

By Diane Sulg, Photo Credit: Baabaazuzu

Sew Perfect!



Sue and Kevin Burns

What would you do if you discovered your husband had put your best wool sweaters into the dryer and they shrank so badly you could not wear them? If you are named Sue Burns, this “happy” accident would become the foundation of your new handmade business!

Sue lives in Lake Leelanau, Michigan, where she had been a graphic designer with a great eye for color and pattern. Since she knew how to sew, she cut up those sweaters and created jackets and

hats for her young daughters. And then her phone began to ring! Friends wanted to know where she got those wonderful clothes, and when she said she made them, they asked her to make more.

Sue's nickname is “Zuzu,” so she paid tribute to the sheep who grew the wool and called her business Baabaazuzu. She rounded up wool clothing, purposely washed, shrunk and felted it, and then created a lovely line of girls' clothing. Of course, almost immediately requests for adult fashions poured in and Sue expanded her line. She even taught her husband Kevin to sew because they had so many orders!

Today the Baabaazuzu line includes mittens, gloves, scarves, hats, headbands, bags, jackets, and vests. There are even accessories for men. Everything is meticulously fashioned. Sue is captivated by combining colors, patterns, and textures, so every garment she designs is a piece of art. Her fabrics are felted so they are dense, warm, and durable. Her finished garments are always tailored, refined, and polished to be both fun and fashionable. Enjoy a peek at Sue's current work at baabaazuzu.com.

Her business is also a great example of omni-channel marketing. Early on a local shop owner encouraged Sue to attend the wholesale Buyer's Market of American Craft, and she says those early years were “simply magical.” Hers was a unique business at a time when recycling was just an emerging concept and



repurposed clothing was often greeted suspiciously. But within a short time, the wisdom of her eco-friendly business became one of its best-selling features. Her wholesale business has been thriving for more than 25 years, so you can find Baabaazuzu clothing in shops throughout the U.S.A., Canada, Japan, and even South Korea!

Since Baabaazuzu is located in a busy Michigan tourist area, Sue has a storefront where summer customers come in to stock up for the winter ahead. She also exhibits at a limited number of art fairs where she meets with customers and gets direct feedback. Often their suggestions lead to important business developments, like the fingerless gloves which became a best-seller for the company.

Sue uses every available opportunity to get her work in front of buyers. Wholesale buyers can find her work on Faire and IndieMe, and retail customers can see her work on both Etsy and Amazon Handmade. She says it only makes sense to have your product “where there are buyers.” And up to this point, it means that everything she designs and makes in the off-season is sold out for the coming winter.

Sue wisely hires experts to handle some aspects of her business such as social media and photography. That leaves her time to oversee every detail of planning and executing a remarkable line of clothing. It also allows her to spend time on her favorite part of her business, customer service! She regularly reaches out to her customers to appraise their needs and gain their feedback. She is devoted to exceeding their expectations and making them happy. And, of course, cozy warm and strikingly fashionable in the wonderful upcycled wardrobe she creates! ^{HB}



Diane Sulg is Executive Director of CRAFT and founder & co-chair of American Craft Week (ACW). She is a handmade advocate that provides valuable information in her one-day seminars titled “All About Wholesale” at wholesale shows throughout the United States. Diane is the former owner of Maddi's Gallery in Charlotte and Huntersville, NC. She can be reached at dianesulg@gmail.com