascinating that you could read through touch, going to school for fashion communication, specifically, Braille as a communication tool sort of just lent itself naturally. So I've always just been really fascinated by the visual aspect of Braille with this combination of dots. But the idea that you can actually successfully read and read quickly through touch so it's always just been something I thought was really cool. And I've always loved beaded clothing. So like you sort of started to mention I was window shopping kind of looking for inspiration for my fourth year Capstone project. I knew I wanted to work with a disabled community but wasn't exactly shared and what capacity or what that would look like and came across as super cool beaded jacket. Stop for a second, kind of asked myself why this beaded jacket couldn't be cool beyond its aesthetic values and sort of just thought about how similar the size of

beads and Braille are. Kind of question well, what if we rearranged all of these beads slightly to create messages that were fully legible that were Braille that could describe the outfit or empower the individual who's reading it provided clues into independence or even further Those who don't read Braille be more of an advocacy element and be used as an opportunity to build awareness about disability.

### **Steve Barclay**

So I'm on your, on your website, and you have pre orders available for the blue dress I note, which has an awful lot of Braille on the front, quite a bit of reading. And if you're going to read that whole thing, you're getting to know that person pretty well.

It's funny, you bring that up. So yeah, that piece is one of the closest to my heart, that was several years in the making, and it has over 2600 beads. But to your point with getting to know everyone that Braille beadwork is in multiple paragraphs down the complete front of a long dress. So it starts at about the neck, chest and goes to about the ankle. But for that case, a lot of our Braille, when it's meant to be read, it's more of a personal thing. It's read before the wears wear again. And then a little ironically, it becomes more of a visual statement when it's actually being worn on someone visual to the rest of the world. But I mean, if you can send to it all the power to you to have someone read it to you while wearing it. In most cases, nobody should just go up and touch you anyways.

### **Steve Barclay**

So that's true. Do you want to talk a little bit about the messaging that is on the blue dress? Yeah, it's pretty, it's pretty cool. I was just reading about it. I think it's really neat.

### **Alexa**

Thank you. So with that piece, in particular, I worked really closely with 10 Blind women. And the premise was that all of the Braille on that dress actually describes the color blue from the perspective of those 10 women. So this dress that we created, it's a really beautiful striking blue color. And it describes the different memories, feelings, and thoughts that those 10 Women associate with the color despite not actually seeing its visual beauty. So really going through the different kinds of assets and thoughts that blindness is a spectrum and every woman lost her vision at a different stage. And some have more remaining vision than others. So you know, the experience of someone who lost their vision, maybe in the age of two or three, just looking up at the sky, and identifying that as blue to someone in their later life, recognizing that their mother or son's eyes were blue, but they would never really see them to grow older, etc. So really, really interesting the diversity of stories that we had. So that was kind of a transcript from some really intimate interviews that we did.

### **Rob Mineault**

Yeah. What really impresses me about all of this is just how you guys have really been able to take something like fashion and you've, you've sort of been able to build something that's functional, but also a little bit of an advocacy piece a bit, a little bit of an educational piece, and something that's also very fashionable, in and of itself. And I think that that's a lot. That's actually really impressive to be able to do, we're talking about so much more than just, you know, putting Braille like beads on a t shirt, you

know, and having it spell out something in Braille, you guys are really sort of taking it to another level. I guess my question is, has that what has that process been like? And have you engaged with members of the blindness community to sort of help you build this out?

Yeah, so I'm Jake, I'm gonna hop in on this one. You know, I like that you call that out, and that's something that we've actually taken very consciously from the beginning, is that as we've gone to build up this, this brand and our products, is we want them to be something that is, is useful, and empowering to the blind and visually impaired community, but isn't restricted to that community. Because really, the way to bridge the gap with action between, you know, fully sighted or fully abled communities, and those that aren't, is to make a product or a brand that stills the needs and the desires of both, you know, we really wanted to kind of bridge that gap open up lines of communication. So all the products, well, they're designed to be worn by anyone, you know, do cater to both audiences. And then to you to your question about, you know, involvement of the blind and visually impaired community, even though some of these products, you know, we market them and we try to sell them to those who don't, aren't are visually impaired. We do want to make sure first and foremost, especially our Braille application is always legible. Because that is really one of the core parts of the company. So we very heavily use a co design process, which is something Alexa started, and she's been doing for since before I was involved, but we really always make sure to involve the community and test our products with them, as we're developing them. And this is goes from the design of the products. You know, we'll talk about, you know, what types of phrases are important, all the way up to the blue dress and the interviews that went into those, but also to make sure as we were, you know, going through different applications ours for the beads, which were pretty consistent with now, but that went through several levels of progression and testing and in R&D is always making sure that we got feedback on the placement of the beads, how sturdy the beads are making sure that they were legible. And also, you know, making a product where these beads are meant to do the wash and lasts a long lifetime. So, you know, well, while we push this product to a larger audience, we do make sure that t he the blind or visually impaired community is involved in the design of those products.

### **Rob Mineault**

So can you talk to me a little bit about about the actual the process of the beading? How much was sort of work? Does that add on to making something like a T shirt or a dress? And how do you balance that? And is that been a process, hit's gotten better and more refined, the more that you do it.

### **Alexa**

It has definitely gotten more better and refined since we started. When I first started the project in my dorm room, I remember I would hand so every individual bead with a needle and thread, I think maybe it would take me like an hour to write just three characters. So by no means was that efficient or effective. And thankfully, that method of Braille application wasn't the most legible. So we've been able to since improve our techniques, and the most less legible aspect actually ended up being the quickest to apply. But I'll let Jake kind of explain that process a little.

### **Jake**

Yeah, so I mean, it's, it's definitely progressed. And you know, as we've had our orders pick up, we've had to learn to progress with them to keep up with everything, because like Alexa said, in the very beginning, hand sewing each bead was not sustainable and wasn't going to last. But it was very important for us and learning, you know, what we needed to focus on, especially as we're looking into the legibility of the Braille. So you know, what it kind of turned into eventually we found a type of bead, that would work well. But we were still kind of hand placing each individual bead. So wasn't selling any more. Now we use like a heat process, we involve a, you know, a special type of glue. But we, Alexa was still a lot of the time to hand placing each bead and we're moving them over. Now we've gotten up to the point where we're able to do effectively like a stencil, kind of a pre outline of what the Braille beading needs to be. And we're able to then push the beads into this stencil, and they all kind of fall into the exact place that they need to be. And what that allows us to do is to really ramp up the speed at which we can do things. So for example, with some of our T shirts that we sell, that all have, you know, some of our preset phrases, we can make the phrases for, you know, 10 t shirts at a time, which allows us to kind of increase that. But that also transfers over to the blue dress where we have multiple paragraphs down the front is we can make about a whole paragraph at a time. So that blue dress, even those 2600 beads, we probably applied that and about eight to nine chunks of preset beads that we kind of put in their place through a stencil that we make custom ourselves. So we're able to really increase that up and do a lot more. And it's been a one hell of an evolution. But there's still a ways to go. But I'm pretty happy with where we're at at the moment with our current demand and our current process.

#### **Alexa**

Yeah, and the reason that this new process even came to place, we got a phone call from the American Foundation for the Blind, they were getting ready to celebrate their 100 centennial anniversary. And they were looking to do a fundraising effort with all of their donors. And they contracted us to create 1000 custom Braille hats for them. And so we got the phone call said yes, immediately hung up and said, Oh, no, how are we going to do this, we're hand placing every bead. So I mean, it was an amazing opportunity and really forced us to learn how to better align ourselves and make sure that we could maintain our high quality, but do it a little bit more efficiently. So it's really amazing. And now we've learned that we can take on bulk order. So a lot has happened since that first dorm room night.

#### **Lis Malone**

So who are you guys working with for your braille transcription, especially for something like as elaborate as the blue dress where you said there are multiple paragraphs of, of Braille content? Because with Braille, like you said, it's it is a code and it doesn't always just transfer, you know, letter to symbol, especially with phrasings. So I was just curious, like what you guys do for for that type of research.

#### **Alexa**

That's a great point. And so one thing I want to start with that is saying that all of the Braille beadwork that we currently apply is all uncontracted. So it's much easier to do that direct translation, making sure that there aren't any sort of errors with contractions, knowing that everyone can kind of read Braille differently. But what we do make sure to do with all of our Braille pieces is work with the community to get someone to sort of review what the Braille is or ensure the legibility make sure that everything is

there so nothing's going on. out spelt incorrectly, but so happy that you brought that up. And we have received some requests for contracted pieces. And when it comes to that, we'll likely end up contracting those pieces out to make sure that we can involve even more community members and those who are working to become transcribers.

**Lis Malone**

I mean, looking at your designs, it actually reminds me of large print Braille. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that. Yeah. Yeah. So So for, for, for some of us, I'm one of them who, whose fingertips just seemed to be dead. I've like corpse fingers. normal size Braille, I cannot feel it to save my life. And they actually have these Braille books when you learn and it'll, it'll make the dots really big. So that you can you can feel them. And when I was looking at some of your designs, I was like, Was that really just that is exactly what it reminds him It looks like large print Braille.

**Alexa**

Wow, I would be really curious to get your feedback on the legibility of our Braille. Because what we tried to do was replicate the size of regular printed Braille as much as possible. So I believe we're at about two to three millimeters per bead size, further full width. And we've been told that that was the easiest sort of direct relation to that regular printed size. So I'm curious how your finger would sort of pick that up, or if an even bigger size would be preferred for you.

**Lis Malone**

Yeah, and it's, it's just an interesting concept of the large print Braille because of those who just can't feel it very well. But also, sometimes when people go to school, and they study to become like rehab teachers, and work with the blind and low vision and they were learning Braille, sometimes they learn it by seeing it. And they'll have these workbooks where it's a very visual thing where they're learning it by seeing the dots and, and and then obviously, when they take the test, like, No, you can't look at it, you have to actually be able to read it with your fingers. But it is that interesting, large print, sort of concept that but that's the first thing I thought of was like, wow, like Mark print Braille mummy, but I don't know the exact size. I don't know, Steve, if you happen to know what the actual size of the large print dots would be considered.

**Alexa**

I don't remember off the top of my head, but I'm very curious. And we'll definitely check right after this podcast.

**Lis Malone**

I think they have to send me some free merchandise for me to try it out. Right? I'm getting that. Oh, twice it's for research.

**Ryan Fleury**

Well done, well done.

**Rob Mineault**

You just gotta you gotta cut out the middleman, you gotta ask Ryan to buy you some merch twice.

**Lis Malone**

Apparently wants to buy me the blue dress.

**Ryan Fleury**

I thought this podcast was brought to you by Canadian Assistive Technology

**Rob Mineault**

So how challenging is it for you because you went to school for fashion? You've clearly you've had a real passion for fashion all your life so do you find yourself sort of having to wear different hats in terms of when you're designing like, because you're approaching these things from different angles, you've got the fashion angle, but then you've also got functionality and you've got, you know, accessibility and adaptive clothing. So do you have trouble sort of balancing all those? Or does it sort of just kind of come naturally when you're designing?

**Alexa**

That's a great question. So had you asked me this right when I was starting university, I probably would have said yes, fashion meant something completely different for me. But once I started learning more about the industry and how inclusive design wasn't really being prioritized within fashion, my entire love and appreciation for fashion shifted in a completely different way. So now I look at everything almost with an accessibility mindset first, and look to see how can we make this both accessible, but aesthetically pleasing, and my latest passion has really been in finding the marriage between those two. So for example, with a blue dress that we created, while the Braille beadwork that describes the color blue is the focal point of that piece. The accessibility goes far beyond the Braille so we made sure to use a beautiful blue fabric that actually doesn't wrinkle. So accessibility wise, that being able to steam it or iron it is one less thing you don't have to worry about. That's a bonus for if you're sighted or if you're visually impaired. We made sure that there was a slit in the dress so it doesn't go too high, but it really increases about walkability. So if you do have a white cane in hand or a guide dog, you might be taking a longer stride, you don't have any limitations in your garment, it's really easy to move around in, and there's a long zipper pole in the back. So it's much easier to pull the dress on and off on your own, because it's a lot easier to be able to reach that poll. But the accessible feature that I'm actually most excited about is that we've started to incorporate washable QR codes into all of our pieces. And so with those, you can actually use your camera phone, scan the QR code, which is the full size of that garment tag. And it'll bring you to an accessible web page, that gives you a full physical description of the garment. It'll give you a transcript of all of the Braille beadwork, give you the laundering instructions, the wash all of that. But then furthermore, we'll even give you some styling suggestions depending on the different occasion that you're going to. So those are all features that take accessibility one step further. But like Jake and I were sort of talking about earlier, making sure that they're all accessible features that can be worn and appreciated by anyone, no matter if you have a disability or not. So that's kind of where it's all coming together for us.

**Ryan Fleury**

Well, it's interesting, you said you're taking it one step further, because you know, we've seen in the last year and you mentioned it again. And whenever you interviews you did that Nike Tommy Hilfiger

and other mainstream fashion designers are acknowledging the fact that there's a missing market there that they haven't taken advantage of, and are coming out with adaptive clothing lines.

**Alexa**

We're so excited to see that. And one of our main goals really is to bring inclusive fashion to the mainstream. And that's really why we're making sure that we're designing a product that yes, is accessible and targeted to the blind and visually impaired community and disability community as a whole, but really can be something that's worn by everyone and appreciated by everyone. So that way, it doesn't become a siloed group, that it doesn't become fashion just for the disabled, because it really is important to bring it into that mainstream element, to begin to normalize it and really be able to bring about that advocacy and awareness.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah, that's so interesting that you say that, because that was kind of my thought, too, when I was researching for the show, you know, fashion, fashion has really been sort of siloed. But when you really think about it, fashion at its essence is so important for people, I mean, listen, you know, most of us wear clothing, you know, 99% of our day, you know, unless you're Ryan in which he's not wearing pants now, but, you know, we, we use it for, for so many things. It's functional, but it's also a part of our self expression. It's how we, we exude self confidence, and build self esteem, it really is an important aspect of, of our lives. And so it is really important to sort of start to build all of these aspects into just mainstream fashion. And I think that it's it's incredibly important what you guys are doing, because you're kind of setting the template for a lot of other companies out there that I think are slowly beginning to realize this. And we say this all the time, when we're talking about assistive technology, we're talking about accessibility, you know, it's at that design level, that we need to roll in these ideas of adaptation, or you know, functionality, and all these important things so that we can make clothing that's going to appeal to people you know, who are able bodied as well as people with disabilities. It's cool, we want to build something that's going to be for everybody, and that's going to benefit everybody.

**Alexa**

Absolutely. And I love the way you said accessibility cannot be an afterthought. And any product or service that you think of that did actually go through a co design process or include a diverse group of individuals including those with disabilities in the design phase, you'll notice immediately that their product or service is far superior because so many times when you've thought of the needs of others those will sometimes just make the product or service easier to use the end up benefiting those that didn't even necessarily know that they were going to have that challenge in the first place.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah, that's exactly right. You know, we when you can we can point to so many examples of things that you know, we use all the time that was there were actually designed for for, you know, some sort of a disability community. Everything from subtitles on movies to, you know, text messages, so into audio description for that matter, which is something that is something new again, that's, that's a growing field. So let me ask you this, because this is something that I kind of was mulling over, while you were sort of talking about texture, the idea of sort of like designing something as like sort of a tactile garment, you know, combining different just in the way that, that fashion, you're combining colors and patterns in

certain combinations to make it, you know, visually pleasing, is it a thing to sort of combine different textures and patterns of those textures, so that it sort of produces a really unique tactile experience.

**Alexa**

Absolutely visually impaired or not, combining different textures, even in the same color immediately adds so much extra character and sophistication to an outfit. I've always been a fan. But ever since working more closely with this particular community, it's such a bigger difference. So I know in we've been one of the first prototypes that we made, you may be familiar with it, it seems to be a crowd favorite, but it's an oversized denim jacket. And it has several stripes on the back all filled with different amounts of Braille beadwork. But on that every stripe that we added there has a different texture. So as you're brushing your hands back along the back of the jacket, you can actually tell once you've reached every every stripe, which ends up being a section of information. So that change in texture ends up being both aesthetically pleasing, but also completely functional in determining the information you're looking for. We have the smooth fabric on the blue dress, which doesn't wrinkle, but it's also really cool to touch our T shirts. First thing customers often say that this is the softest teacher that they own. And then we have our embroidered logo in the corner. So every time we can add an additional sort of textural feature that will add to the experience we do, like we add an embossed version of our logo on all of our printed materials. So that way everyone can experience the brand, even if that's just feeling what our logo and branding actually is.

**Lis Malone**

So I'm gonna ask one of the toughies and listen, I love to play devil's advocate. So and you are not the first guests that we've had that are in the able bodied or as we've said on the show the TABs, temporarily able bodied, and are doing, you know, very meaningful things that improve the lives of those in other communities. So I want to preface it with that. But I do want to ask you, how are you straddling that line, where you might be challenged with whether or not what you're doing is more appropriation than appreciation.

**Alexa**

So, I very much appreciate this question. And I really liked the way that you prefaced it, we at no point want to be appropriating anyone or anything. And that's why the CO design process is so important to us. There's nothing that we do at the company at any stage that doesn't include the community. So Jake was mentioning earlier with the actual Braille legibility, the choice of phrases and placements, that goes all the way to the brainstorming of our designs, but actually the photography and the modeling and the writing. So every month, we released a blog that's written by someone from the visually impaired community or an ally talking about their experiences. So we make sure that we provide a platform in every aspect, we provide an avenue for modeling, in some of our photo shoots. Those that were one of them, in particular, with blog to last October, our photographer actually identified as having a disability. So whenever possible, we're all about building awareness about the community as a whole. It's never supposed to be about us or myself as the main designer, but really always as a community brand. And really making sure that we emphasize that and the CO design process has been the main way in which we've been able to achieve that. But I am happy that you brought this up.

**Lis Malone**

And I think it's a really important question to ask. And I think that what you said is a fantastic answer. Because I think on the surface, and you hear about something like this, and you don't know the inner workings and you don't know all of your motivations and the things that you guys are doing with it with your company, it very quickly, you might think, oh, gosh, they're taking our form of communication and they're making it into this, you know, this showpiece And isn't this cute for you know, sighted people to wear and now they love blind people or something like that. So but I it's very obvious that what you're doing goes a lot deeper. And I think it's just important to make people aware of that.

**Jake**

Thank you. Just a note on that, too, you know, because like, like, like I said, we really make it a point to try and show that we are not, you know, trying to come in here and take this, but we're trying to work with the community. And I think what's been kind of, you know, reassuring to us that we've been approaching this properly, is that we've had outreach kind of organic to us, from organizations of the blind and visually impaired, more than we have had for say, like, for profit or private organizations, we've actually done a lot more work with groups like the American Foundation for the Blind, we've done some stuff with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. And I think a lot of that is because we've taken such a point to involve the community and to make sure that we're designing for and with the community, that we're starting to see support from these types of organizations. So that's, you know, reassured us that we're on the right path, and has opened up our ability to then work with those organizations and access, you know, people who are involved with those groups to further do our co-design process and to, you know, have involvement as we move forward.

**Lis Malone**

I'm all for this, I'm ready to jump on board and get my own custom made shirt. I want it to say in Braille "stop staring at my chest".

**Alexa**

We can do that.

**Rob Mineault**

Okay, so Okay, here's a question for you. So this is just this is a very general sort of just industry question. Because it seems to me that, that fashion, the fashion industry has gotten a lot better in recent years, about sort of linking fashion and social change, or social good, much more than previous decades. So has, in your experience over the past few years, is the fashion industry sort of making some strides in terms of becoming more involved in social change? From your perspective?

**Alexa**

I would say changes have definitely been made. Is there room for more changes? Absolutely. There always will be. And I think there's been changed but not necessarily as much change as there. So should be specifically in the area of disability inclusion, fashion has definitely gotten better with social change in forms of other diversity from gender, race, age, sexual orientation, but, and size inclusivity as always, but when it comes to disability in fashion, it almost seems like disability remains one of the factors that is constantly excluded from that conversation. There have definitely been improvements. But like I was saying, I think there's far more that can be done. But with your point about social change,

I think a lot of companies now are understanding that they can't just be a clothing brand, they do have to have a much stronger mission and values that behind what it is that they're doing. So completely agree with what you're saying.

**Rob Mineault**

So it seems to me that that more and more clothing manufacturers are taking some of this into account.

**Lis Malone**

I think, though, that in the fashion industry, just as a consumer, not someone who works in the industry in any in any way. I think that companies are saying Sure we will. We're open to whoever wants to wear our stuff, but we're not changing our stuff so that other people can wear it. And that's where the disconnect is.

**Alexa**

That's a good point.

**Rob Mineault**

Good point. Yeah. Man. See, we brought Lis on for a reason.

**Lis Malone**

Let me just tell you, Alexa. These guys they think chaps are accessible.

**Rob Mineault**

Is that the appeal of them?

**Steve Barclay**

Wait, wait a second. You mean there's alternatives other than sweats?

**Rob Mineault**

So in your experience, then when you were going to school, Alexa, you mentioned that really like the idea of inclusion and accessibility adaptive clothing was a fairly new concept, and wasn't really being discussed at all. Do you get the feeling now that that has changed?

**Alexa**

Definitely has changed. So I went to Ryerson University now known as TMU. And when I started school back in, what was it 2012, 2013. My particular program coincided with when Dr. Ben Berry joined our faculty, and he is now the dean of fashion at Parsons in New York City. So he's the person that really taught me about the importance of diversity and inclusion. So he has really kind of taken that value set with them everywhere that he's gone in terms of education, and being at such a prominent fashion school like parks. Is, is really starting to mold that concept there as well. He was my advisor in school. And that's really what led me to kind of pushing myself as far as possible in bringing inclusivity to fashion in the lens that I was sort of taught. And now you kind of see it as maybe there are programs that study specifically on inclusion, or you see an increase in inclusive design programs, or like we were even just saying the fashion industry as a whole seems to sort of take it on a little bit more, but to what

Lis was mentioning, unless you're actually changing things at the root, what changes there really, you can't just say, oh, we want all customers now, but we're not going to design things for those customers. So bringing it back to that education level in the universities, I think is the most important element for change truly to take place. And he's been a phenomenal proponent to doing that. And to add on to that a little bit further. 2015, 2016 is when I first started this Braille fashion research project, and I'll never forget the types of responses I was getting from my fashion peers. I'd be like, oh, I'm doing like this Braille fashion thing. I'm working with local individuals who are visually impaired and learning about challenges from deciding what to wear and organizing closets and if fashion trends matter, and stigmas related to visual impairment and fashion. And a lot of them would respond saying, oh, like, that's cool. But why? Or if you're visually impaired, why do you care what you look like? So those types of comments then really fueled me to continue my research and evolve it into something more. But I think those types of comments, it's going to be far less likely to hear those words coming from someone today, or at least coming from a fashion student specifically. That was my experience with it.

**Rob Mineault**

So it's good news. Excellent.

**Steve Barclay**

Who were the people that we interviewed previously about their clothing for people in wheelchairs?

**Rob Mineault**

That was Issy Camilleri

**Steve Barclay**

Yeah. Okay. Because that's the thing that you guys should be talking. Okay. And maybe are.

**Alexa**

So we haven't officially met I would love to meet. She's phenomenal. Our paths have crossed a few different times, we're actually going to be at the same event in two nights from now. So hoping to officially meet her then. But she is such a trailblazer in the adaptive clothing space. And I'm just so honored to kind of be following in her steps. In some ways. She's doing amazing work.

**Steve Barclay**

Yeah, she absolutely is. And I can see I can see a crossover episode here.

**Alexa**

Oh, yeah, we both had our inclusive masks on display at the ROM, they did a an exhibit all about masks for the pandemic. And our two masks were the only two in the exhibit that featured disability inclusion. So that was a really huge honor to be there alongside her.

**Rob Mineault**

Amazing Well, listen, you guys are doing incredible work and you guys are really, I feel like blazing some trails as well. So I'm personally really excited to see where you guys take this. I mean, you guys are only it's you know, 2020 it's two years. And it sounds like things are going gangbusters already so I

first see a big things for you. I mean it clearly you've already got a t shirt sale from Lis or at least via Ryan

**Lis Malone**

And the blue dress from Steve.

**Steve Barclay**

No I'm waiting for the little black dress.

**Rob Mineault**

Oh, there you go!

**Alexa**

We can take custom orders too. We'll get interesting.

**Lis Malone**

Yeah black's more my color.

**Rob Mineault**

Well, listen, it's been an absolute delight talking to you guys. If people want more information about the company, or to reach out to you guys, where can people find you online?

**Jake**

Yeah, so I mean, we're doing our best to be as accessible as possible. So we have a website which is ailledesign.com. We have an Instagram page which Alexa is very active on which the tag for that are the handles @ailledesign. We can also you can email us directly if you'd like which is hello@ailledesign.com and brand new to it. We just started this week but we officially have a Tik Tok channel now, which we're going to be looking to grow and expand which is also @ailledesign.

**Rob Mineault**

Well, best of luck to you guys. I love it. I'm loving what you do and please come back anytime and we can talk more about this stuff as you guys roll out some more stuff.

**Alexa**

Thank you so much this was amazing I absolutely love this crew there's so many laughs during this conversation

**Rob Mineault**

Open invitation to come back anytime.

**Alexa**

Thank you so much. Great job guys.

**Jake**

You bet guys take care.

**Lis Malone**

Thanks, guys. Yeah.

**Rob Mineault**

Okay, we need a T banter T shirts that have AT Banter in braille.

**Steve Barclay**

Why is it that every guest that we have, we need new promotional items.

**Ryan Fleury**

When's the last time we had any?

**Steve Barclay**

We've still got a drawer full of cowbells.

**Rob Mineault**

That's true. We need to get rid of those cowbells. Well, they came in handy well Ryan was gone.

**Lis Malone**

Holding off still worthy AT Banter hockey jerseys because, hockey season.

**Steve Barclay**

Do you know what? I actually have looked into that list because I did some previously for Rob and Ryan. And they have gotten stupidly expensive. Oh, like just all of a sudden the price is shot up. Really strange. Yeah.

**Ryan Fleury**

Hockey jerseys are all the rage. Well, just for you Lis and Steve we do have an hockey episode coming up soon.

**Steve Barclay**

Yeah so that we have one of the de Montes boys on

**Rob Mineault**

We do? What is that?

**Steve Barclay**

They're Yeah, they're into blind hockey in a big bad way.

**Lis Malone**

Yeah, yeah.

**Rob Mineault**

Well, listen, you guys are in charge of that show. I'll just embarrass everybody.

**Steve Barclay**

Hey, Lis, if you want to familiarize yourself more with hockey and with Canadian culture in general, I highly recommend looking up a show called Letterkenny. If nothing else, you will learn some of the most horrendous you mama jokes that you've ever heard.

**Rob Mineault**

It's classic Canadian entertainment. Lis.

**Rob Mineault**

What's everyone think about this?

**Ryan Fleury**

I think it's great. There's another option now in the community for accessible fashion.

**Rob Mineault**

I really do think their attitude, though, is something new. Like I don't think I the way that they're combining all of these things together, like the functionality and the self expression and, and just the fashion elements, the visual element. I don't think anybody else is doing anything like this.

**Steve Barclay**

They they've done from the work that I've seen on their website, they have done a really beautiful job of making the Braille beautiful. Yeah, exactly. And regardless of whether somebody understands, even if they don't understand its Braille, it's still this really cool pattern that they're looking at. And the way that they've produced the Braille, it stands out very nicely against the fabric. So it's very, very visual, in addition to being bumpy, and, you know, as I, as I mentioned before, you'd have to be friends with whoever was reading you, I guess, but. But that's not going to be your typical interaction, I don't think.

**Lis Malone**

I don't know if they are at this stage. And they're still they're a young company. I think that I think that there were years they have so much time to do amazing things. But I would say that they're on their way to becoming an accessible fashion company, but I would classify them now as being a clothing company that celebrates accessible. Yeah.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah, that's a really good point.

**Steve Barclay**

It's good definition,

**Lis Malone**

Which I still think is extremely important. But I think that they're doing things that are getting them into that accessible fashion arena, for sure. But they definitely they very clearly celebrated.

**Rob Mineault**

Yes. And I think that that's the big difference. If this isn't something like Oh, this is just, you know, again, accessibility is just an add on. They are like looking at it at that, you know, original development stage and building this stuff in. And yeah, I think that there's a huge difference between making something that's functional that you know, has some Braille lettering on it so you can tell what color your T shirt is to again, like celebrating things and making it their own and allowing people to make it their own. This beautiful combination of functionality and advocacy and self expression and fashion that I just I don't no one else is doing So I'm really excited to see where they go in the future and yeah, I have a feeling in two years they'll be so successful that when we ask them to come on they'll just ignore us

**Lis Malone**

AT Banter who? Wait, what? Well, we didn't offer you a blue dress.

**Ryan Fleury**

We're gonna be here in two years?

**Steve Barclay**

In two years, that's true to less you're gonna fit into a smaller dress in two years.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah, actually that's true.

**Steve Barclay**

How goes the new meal plan and stuff?

**Lis Malone**

Um, yeah, it's still it's still on pace.

**Steve Barclay**

Are you seeing any gains? Are you are you happy with it? Or are you just miserable?

**Rob Mineault**

Are you feeling better?

**Lis Malone**

now that I think the misery window is gone? Good. No. Yeah. But it's um Yeah, I'm definitely very I'm shrinking slowly. Because I'm not I'm not starving myself but I think because I I'm not getting any processed sugar.

**Steve Barclay**

Yeah, you know, you don't want to shrink fast that's a problem.

**Lis Malone**

Yeah, but they're it's a it's a slow burn. It's a slow shrink.

**Steve Barclay**

That's exactly the healthiest way to do that is just take it gradual. Don't do any mass. I have a buddy who he does these these massive cleanses. And he will he will go on like a lemonade cleanses doing nothing but drinking this this lemonade concoction. And he'll do that for like two weeks. And he'll shed like 40 pounds. But every time he's done this and he's I've seen him do it about four times now. He just pounds it right back on again. It just kind of over the next year to two. Yeah, no, it's not. It's a pretty it's a pretty harsh thing to put your body through. So yeah, no, I think you're I think you got the right approach. Slow and steady wins the race as they say, you know,

**Lis Malone**

Ya know, the whole not eating not being able to eat dairy, it has just eliminated so much from my diet.

**Steve Barclay**

Oh, I'm out on this diet them. No cheese? It's just a deal breaker right there.

**Lis Malone**

Yeah. So Eating out is very challenging. Yeah, it's a little more challenging than I thought it was going to be. Because a lot of restaurants don't know if we can make this without butter. I'm like, you don't have any oil back there while we're really okay. Like so you're admitting to me you make this in bulk.

**Steve Barclay**

A lot of stuff is prepped in bulk, right? And then finished for the meal.

**Lis Malone**

Yes, you find out you know, how kitchens operate when you ask them for something? And usually like because I mean, when you say hey, I have a dairy allergy. You know that usually they're like, oh, shoot, they're like, Okay, well, you can they'll tell me right that like what? This is out? This is out. This is out that I'm like, wow, you can see how much crap is in everything. Yeah.

**Steve Barclay**

One of the guys I travel with regularly and he's been a guest on the show a couple of times is Adam Wilton for the provincial Resource Center for the Visually Impaired. He's he's full on vegan. And, you know, he finds something every place we go to, but his selections are just miserable. It's like, you know, he'll get one, maybe two things on the menu that he can eat if they modify it, perhaps. It's yeah, it's kind of bleak. You think that restaurants would have pivoted into this a little bit more than they have, you know, like, have more self assembly kind of kind of options?

**Ryan Fleury**

Well, we used to have these things called buffets and then COVID hits.

**Steve Barclay**

Yeah, that's true. True.

**Rob Mineault**

It's true. I miss I haven't been to a buffet in ages.

**Steve Barclay**

But if you're on a restricted diet, who's gonna pay for a buffet because you always have to pay a huge amount of money and then you know, if you're eating, you know, lettuce and cucumbers.

**Rob Mineault**

Not really getting your money's worth.

**Steve Barclay**

It'd be getting a lot.

**Rob Mineault**

Hey, Lis.

**Lis Malone**

Hey, Rob.

**Rob Mineault**

Where can people find us?

**Lis Malone**

They can find us on the web at [www.atbanter.com](http://www.atbanter.com)

**Rob Mineault**

You are correct. And they can also drop us an email if they so desire at [cowbell@atbanter.com](mailto:cowbell@atbanter.com). See he was away one week, but he still knows all his cues.

**Steve Barclay**

And let's incentivize this a little bit. You heard the cowbell? Write us write us and I'll send you a cowbell.

**Rob Mineault**

Oh, sweetening the pot. So anybody who writes in?

**Steve Barclay**

Well, I don't know, until I run out cowbells.

**Rob Mineault**

Oh, wow. Okay, well listen prepare the inbox to be flooded. Okay, well, this is great this you heard it right people. All you have to do you had a sweet free cowbell is is email us and say a kind word.

**Steve Barclay**

Oh, hang on. We should put we should put some sort of proviso on there they have to write a review. Oh of the podcast like a two line review. Yeah. So write your two line review about the podcast, email it to us. Give us the permission to post that someplace. And we will. And we'll send you a cowbell. Okay, so now it's bribery. Yeah, yeah. Which we're not above.

**Rob Mineault**

I mean, we could actually like do we want to make them write a haiku? Maybe a review that is also review haiku.

**Lis Malone**

You really want to lean towards a limerick.

**Ryan Fleury**

You really don't want to get rid of your cowbells.

**Steve Barclay**

Do you make the review in any poetic form? All right, exactly.

**Rob Mineault**

Okay, so poetic

**Steve Barclay**

Yeah, try and make it poetic.

**Rob Mineault**

Okay. Really just right. Just people just write in. We don't care. We wouldn't be able to tell anyways.

**Steve Barclay**

I'll be able to tell. I'm a poet at heart.

**Rob Mineault**

Okay, there you go. Steve. Steve will be the judge.

**Steve Barclay**

Oh, I have the heart of a poet. I keep it in a jar by the door.

**Rob Mineault**

Where the hell were we? Do we do all the socials? I don't even know. Did we do the socials?

**Steve Barclay**

We did you know? Yeah, Facebook, Instagram. And what's that other one? Twitter. Yeah, we're there. We're there. Get on it.

**Rob Mineault**

Yeah. All right. Well, anyways, that is going to about do it for us this week. Thanks, everybody for listening in. Big thanks to Alexa and Jake, for joining us. And we will see everybody next week.