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GIFTGUIDE

FOR HOME & LIFESTYLE RETAILERS. EST.1975



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inside retail

We chat to Jo Hutchens about the launch of her store Well Versed Homes and why she loves being a retailer.



OPEN 24/7 ONLINE



Well Versed Homes opened a physical store late last year.



For most retailers, launching a bricks and mortar store is the first step in their journey before they create an online presence to complement their store. However, there are those who decide to do it the other way around like Jo Hutchens, owner and founder of Well Versed Homes.

Well Versed Homes opened as an online store in July 2018 and then as a bricks and mortar store on 27 September 2022.

“In 2018 I took a six month ‘creative sabbatical’ from my corporate career in education marketing and events management to gain an interior design qualification and begin my journey to transition my career and fulfil a life-long dream to open a gift store,” she explains.

“A bricks and mortar store was always part of the plan so that I could meet my customers face to face and offer a level of care and service that is not always possible with online consumers. I also wanted my store to inspire my customers





Jo Hutchens' customers are what she loves most about being a retailer.

and show them how to create a beautiful home environment when selecting products from our store.

“Our mission is to offer a range of beautifully designed and carefully curated homewares and gifts, which

allow our customers to express themselves, their values and their generosity.”

Her connection to the gift and homewares industry goes way back and started when Hutchens was in her 20s and she was the group event

manager for a company called World Trade Promotions.

“Some wholesalers may recall that this was the company who brought the concept of gift trade fairs to Australia and eventually went on to sell their business to Reed Publishing.

“I started my working career as a receptionist for this organisation and learnt sales and marketing skills on the job. It was an amazing first job for a young woman. I was responsible for selling the exhibition space, the trade fair catalogues and promotion to visiting retailers.

“The portfolio of events I managed included giftware, china, glass and tableware as well as jewellery trade fairs. I learnt so much, but it was a little shop in Sydney’s Stand Arcade that was my greatest inspiration.

Does anyone remember Martinvale, who were both wholesalers and retailers?”

Many retailers are doing it tough at the moment with the





Well Versed Homes interior

current rising cost of living and interest rates as well as an uncertain economic climate and would only add more pressure to a new store such as Well Versed Homes. However, Hutchens has embraced every opportunity and challenge with open arms.

“I actually loved every minute of opening our store,” she enthuses.

“We literally started with a shell and an unlevel concrete floor. My interior design training kicked in and with the help of a great builder, graphic designer, painter and so many suppliers, we created a beautiful space that our customers often say is calming and inspirational.

“I was a bit nervous about the whole POS thing but what would we do without Shopify? It was so much easier than my sleepless nights imagined. I guess the biggest challenge was how much stock I needed to fill a shop, but we figured that out too.

“We’ve noticed though that those who are unaffected by inflation and interest rates are travelling and others are buying gifts but perhaps reducing personal spending,” she adds.

“We just all need to stay focused, keep costs under control and ride out this tricky time. Show up every day, work hard, be kind, be creative and share hope. It will turn around,” she says.

Well Versed Homes has a very strong brand aesthetic and values, which drive all its selections and own designs instead of following the latest trends.

“Not chasing trends can be a challenge because we can fear losing customers if we don’t have the latest, greatest new look, but if this means we are moving off-brand, it is a big no for me.

“I create a mood board each season or campaign e.g. Father’s Day or spring and curate from our existing loyal suppliers or new trends that I

have spotted. If it is aligned it’s in, if it’s not, it’s not.

“I believe that’s what keeps our store unique and maintains our vision and mission. It’s also what differentiates our store from others and what brings our customers back over and over again.

“However, I do love the warmth and authenticity that is coming through with the natural biophilic design movement and as this is consistent with our brand look and feel, it is a positive development for us and one that we are embracing because it is who we are, not because it is a trend,” she explains.

While Hutchens is looking forward to opening more stores in the (near) future, for now she will be focusing on just the one.

“Life is busier than I imagined so having the right people to help you is crucial. Whether that is your staff, suppliers,



Jo Hutchens at her happy place, inside the store.

accountant, contractors or friends and family who will show up to clean the windows and serve the bubbles on opening night. Find your people, create a fit out and stock budget and then stick to it.

“This dream has been in my heart for a long time and it can be hard to take that great big leap, but I can assure you it is worth it.” **G**

