



Women in Business: Bianca Lorenne Fine Linens

## Description

It is of value to any crafter to come across a company embracing true artisan techniques. It is a place of inspiration and admiration. Time and again it is a great privilege to learn the inner workings of a company, the idea behind its origins and what mechanisms makes it turn year after year into a success and a desired career. Today we talk to Alison Nottingham, the founder of Bianca Lorenne Fine Linens about business, values and motherhood.



**Masha:** 'Â Please introduce yourself and your company.

**Alison:** 'Â My name is Alison Nottingham and I am the founder and operator of Bianca Lorenne Fine Linens, based in a small town in New Zealand.'Â Named after our daughters Bianca and Lauren, my husband and I started the business in 2005 through following a passion for textiles and all things beautiful.'Â We design, import and wholesale and retail our home textiles throughout boutique stores in New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom.

**M:** How did you start out? What prompted you to go into business with linen?

**A:** When I was home with my young daughters, I was fixated on quilting and embroidery in every spare moment I had. I can remember getting in quite a panic about how many projects I wanted to do in my life and thinking if I was to conquer them all I'd probably need to live until I was 150!! I was searching around for some lovely unique, hand crafted bedding and couldn't find what I was looking for. So hence the chance to start something up.

**M:** Your embroidery and decorating techniques are varied in styles and approaches, beautiful, thought provoking- where do you find inspiration?

**A:** We get inspiration from many places – fashion, travel, nature, hand crafted techniques, fabric manipulations and antique embroideries to name a few. Countless hours are spent trialling, stitching and agonising over the finer details of each piece until we have it just right to go to market.



**M:** How important are traditional techniques and natural materials to you? What are the reasons?

**A:** You just cannot compare sleeping under natural fibres to anything else. They breathe, have a beautiful handle and a raw look about them that speaks nature. We celebrate the fact that there are extremely talented artisans out there in the world that continue to practice their skills to produce some outstanding work. In the fast paced, modern mass produced world we see less and less of this. There is something comforting and homely about being able to design and produce these stunning items that make our houses homes.

**M:** How big is your team and what do they do in order for your company to function properly?

**A:** We have grown to a team of 10 staff now, each and every one having a very important role to play in the business. Our design team includes myself, a textile designer and a graphic designer/marketing coordinator. The inspiration and collections start here where we spend hours working on colourways, themes, prints, techniques and marketing strategies. Production offshore is managed by myself and our designer. My husband is our photographer, prop maker and anything else he can do to help out. Once the product has arrived our wonderful sales, administration and warehouse staff ensure that everything runs to plan and our clients are happy. Without the amazing team I have had with me on our journey, we could not be where we are today and I am very grateful that they are passionate and enthusiastic. It's so exciting when new samples are arriving and a full collection comes together to present to our clients.



**M:** How did you build your production structure? Did you have any advisors or formal education?

**A:** I am an accountant by trade but about 20 years ago, I was studying extramurally for a business degree whilst working full time for an accountant. One night I came home, threw all the papers up in the air and said – “That’s it – I’ve had enough of this number crunching – its time to be creative” And I haven’t looked back since. In saying that my business and accountancy experience have been a great help in starting and running a business. I have no qualifications in design, textiles, importing, wholesaling and retailing – just a passion and willpower to make it happen. I have taught myself and learnt along the way about production sampling and timing all of which are crucial matters. There have been highs and lows like any business but I embrace the challenge of learning

new things every day.

**M:** What advice would you give to someone starting out in the industry?

**A:** Make sure you love what you are going to do and it will never seem like a job. You need endless amounts of energy, perseverance, time and support to see you through. Never assume anything and be the best you can be at all times. Good enough is not perfect - perfect is good enough.



**M:** How do you balance family and business?

**A:** I have to admit that this is something I could be better at. Because I love my job so much it does not feel like work to me. I get up early and get to work as soon as I can so that come 5pm I can lock up, go home and be with my family. However as this is a family business I am very lucky that

we working together so spend a lot of time with each other.'Â The support of my husband has been an amazing help, and my youngest daughter is now working for us full time and learning the ropes.'Â Lauren also works in the holidays when she is home from university.

**M: 'Â** What are your three tips to mothers who 'Â desire to have their own business but who care to have a happy family?

- A: 'Â**
1. Try to shut off from work when you are at home and enjoy the family.
  2. You can do both – it is just about managing your time effectively and efficiently – I live by 'Â lists!!
  3. If work gets too much employ people to help at work so you can still have your precious family time.





**M:** 'Â Would you say you are where you aspired to be? Is there more to your dream?

**A:** 'Â I never would have imagined we would be where we are today'Â so I am extremely delighted and encouraged by this.'Â Yes there is more to my dream – an endless supply of ideas that are constantly being evaluated.'Â It is just about making sure that the next dream fits with the brand and where we want to go in life.

**M:** 'Â What does success mean to you?

**A:** 'Â Success means being happy in what I do and having fun on the journey. 'Â In order to be successful, I think I'll always need an outlet for creativity and a little place in the world where I feel like I'm doing the best I

can do.'Â Success is also making sure my family is well provided for, happy and all loving what they do too.



## CATEGORY

1. SUCCESS HACKS

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## Date Created

February 10, 2014

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