

Creative Business Mothers: Sharmadean Reid

Description

Our next inspirational business mother is Sharmadean Reid, founder of WAH Nails, who is pretty much entirely responsible for the boom of the brightly colored nail art trend weâ??ve seen over the last few years. Sheâ??s got two salons, two books, countless pop-up stores across the world, beauty products and an MBE under her belt as well as a four year old son. We love her for her attitude, her sense of style and her desire to help other women, especially mothers and of course the wonderful nail art she creates at WAH.

Sharmadean Reid at WAH Nails Topshop. Photo: The Standard

WAH started out as a fanzine and blog and byâ?? 2009 Sharmadean opened her first nail salon in Dalston (East London). Sharmadean puts her confidence in starting the business down to her youth and a bit of naivety, but from her work as a trend reporter she knew it was a fail-safe plan. Her aim was to have a space where â??Å?it felt like going round a friendâ??s house for a cup of teaâ?•Â•.

WAH was born because she was frustrated by the lack of fashion-forward nail salons as well as spaces for girls to hang out. She says theyâ??d stay up to 11pm in the early days, playing music they wanted, painting nails and drinking cider, but the salon and WAH was more than just painting brightly colored nails. The salon was used for social and community good too â?? they had mothers meetings, fundraisers and female empowerment lunches and Sharmadean wanted to use it â??Å?as a vehicle to get girls together together to share ideasâ?•Â•. It worked and she says so many girls tell her they made friends at WAH and went on to start businesses together.

Sharmadean Reid. Photo: The Cocoa Diaries

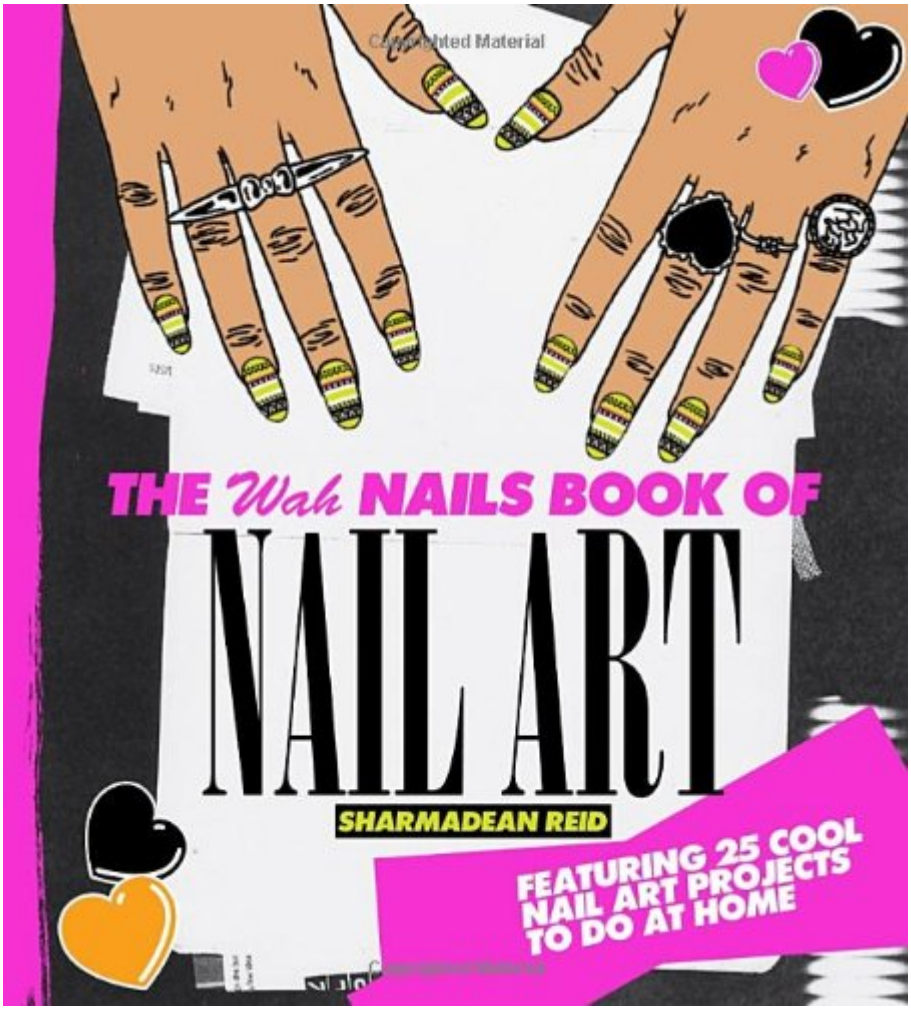
To Sharmadean, the WAH girl â??Å?has the self-respect to do whatever she wantsâ?•Â• â?? there is no walk of shame home and she can be experimental with fashion and makeup without the fear of ridicule. Through mentoring and hosting power lunches, she aims to support these women, saying, â??Å?Iâ??m from a single parent family. I want to show girls that are in my situation or worse that you can do whatever you want if you believe you are capable.â?•Â•

Sharmadean now spends a lot of time talking at other peopleâ??s events â?? she spoke on â??Ë?Why People Failâ?? for Women of the World Festival â?? but in terms of her own inspiration, Sharmadean is inspired by lots of independently powerful women who are changing culture. She says she judges success â??Å?not by the money made but by the reach of what you are doing and how much you change peopleâ??s perceptions of somethingâ?•Â•. She cites Martha Stewart as one of her heroes because she changed peopleâ??s view of domesticity, something that is a female domain, and made it cool. When asked if she worried about competition her answer was: â??I really donâ??t care about competition. The people who run those other business havenâ??t got my brain, my history, my references. I live and breathe what my customers do. Iâ??m very visually-led and have got decades of visual fashion references in my brain that I can pull out and turn into an amazing product. The nails Iâ??m wearing now are blown up Chinese anime characters from a karaoke bar. Other businesses just donâ??t do stuff like that. I donâ??t worry competition because we could all see the same art exhibition or go to the same conference or read the same trend report but weâ??ll each take something different away from that experience.â?•

The nail bar menu at WAH. Photo: Universal Doll

So many people believed in her vision that after the WAH salon in Dalston came their home in Topshop Oxford Circus, one of the biggest fashion stores in the world. Publishers believed in her and Sharmadean has now written two books â?? one on nail art and one on â??Ë?Downtown Girlsâ?? which is more of a life and style guide. For her itâ??s easy â?? â??Å?when it doesnâ??t feel right, it usually isnâ??tâ?•Â• and she also uses a roster of long time friends as a sounding board to tell her if something is â??Ë?WAHâ?? or not. Expansion came intuitively, driven by her own expanding ambitions: â??â?¦when I had the shop, there were loads of other people that then did nail art afterwards, so I was like â??Å?Well Iâ??m gonna write a book.â?•Â• So I did the book, and then I was like â??Å?No one else has a got a book, now Iâ??ve got a book.â?•Â• And then other people have now got books, so Iâ??m like â??Å?Well no one else has got their own product rangeâ?•Â•â?¦so now Iâ??ve got my product range. And then as that grows, someone else

could probably do their own product range, but it might not be in America, and itâ??ll just keep me moving forward. I definitely thrive off that. I donâ??t get jealous, really. I see something and Iâ??m like â??Å?I want that.â?•Â• But I donâ??t let the envy consume me, I let it propel me forward.â?•



The WAH Nails Book of Nail Art by Sharmadean Reid

After a 5 year wait for the right opportunity in 2014 Sharmadean launched her product range, nail polishes, tools and brilliant fun free tutorials inâ?? Boots (the biggest cosmetics store in the UK).â?? She says she has a sense of duty to her customers, proud that her products are vegan and chemical free. â??Å?Persuading women to part with their hard earned money is a privilege. We have to earn it.â?•Â• Sharmadean enjoys working on these projects as they are something she can do alone, in her own timeâ?? â?? salons are mostly managing people, something she freely admits she doesnâ??t enjoy

doing.â?? She also admits she thought she would have more salons at this point in time, but enjoys spending time with her son too much to make this happen faster.

Some of the amazing nails painted by WAH girls.

Sharmadean had her son Roman in 2011, when the business was in a full upward trajectory. She split with Romanâ??s father when he was just 8 months old and the two have shared childcare ever since, something which is a work in progress. When asked how she balances being a mom and being a boss, Sharmadean says â??Å?not very wellâ?•Â• because â??Å?you never, ever, ever have it allâ?•Â•. Her solution is to try and involve her son in her life as much as possible and finds the things they do together inspiring. Sheâ??s brutally honest as well and believes her business would be â??Å?a lot further on had I not had a babyâ?•Â• but wouldnâ??t trade it for the world: â??Å?If i didnâ??t have a baby Iâ??d definitely be a millionaire right now, but as my son is priceless Iâ??m already winningâ?•Â•.

Sharmadean and son Roman. Photo: The Fader

Reid grew up in Wolverhampton with a big Jamaican family and would choose it over busy London any day. She said the city made her who she is and this is why she chose to move back and raise her son there â??Å?around his family, in the open air, at a slower pace of lifeâ?•Â•. Sharmadean knows she wouldnâ??t be the same person if she hadnâ??t moved to London to study fashion communication, but itâ??s clear her hometown and family are much more important to her than Hackney.

Sharmadean believes that lots of girls donâ??t start businesses because they think having kids stops them â?? you weigh up the pros and cons of the time spent away from your child and at the end of the day â??Å?being a woman is hardâ?•Â•. For this reason, she mainly employs single mothers and women receiving benefits, trains them and helps them fill out benefits forms. â??Å?I know how frustrating it is to wait for someone to give you money.â?•Â•

Sharmadean Reid. Photo: Nail Splash

Sharmadean believes thereâ??s no such thing as hitting a brick wall â?? she sees any problems not as failures but â??Å?just obstacles that might take a little longerâ?•Â•. Her best advice for someone looking to start up her own business is: â??Å?just get on with it and stop talking about it. Thereâ??s enough money out there for everyoneâ?¦ If you have an idea, just go for â?? start doing it. If you talk about it more than threeâ?? times you should be getting on with it already.â?•

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