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COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 6

Courage is
contagious
Live free
Run wild
Be FEARLESS

OLIVIA MUNN

HOLLYWOOD'S
MOST POPULAR NERD

'AHA' MOMENTS
NIKE, FLICKR + DROPBOX

THE REBEL'S
CURRICULUM
THE RISE OF KIDPRENEURS

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FASHION / DESIGN / FILM / FOOD / TECH / ART / SOCIAL CHANGE / TRAVEL



ABODE À LA MODE

FROM THE MUNDANE to the majestic, two AUDACIOUS BUSINESSWOMEN have made the who's-who list of PROPERTY stylists, almost overnight.

WORDS: JESSICA JANE SAMMUT
PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREW ASHTON

“If you are going to go out there into the wider world, you better be damn sure about who you are, why you exist and what you deliver,” says Amy Chamberlain, one half of the supersonic sister duo who make up The Real Estate Stylist, the Melbourne property-styling dynamo that has recently smashed onto the interior design scene with unexpected velocity.

“We started with a AU\$20,000 loan (which we quickly realised was peanuts), we didn’t have any business premises, we didn’t pay ourselves for six months, we worked 16-hour days, seven days a week — and still do — we sacrificed our hobbies, friends and partners. Everything was harder than we thought, but it has been worth it. There is no substitute for hard work and persistence,” she adds.

And while the journey has been rough and tough, it hasn’t been long. In fact, it wasn’t until recently that Amy and sister Sara decided to tap into their creative personas, unleashing a beast that quickly grew legs to bound through the property-styling industry with spectacular confidence and boldness.

Just one year, from a single couch, their lounge room for storage and no real estate contacts to their name, to a burgeoning business styling homes to the tune of AU\$2000 to AU\$15,000, their third job being a AU\$4 million mansion in Toorak, Victoria.

Amy, a self-confessed lover of eccentric and in-your-face style and a former primary-school teacher, had possessed an eye for interiors and design throughout her career in the schoolroom, but says she had never realised her potential as a stylist until she found herself in Italy studying design on a research project. It was at that time that she felt equipped with an understanding of how to evoke certain feelings and trigger particular outcomes in an environment. The experience left her wondering if there might be something more in it.

Sara, a freelance stylist and marketing guru with a business background in retail and corporate sales, believed the same, and also had an urge to reach higher, better and greater, and to channel her skills into something more meaningful.

“I wanted to start a business in interiors,” explains Sara. “It was as vague as that. I rented a room with friends on the cheap and set up a desk in my bedroom and went to ‘work’ every morning — often in my pjs with three jumpers on and the cat on my lap, as it was freezing and I didn’t want to use the heater to warm up the house!”

biggest bang for your buck

lamps: You don’t need to spend too much on them, but they’re mandatory.

cushions: The quickest way to change a room.

rugs: Create zones and can even be used on carpets (much to our clients’ shock-horror).

artwork: Use but don’t hang too high or too low. If you’re confident enough with your eye you can mix mediums, otherwise choose a style and stick with it, such as black-and-white framed photography.

take one away: The old Coco Chanel styling tip still rings true. Often taking away one item can change the entire look of a room and not cost a cent. Remove that daggy sculpture, dated throw or your grandmother’s old dresser (but don’t tell her).

“I investigated my options and met with anyone who would meet with me. Each person led to another pivotal person — as is always the way when you are on the right path — and one day when I was looking after a property-styling business in my freelance capacity, Amy came to assist, and we suddenly knew that this was what we both wanted to do!”

Spotting a niche in the market for property styling with a clean, fresh look, Sara and Amy set about taking their idea to market, a journey they walked blindly with what could be described as just a backpack of aplomb and an eski full of determination on board.

“We could see a huge shift in how properties were being presented and the images that consumers were being exposed to in magazines, blogs and television programs,” Amy says.

“We knew we could demand a better feel to what was being done out there already by property stylists. We wanted to go against the grain, even at the risk of us standing out.”

In August 2012, The Real Estate Stylist was launched as a property-styling company for residential homes on the market, and the sassy twosome knew that in order to make the venture a success they needed to retain full creative control of the end product, but also balance this commercially.

Carefully planning their brand, sourcing their products, attending trade fairs, wooing suppliers, building a network of relationships and blowing their clients away in the delivery of their first briefs, the venture began to take form. And it wasn’t long before Amy and Sara were styling million-dollar mansions and making a name for themselves as the best in their field.

“We sit in an interesting space — straddling new trends and delivering a look to a layman audience. We are constantly interpreting the styles in interiors and evaluating the readiness of

a market. It was tough at first,” smiles Sara.

“We were working out of our homes and had furniture being delivered there, but we had nowhere to put it! At one point, I couldn’t even get to the shower or open my closet! However, after four months of trading we had gained enough clients to expand to four Kennards storage units.”

After completing a styling install on a particular mansion, the photography was used in an advertising campaign for a major national retailer, marking a major turning point for the girls’ business.

“We had to run home to my parents to hide from our clients as the phone was ringing off the hook!” laughs Amy.

“A crazy week of forecasts and spreadsheets ensued, to get a handle on how much further stock we were going to need to meet the rise in demand, and in fact, we almost walked away when we realised how deep our pockets were going to need to be in order to move forward.”

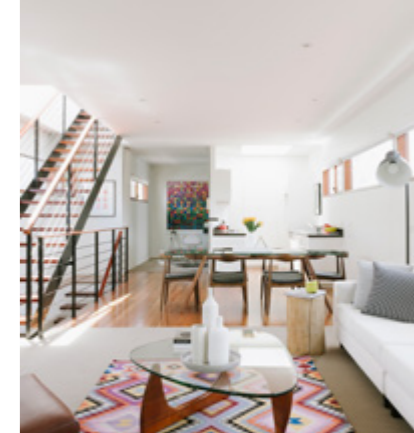
Returning to Melbourne however, the girls secured more investment, and between May and September of that year moved into new warehouse premises, purchased their own delivery vehicle, extended their stock and took on full-time staff.

Starting off with the goal of styling one house per week, they now do two a day, and have already installed more than 90 properties in nine months, including the home of AFL footballer Chris Judd and his TV personality wife, Bec.

“We are a great team,” explains Amy.

“Sara is ultimately the business guru — she’s got the money smarts and the commercial knowledge, while I do a lot of the relationship management. When we design, we do it together. In the real world, our houses look completely different and our tastes in food, men and lifestyle are basically opposite. But when it comes to designing spaces for our business, it is uncanny how much we are alike. You could put us in separate locked boxes with a picture of a room and we would draw the same design, aesthetic and style.”

Sought-after by the cool and the smart, Sara and Amy have managed to walk boldly where others have feared to tread, along the fine line of creativity and commercialism — a courageous exploration. ■



PHOTOGRAPHY:
ABOVE: CLARE MARTIN LAPWORTH
BELOW: DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY INHOUSE

