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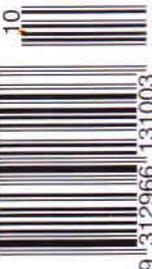
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MAKING 'THE LEAP

Ever dreamed of turning a passion project into your career? We meet six people who have given up their day jobs and taken the plunge **WORDS LETA KEENS**

A photograph of Cheri Flewell-Smith, a woman wearing a leopard-print headscarf and a colorful, patterned top. She is sitting at a table in a workshop, smiling at the camera. On the table in front of her are several colorful, patterned cushions and scarves. In the background, there are various items on shelves, including a cactus and some papers. The photo is framed by a black border with the text 'RDP III' on the right side and 'RDP III' on the left side.

Cheri Flewell-Smith is the mastermind behind The New Punjab. The range includes cushions (from \$79.95 each), scarves (from \$39.95 each).

During trying times at work, we've all caught ourselves fantasising about chucking it in to follow a dream. Many of us also become trapped by the false belief that we just don't know how to do anything else or that pursuing a passion is too risky. The truth of the matter is that although you started out in one field, it doesn't mean you have to be stuck there for life. From homewares moguls and market junkies to interior designers and textile artists, the people we meet here all transformed a creative sideline into their main source of income. It took a fair bit of juggling, hard work and risk-taking to make it happen, but none of them have any regrets whatsoever about making the switch. Except, perhaps, for Cheri Flewell-Smith (pictured), who made the leap from advertising agencies to starting her own company. "I wish I'd done it sooner!" she says.

Cheri Flewell-Smith, The New Punjab

What were you doing before this?

I was an art director at advertising agencies in Sydney and Melbourne.

What made you want to change?

I wanted to be my own boss. Being in a creative job can leave you yearning for a creative outlet - believe it or not.

Was there a stage when you had to juggle both? How did you handle that?

I went freelance, so I could juggle my time and finances while I made the career switch. It meant being strict with money - all my holidays involved sourcing manufacturers.

How did you know the time was right to completely switch over?

The late nights. I'd happily spend hours poring over designs and putting together moodboards. It was taking over my life.

What does your new career involve?

I started a company, The New Punjab, which creates authentic Indian goods

for the modern Australian home. I design the products and have them made in India by traditional craftsmen.

What lessons have you learnt? It pays to be there while you get your products made. I like to know who's making them and under what conditions.

Any helpful advice you were given?

There's enough success to go around.

Any disasters along the way? Getting 300 cushions sent in the wrong colour because our craftsman ran out of dye. Luckily for me, emerald green was announced as the colour of the year!

Advice for anyone thinking of switching careers? Ask yourself what's the worst that can happen. If you can handle that, make the leap.

How has your life changed? I'm more content. I feel like I have a purpose. Visit thenewpunjab.com.

“START SMALL. DON'T ORDER 5000 OF ANYTHING! FIND OUT IF THERE IS A MARKET FOR WHAT YOU INTEND TO CREATE”

CHERI FLEWELL-SMITH, THE NEW PUNJAB

The New Punjab collection includes cushions (from \$79.95 each), and the 'Roti' rug, \$495.



Julia Green, stylist, Greenhouse Interiors

What were you doing before? Can you believe I was a drug peddler but of the legal kind? A job in pharmaceuticals promised a car and lots of money and, having been a poor uni student for years, that was very appealing! But I knew from the first day it was not for me. I somehow managed to get sucked up in a vacuum of time for 15 years. I don't regret it, really. It taught me more business skills than any degree could and it fuelled me with a passion to one day do my own thing in a field I cared about.

What made you want to change? In truth, I wanted to get out from the start, as I never felt passionate about the industry I was in, but leaving the security and money of a corporate job felt really scary. Fortune favours the bold, though, and after the birth of my second child, I took the plunge. It wasn't a risk at all, as it turned out. I had few overheads, time, buckets of enthusiasm and a good business brain from years of corporate training.



Julia Green (left) and Jacqui Moore created these two looks (below and below left) for Dann Event Hire. The *Tears* artwork is by Ali McNabney-Stevens.



What sort of training did you have to do for your new career? None. It's all been on the job. I think styling is largely about intuition and composition. I threw myself at shooting (to the point of distraction) and the more I did it, the more I learned. But the person I attribute most of my crash course in styling to is photographer and dear friend Armelle Habib. I consider her a genius behind the lens, the best art director I have ever worked with and a damn fab person to go with it.

What does your new career involve? I am a glorified furniture removalist, floor cleaner, fluffer, maker of pretty shelves

Why didn't you go straight into this? I didn't know a job like this existed. Plus, I was academic at school and encouraged to pursue that rather than the arts. It's all tied together now, though, so none of it was wasted.

Lessons you have learnt? That you can do absolutely anything if you want it badly enough. And it's a marathon, not a sprint.

Any disasters along the way? My biggest disaster is my inbox as I receive around 500 emails a day - it gives me heart palpitations!

Advice you were given that was helpful? Surround yourself with good people and always, always listen to your gut. It never lies.

“MY ADVICE IS TO JUST DO IT. MY HUSBAND AND I ALWAYS LAUGH AND SAY WE ARE ‘DOERS’ NOT ‘GONNAS’” **JULIA GREEN, GREENHOUSE INTERIORS**

and beds, among many other strange things. It's a funny old job, really. So much smoke and mirrors but that final image, when we get it, still takes my breath away every time. There's such a sense of satisfaction to actually create something. As well as styling, I write most of the copy to accompany my work, run a wholesale homewares business representing 11 artists, and consult with emerging brands. I'm also the interior host of Channel 10's new renovation show, *The Home Team*. It gives me a rash just saying that - I need a holiday.

Advice you could offer to anyone thinking of switching careers? Just do it. Don't over-think it or it will be too hard. Make a realistic plan on a piece of paper with small achievable goals and get going.

How is life different after your career change? I now don't really have much of a life outside of work. I am ashamed to say I have forgotten what work/life balance is. I miss having the chance to switch off occasionally. When it's your own business, it's not that easy! Visit greenhouseinteriors.com.au.



Donald Campbell, designer

What were you doing before this? I was a high-school art teacher.

What made you want to change? After years of encouraging others' creativity, I wanted to explore my own.

Was there a stage when you had to juggle both? How did you handle that? I studied design at night while I was doing casual teaching and education work at the Art Gallery Of New South Wales. At the time, I also started to build up a small group of clients for the design work.

How did you know the time was right to switch over to your new career? When you realise the old career is holding back the advancement of the new. One new job had the potential to be much bigger if I had the time. That's when I knew it was time to make the switch.

What does your new career involve? I have a design practice, which involves everything from hanging artworks to the planning and implementation of whole residential (one is pictured above) and commercial projects.

Why didn't you go straight into this career? As a child I was always drawing house plans and looking at books on architecture, but I didn't understand how I could go about doing it as a career.

Lessons you have learnt? You can't know everything yourself, so you need to have really good people around you. I've learnt to be confident enough to accept ideas from other people, from clients to co-workers, to become truly collaborative.

Any disasters? I was working on a project with an overseas agent and his staff misappropriated the funds. It took two or three years to get back on track.

Highlights? Seeing a project finished and the client inhabiting the space.

How has your life changed? My work life is more rewarding, more diverse and there are new challenges all the time. Visit donaldcampbelldesign.com.