



Elegant entrepreneurs

Many enterprising women have graced the Frontispiece page of COUNTRY LIFE when launching their businesses. Flora Howard asks five of them how they did it

EVERY week for 117 years, a face has gazed out from the first editorial page of this magazine. The young woman on it may have been due to be presented at Court, part of the war effort or a young Society mother posing with her infants. Royal births, marriages and Coronations were marked—and still are. After the Second World War, the girls were, almost uniformly, engaged to be married and wearing pearls.

As society changed, so did the COUNTRY LIFE Frontispiece. It became fashionable for a young woman to start her own business and to celebrate and promote that achievement. Research conducted by RBS in 2013 (*Women in Enterprise: A Different Perspective*) shows that there are almost 1.5 million self-employed women in Britain, an increase of about 300,000 since before the economic downturn. Here, we talk to five enterprising Frontispieces about how they made it work.

Jenny Dawson, Rubies in the Rubble chutneys

(www.rubiesintherubble.com)

How did you start?

I was working for a hedge fund, but knew I wanted to build something I was really passionate about. I stumbled across the issue of food waste and began researching it.

My view was “I’m young—if I try for two years and it doesn’t work, I’ll have learned a lot and have a great story to tell”. The business (making chutney from discarded food) started in a church hall and charity kitchens—and quite a bit of the British Library. Now, we have a kitchen in New Spitalfields Market, Leyton, and offices in Stratford.

Inspiration?

I wanted to make a brand that raised awareness about and created a solution to food waste.

Biggest challenge?

Getting the product into stores and changing people’s habits. I naïvely thought that if you make



Rubies in the Rubble chutneys are made from food that would otherwise go to waste



a great product, it will sell.

Favourite element?

The diversity of my week and the team I work with.

Most proud of?

A letter of congratulation from The Queen.

What's your best advice to the aspiring?

Go for it! Start small, test the idea and, if it seems possible, you can always scale up. We started on a shoestring.

Amelia Bainbridge, Auree jewellery

(020-8947 6686; www.aureejewellery.com)

How did you start?

I saw a niche in the market for jewellery that would travel through life with you, but which was affordable and didn't need to be kept in a safe. I'd worked in the jewellery business for eight years and always wanted to start up on my own. Things moved very quickly, from creating a business plan to launching the site in three months, and, in that time, I learnt a lot, from getting the right team together to creating a brand, building a website and, most



Amelia designs showstopping jewellery that you don't have to keep in the safe



Foyle Fireworks matches music and fireworks for dramatic, inspiring displays

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Mrs Daniel Balfour

importantly, finding all the workshops. The office is currently at home, in south-west London. An easy commute, but a little cosy.

Inspiration?

My highly spirited grandmothers. They both took on life with an enthusiasm and energy that influenced me from an early age.

Biggest challenge?

Deciding 'this is it' and starting.

Favourite element?

Watching something grow that you've built up yourself.

Most proud of?

Our first order, and then each one we got after that. It confirms that we're getting it right.

What has been your experience?

Hard work, pretty scary, hugely rewarding and incredibly good fun.

Advice to the aspiring?

If you have an idea, do the research and get on with it. Don't underestimate how much your friends can help you.

Serena Balfour (née Foyle), fireworks soundtracks

(020-7235 3766; www.foylefireworks.com)

How did you start?

During the planning of my 21st birthday party, I spent a day with the fireworks designer editing the soundtrack to create the feeling and experience I had in mind.

I then began by organising my own fireworks event in Scotland in aid of Marie Curie Cancer Care to showcase my ideas. I now work between Edinburgh and London.

Inspiration?

I realised that music and its power to move us was not being thought of in this way within the production of firework displays and was inspired to change this.



Biggest challenge?

Trying to explain my service to events companies.

Favourite element?

Working alone and having the space and freedom of mind to create each soundtrack.

Most proud of?

Working with Jubilee Fireworks to win the 4th annual Philippine International Pyromusical Competition of 2013.

What's your best advice to the aspiring?

Never give up. People don't tend to like change and they usually stick to what they know and understand, but you only need a few doors to be opened in order to succeed. I knew I'd found a niche in the market, so I focused on developing this idea and all the possibilities.



Anna Wright, illustrations

(0131-557 1572; www.annawright.co.uk)

How did you start?

I studied illustration at Edinburgh College of Art and have just done my best to make a living from it. I began with exhibitions, prints and cards. It got to the point two years ago that I couldn't keep

up with the orders, so I took someone on to help and it's grown from there. I've moved from my bedroom via a friend's barn to my current studios in London and Edinburgh.

Inspiration?

I heard Anya Hindmarch on *Woman's Hour* and found her inspiring. I wrote to her and she was very encouraging.



Anna Wright's animal illustrations are often humorously titled, such as *Friday Night* (above left)

Biggest challenge?

Juggling the business side while trying to be creative.

Favourite element?

Being creative for a living.

Most proud of?

My team—they keep me going. If I had to pick a design, it would be *Friday Night*.

What has been your experience?

It's been interesting, exciting and overwhelming.

Advice to the aspiring?

Have confidence and don't rush into big decisions without taking time to think everything through and doing research. Most importantly, enjoy it.

‘I'm a great believer that success is born of hard graft—and a little bit of luck,’

Claire Howeson, Penmayne of London hats

(020-3397 9772;
www.penmayne.com)

How did you start?

I'd always wanted to run my own business and was just waiting for the right concept. I took up millinery as a hobby five years ago. I wanted to build a British luxury brand synonymous with great-quality hats that are beautiful and wearable. I spent months researching the idea and developing a business plan, left my job as a solicitor and spent six months working for milliners Edwina Ibbotson and Noel Stewart. I started on a tiny budget; I did a photo shoot in my sitting room, set up a basic website, made a collection and then started selling at Christmas fairs. The business has grown organically from there and I now work in a shared studio.

Inspiration?

My father and grandfather. They both ran their own businesses and the more I learn, the more I admire what they achieved.

**Biggest challenge?**

It's been a very steep learning curve. That and endlessly carrying huge boxes of hats up and down the stairs to my top-floor flat!

Favourite element?

Doing everything from designing and making, to finances and selling, to marketing and PR. One day, I can be sampling materials for the new collection and the next, I can be drafting our sales and marketing strategy.

Most proud of?

Penmayne of London will be stocked

in Harrods from early August.

I can't believe I can say that.

What has been your experience?

You have to learn very quickly to focus on the successes, trust your instincts and keep an open mind.

Advice to the aspiring?

The best advice I was given was to be brave, work hard and remember to enjoy the ride. I'm a great believer that success is born from hard graft—and a little bit of luck along the way. 🐾

Penmayne of London hats will be stocked in Harrods from early August



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