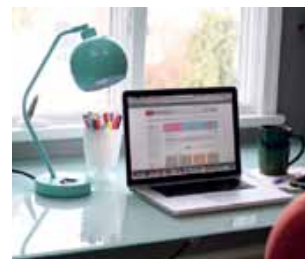


# MATERIAL WORLD

Despite working from home, Chelsea manages to keep her office space spick and span (which is more than we can say!). Lots of light and plenty of beautiful crafty things help to her to stay focused.



Etsy shop owner and fabric aficionado Chelsea Graham invites us to take a peek behind the scenes at her growing online business, **Bobbie Lou's Fabric Factory**. She says she stocks only fabrics she would sew with herself, and we say, prepare to drool!

**A** personal love of fabrics led to Chelsea Graham to establish her own online fabric store. We chat to Chelsea about her passion for patterned fabrics, social media, and how she manages her times as a 'work from home' mum.

## Q How did Bobbie Lou's Fabric Factory get started?

When my husband and I moved across the country from Santa Barbara, California to Baltimore, Maryland in 2006 for his job, I took some time off. A lot of friends from college start to have babies around the same time, and I started sewing them gift bundles that included a baby blanket, burp cloth and onesie. I soon had requests to make them for their friends and so on and so on. This evolved into me opening my Etsy shop, Lola Miren, selling handmade baby items. I

opened wholesale accounts with several fabric suppliers and started accumulating bolts of fabric in my small studio. A year or so later I had the idea to start a fabric shop on the side. Between the two Etsy shops I had basically created a full time job for myself. After our son was born in 2011, I continued with both of my shops and in the end made the hard decision to close Lola Miren because I just didn't have the time to fill all of the orders and take care of our new baby. I focused on being a mum and on Bobbie Lou's Fabric Factory and am so happy with where this decision has taken me.

## Q Where does the shop's name come from?

The name of my shop is inspired by my grandmother, Bobbie Lou, who was an amazing seamstress. She spent most of her free time sewing clothes, dolls, blankets and other

beautiful items for her three daughters and eight grandchildren. She handmade all of my party dresses growing up as well as countless other treasured items that I still have today. She was a huge creative inspiration to me and she would be so amazed and excited with the beautiful selection of fabric available today. She would especially be in awe of the fact that it can be delivered to your door with the click of a button!

## Q Describe your personal style

I love bright colors and our home is filled with a mix of new and vintage items as well as collected treasures from my travels. I grew up moving every couple of years and have lived in Africa, South America, Australia, Europe, the Middle East as well as various places in the US (I went to 13 schools!). I've collected lots of things from around the world over the years. I tend to



I FIRST FELL IN LOVE WITH  
ALEXANDER HENRY  
FABRICS. ART GALLERY  
AND CLOUD9 FABRICS ARE  
AMONG MY OTHER  
PERSONAL FAVORITES.

## "I HAVE SO MUCH FUN SHOPPING FOR FABRIC – IT'S MY FAVOURITE JOB"

favour anything in the colour turquoise so we have a lot of it scattered around our home. I'm sure how I grew up has influenced my personal style and this has carried over into my fabric shop. I first fell in love with Alexander Henry fabrics (they were my first wholesale account). Art Gallery and Cloud9 fabrics are among my other personal favorites. This year I'm focusing on sourcing some new, small, up and coming fabric lines to add to the shop in 2014.

### **Q How do you select stock?**


I understand the need to focus on market trends and customer preferences, but I also purchase fabric for my shop that I love! I

have so much fun shopping for fabric – it's definitely my favourite part of owning a fabric shop. I think what sets my shop apart from others is that I don't offer everything under the sun. I like to select the fabrics I truly love and would personally enjoy sewing with. I'd say I follow fabric trends a bit but I don't stock my shop based only on what is trendy. The one exception to this is chevron fabric – chevrons are a trend that will not die! I also sell a lot of the Alexander Henry Folklorico line (which is a personal favourite of mine). Fabric with teepees, feathers, arrows, triangles and foxes are all very popular right now.

### **Q What happens behind the scenes at your Etsy store?**

I'm a work-from-home mum to our three-year-old boy, Duke, so for me balance is a daily challenge (like all moms!). We live thousands of miles

away from our families and my husband travels for work a LOT so finding the time to be a good mum and a good business owner is tricky. Our basement has evolved into my fabric studio so I'm lucky to be able to work from home. A year ago I hired a college student, Caitlin, to help me out a few days a week either playing with my son or packing fabric orders, whichever I need help with most on the days she's here. Hiring her has been one of the best decisions I've made for my business so far. My mum also helps me from out of state with my accounting and some behind the scenes website stuff. Our days tend to have a bit of routine, but I also love the flexibility of being able to take Duke to the park or soccer or story time (or whatever!) and work during naptime or when he's busy with his trucks or at night after he goes to bed – usually it's a combination of all three.



GEOMETRICS, TRIBAL PRINTS  
AND SUGAR SKULLS ARE STILL  
POPULAR AND I THINK THEY  
WILL CONTINUE TO BE  
THROUGHOUT THIS YEAR.

## I LOVE THE FLEXIBILITY OF RUNNING MY OWN ONLINE FABRIC SHOP.

### **Q How have you gone about marketing the store?**

For the first couple of years after starting Bobbie Lou's I did minimal marketing or promotion. I think having a shop on Etsy has definitely helped because people can search for specific fabrics within Etsy and find them in my shop. Repeat customers as well as international customers are a large percentage of my business. In the last six months or so I have dedicated some time and money to advertising and shop promotion and teamed up with some very talented bloggers. I am so amazed at the power of blogs and social media. I think in order to thrive as a

small business it's essential to have an online presence. I enjoy doing fabric giveaways and reading through the contest entries – it's a great way to get a feel for the fabrics people like upon first glance in my shop. Some of the blogs I've teamed up with (which are all written by amazingly talented and kind ladies) are Maureen Cracknell Handmade, Diary of a Quilter by Amy Smart, Monkey Do, Red Pepper Quilts, Owens Olivia, Bijou Lovely and Freshly Pieced. I also have an Instagram account, [bobbieloufabric](#), where I post new fabrics, sales, and, of course, photos of my cute little boy.

### **Q What have you learnt since starting Bobbie Lou's?**

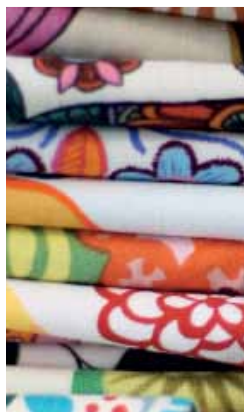
I have to say I have learned so much about both myself and about running a small business. Being a new mum and a new business





Chelsea keeps one eye on what's on-trend, but can't resist buying the fabrics that she likes personally. If we owned a fabric shop, we think we'd be just the same – after all, why not?

## MATERIAL WORLD



owner simultaneously has tested me in ways I never imagined. I've had a lot of late nights up working that have turned into sleepless nights with a baby and some days I think there is no way I can do it all. And then the fog clears and I decide there is no way I can give it up! Hiring Caitlin has helped me learn that it's OK to give up some control and let somebody help me. About business, I've pretty much learned by 'doing' and have learned everything from how to register my business name to managing my inventory to filing small business taxes (and about a million things in-between!). I imagine I will continue to learn about myself and running a business a little bit every day.

### Q What's big in the world of fabric right now?

Chevron is still a strong seller in all colours. I've also been noticing a

lot of nautical prints with anchors, sailboats, whales, waves, and so on. Foxes really had a moment recently as well! There is definitely a metallic theme happening. I'm carrying some new metallic geometrics from Michael Miller and Camelot including zigzags, stripes, triangles, polka dots and so on. I just started carrying Cloud9 fabric, which is a 100% certified organic cotton fabric line printed with low impact dyes. I'm pleased to offer an organic line in my shop! Also, geometrics, tribal prints and sugar skulls are still popular and I think they will continue to be throughout this year. Florals have timeless appeal and I have some beautiful ones on the way for spring.

### Q Can you sum up Bobbie Lou's in three words?

Homegrown: We are truly a family owned homegrown business. Eclectic: I choose unique beautiful

fabrics that I love for my shop! Friendly: I think the only way to do business well is to be a truly nice person while you're doing it.

### Q What comes next for Bobbie Lou's Fabric Factory?

I have some major goals for Bobbie Lou's in 2014. I recently signed on with Aeolida to create my very own e-commerce site, which should be up and running this spring. My second goal is to attend my very first quilt market! I'm planning to attend the Pittsburgh market in May and am beyond thrilled.

### Q What are you most excited about right now?

I'm about to start work on my own fabric line, beginning with a line of basics. My mind is always spinning with new ideas and I have big plans for my little fabric shop!

To see all of the fabrics, visit [www.BobbieLouFabric.etsy.com](http://www.BobbieLouFabric.etsy.com)

We love the homegrown ethos and strong ethics that root Bobbie Lou's Fabric Factory.