

Our Story

In the summer of 2018, co-founders Randall Shapiro and Riley Kuffner found themselves standing in an empty parking space, covered in sawdust, and staring at a mound of dead plants. They had spent an entire summer working to build the most accessible food growing device and this is what they had to show of it. Their journey wasn't the glamorous startup story that one might see online, but make no mistake about it, they wouldn't have had it any other way.

Randall and Riley met in high school as journalists for their high school newspaper, The Tam News. The two became good friends, hanging out on the weekends, sneaking onto golf courses, and organizing late night poker games. While in school, they also created a video arm of their publication, TBN, that went on to receive national recognition. (You can still find YouTube videos of them doing live sports commentary). Their work on the broadcasting network was born out of fun, but also established the foundation for what would become a strong working relationship.

The Idea:

In college, Randall and Riley followed very different paths. Randall studied business at Indiana University, whereas Riley was an engineer studying sustainable technologies at UCLA. As a sophomore, Riley took an interest in the fundamental causes of inequality found within ancient and modern societies. He started to see that throughout history, people who lacked free time seemed unable to break from poverty cycles. The core reason for this was that their time was consumed working for others in order to provide for their own basic human needs (food, water, shelter). This left people without the opportunity to invest in themselves and realize their potential.

Riley knew that life didn't need to be this way. He had been experimenting with an efficient agriculture technology called hydroponics that had been around for a long time, but was starting to make a comeback in urban vertical farming. This method could substantially increase food access, thanks to minimal land and water requirements when compared to traditional farming methods. Riley saw that this type of food growing technology had a place in the evolving home. Randall also resonated with the concept. He was a foodie, and had little to no access to fresh food during the snowy winters in Bloomington. He also saw firsthand how population growth could further strain living conditions while studying abroad in Hong Kong.

As their curiosity grew, they discovered more shocking truths about our food system: long distances from farm to table, the use of harmful chemicals, and pollution levels that were simply unsustainable. Even worse, with additional mouths to feed, our system was going to be pushed to a breaking point within the next few decades.

After talking with other people about their idea, another thing became clear: a home device to grow food would need to be simple and easy to use. The last thing people wanted was some odd looking science project cluttering their kitchen counters. Randall also believed deeply that technology can only be valuable to society if it has the ability to be accepted. So design became a non-negotiable priority. With this in mind, the goal became making the device work autonomously and designing it to be beautiful, similar to a modern home decor or art piece. To get there, they would have to become students of the three P's.

Passion, Patience, and Perseverance

Immediately following graduation, Randall turned down a few job opportunities to move back to California and become a vertical farmer with his high school buddy. He lived at his uncle's house, while Riley found a parking spot at his girlfriend's house for them to prototype. The covered space had no door, so they had to tarp off the front to hide their project from public view. Their parking spot became home that first summer: late nights building, killing lots of plants in the name of science, and detailed creation of their business materials. Riley's tools were stolen twice, contractors came and went, and savings were depleted to the bone. But they never gave up, and built important relationships along the way.

Later the two would run the company from an apartment together (with a door!) while they continued their plant research. They turned their living room into a culinary jungle of sorts, with automated testing racks and bright lights occupying the walls. Later, when they started running out of space, Riley's bedroom became an extension of the plant science room.

From Idea to Company

After a year and a half of grit and sacrifice, the fruits of their labor started to bloom. They completed the industrial design of their first product and started to see real demand in the marketplace. Within a week of launching their website, they had generated a waitlist with 300+ people and had emails from 4 major retailers wanting to sell their product.

A few months later Miravel would be called one of the "5 coolest startups at CES 2020" by Entrepreneur Magazine and recognized in forums such as Pepperdine University's Highly Promising Company List, UCLA Anderson's Impactathon, and UC Berkeley's LAUNCH Demo Day for their work in building *The Simple Garden*.

Today

Randall & Riley recently launched a limited batch of pre-orders and plan to begin production later this year in Fall of 2020.

Their mission is to drive the world's transition to decentralized food production by bringing fresh produce, beautiful design, and sustainable living into an easy and accessible package (or garden, if you will) for everyone, no matter where in the world they might be.

Inspired by California culture, they hope that their products can help empower people to lead a healthy, happy, sustainable life.

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