

From Fashion Buyer to Boutique Sustainable Lamp Business Owner: The Story of Light Clinic

Description



Photo by Kate Kuzminova

Karlijn, the founder of The Light Clinic, stood out right from the start. Always dressed on point with an impeccable yet understated style, an open face and a great smile that made it easy for you to approach her and say hello, and that is exactly how we met over a decade ago whilst picking up our eldest kids from the same primary school in North London. A great listener, an avid fellow reader with whom I greatly enjoyed exchanging inspiring book titles over the years, yet what drew me to Karlijn in an instance is her transparency and directness. She says exactly what she means and this is definitely refreshing in an age of curated context and upkeeping of appearances. Her products are equally simple yet stately.
One day, during one of our playground chats over carrot sticks and hummus, Karlijn told me of The Light Clinic, her sustainable lamp business idea sheâ??s been working on. Combining her life long love of thrifting and her natural gift of styling she came up with an idea of making lamps out of recycled jars and contrasting them with vibrant contemporary lampshades. Of course, as you would expect Karlijn doesnâ??t pick any old jars- her one off collections comprise of hand picked jars from antique markets around Europe and rare ebay finds, you can spot an antique Dutch Delft jar, next to a Mexican pot or an old Chinese vase all adorned with colourful tastefully paired lampshades. She works from home around the schedule of her sons and sells primarily on Instagram. The simplicity and accessibility of the operation is one I find intriguing and inspiring and hoping it might inspire a creative reader to take the leap of faith and make their hobby into a hustle.



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How did you come up with the idea of making lamps, esp you had no prior electrical experience? (On a scale of 1-10, how scared were you in the first few months?)

I worked in fashion for almost my whole adult life but was being furloughed during Covidâ?¦..I found it quite hard to sit still so was trying to make my home look a bit nicer â?? I bought an old lamp and a brightly coloured shade which worked quite well together. I showed it to a few people and they all suggested me making one for them as well. I couldnâ??t really find the right lamps though so I decided to make them myself by drilling into vases and jars Iâ??d find online (shops were still shut at this point) and I did a little course where I learnt how to do the electric side of it all. I wasnâ??t too scared to be honest as it was just a bit of a hobby in the beginning and I made them for my friends so not too much pressure â?? I guess it would be a 2?

Iâ??m a huge fan, of both your courage and the understated yet stylish lamps you make but to top it: you have come up with an idea for an original product that taps into sustainability and recycling. How important is it for you to upcycle, reimagine, breathe life into a previously owned objects?

Thank you! For me recycling as much as possible at this day and age is key, for obvious reasons. Especially after working in the clothing industry for such a long time where there is so much waste I had to find something to do which would have much less impact on the planet. I was brought up in a house full of vintage and second hand items, my mother loves antiques and when I was little she was always on the hunt, my older sister used to own a well known antique store in The Netherlands so it kind of made sense to me to use old objects and turn them into something new.

The Light Clinic has a distinctive visual language, an important tool in communicating as a company- how do you approach branding?

Thatâ??s very kind of you â?? I didnâ??t really have a specific idea about this when I started. I mainly operate on Instagram and the archive of images on that platform is so huge as you know â?? I like scrolling through it and use pictures that relate to lighting/colour/interior. I donâ??t really post anything about myself, I want to focus on the product.



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What is the hardest thing about being your own boss?

To make sure I earn enough money every month to pay the bills!

What are the benefits?

The freedom. I love being able to plan my days myself and not having to report to anyone. Itâ??s the best thing and I donâ??t know if I can ever go back to working for someone again.

How has your experience in fashion sales benefited you as an entrepreneur?

I guess I kind of know a bit about how to sell stuff. Whether itâ??s a coat or lamp, itâ??s the same process. I think I am quite good at customer service also, I always reply to people, keep them posted about their order, hand deliver as much as I can and accommodate any requests and make sure they are happy with their purchase. Iâ??ve noticed customers really appreciate this â?? I have a lot of returning customers, get good reviews and hardly any lamps have been returned to me.

How do you combine motherhood and a startup?

That is quite tricky. On one hand itâ??s great, I can be there for my children as I decide when to work and when to be present for them but on the other hand work never stops, I work a lot in the evenings and on weekends which is not ideal. Especially during covid when I started and things went very well pretty quickly, I had to work non stop while the kids were not at school and that was extremely stressful. But I guess everyone struggled with this back then.

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Instagram is your primary point of contact with your customers, what had been your experience of selling through IG so far?

Instagram is a great tool for me. Itâ??s where I get all my customers. I have a very basic website and have not invested in setting up all these SEO tricks, I donâ??t do any PR so I really rely on Instagram. I was reluctant to use it in the beginning but it really helped me and I have met some very nice people on it! I do notice though that lately it seems much more difficult to get new followers without paying for a post so thatâ??s a real shame.

You often sell out your batches in minutes â?? talk us through the process of the sale strategy.

I usually announce the next drop on Instagram and remind people every day about this in my stories. Then on the day itself I show a preview of what to expect and thatâ??s itâ?¦

What is most important to you for your business to succeed?

Having time to make things and to come up with new ideas.

How big is your team? (accountants, assistants, web developers, photographers, couriers)

I do everything on my own but I do have an accountant who helps me about one day a month, I have 2 girls who help me when it gets very busy with shipping and wiring â?? thatâ??s about it.



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How do you plan on growing your business? Adding products? Wholesale?

Yes â?? both, definitely. I already made some new product and have loads of ideas, itâ??s just about finding the time to launch it! Wholesale is also on the agenda but again I need some more time to focus on this. I would also like to do more collaborations with other people. And trying to become even more sustainable. Looking into the export market is another thing Iâ??d like to do to grow the business.

What does success mean to you?

Hmmm. For me it means being happy with your job, doing something you love. Itâ??s the first time in my life I am really enjoying my work which is the best feeling. And noticing people want to buy my stuff and are happy with it â?? itâ??s very rewarding.

CATEGORY

1. COMMUNITY
2. INTERVIEWS

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