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COUNTRY HOMES & INTERIORS

JULY 2014

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*“We’ve added a
piece of Cornwall
to our business”*

Designers Rebecca Heane and Allison Hughes

We were inspired by the colours of the sea, sky and land, the sheltered bays and windswept moors, the rich history and distinctive identity of Cornwall. We wanted to create a piece of it,’ says Rebecca Heane of Cream Cornwall, the interiors business she and her partner, Allison Hughes, started more than 18 months ago.

With more than 45 years’ experience of interiors between them, Rebecca and Allison were well placed to start a homewares business. Rebecca had lived in Australia for many years, where she designed and printed fabric (silk velvet devoré being her speciality) and ran a farm. But, longing for the aqua waters of the Atlantic and clarity of light in Cornwall, she never quite overcame her homesickness, so she was delighted to return to her native county four years ago and start doing interior design. ‘I’m Cornish and even though I had lived in Australia for 14 years, I had wanted to do something based on

Cornwall and design for a long time.’ Allison, meanwhile, had been a trend forecaster for 20 years in London, and hoped to move into interiors textiles. ‘I got fed up with the rat race and moved to Cornwall six years ago. We’d come down to visit my brother-in-law and I went to work with him. I realised then that commuting along country lanes was much better than the Old Kent Road! It was a sea-change of wanting a different life.’

Rebecca and Allison met at an Enterprising Women workshop. They got to know each other and realised they shared a passion for Cornwall and its colours. When Rebecca was looking for retail space for her business, she took Allison along with her. ‘I visited Allison’s house, saw what she was doing and said, “Shall we start a business together?” We wanted to do something encapsulating what Cornwall is about in a lovely way and it grew from there.’

In 2012 Cream Cornwall was born. ‘Allison emailed me evocative words and phrases about »

Rebecca (left) and Allison
by the harbour in Flushing
looking towards Falmouth.
OPPOSITE Original
drawings reflecting Cornwall
provide the starting points
for most of the ranges - the
mackerel is a key motif.



Cornwall and we decided Cream Cornwall had all the right connotations – cream signified “the best of”, the colour and Cornish clotted cream!’

In between working on their own projects, Allison and Rebecca got together and pooled their resources. ‘We wanted Cream Cornwall to be a lifestyle brand selling everything to create a piece of Cornwall,’ says Rebecca. ‘We visited trade shows, looking at merchandise, but we soon realised that we’d be just like everyone else, so we decided to design products ourselves that evoke the beauty of the county and allow people to take a little of Cornwall home. We have everything crafted by hand locally as far as possible.’

‘First of all, we started thinking about colour and we decided we wanted to create our own paint range,’ says Allison. That was the first product, in fact, that Cream Cornwall produced and it formed the basis for their collections.

Rebecca took photographs of the Cornish landscape and, together, she and Allison pulled out a palette based on the colours of the land, sea and sky. ‘We created an exclusive Cornwall palette. We painted up the colours and created a collection, then we contacted Francesca’s Paints in London. Francesca provided 30 colours for us. She would send us swatches



Allison (left) and Rebecca review the latest paint colours in natural daylight over a cup of coffee outside Allison's house.

“What we love most...
Seeing the designs going
onto different products and
people buying them”

showing the colours and we'd ask for more grey or whatever until finally we were happy,' says Allison.

The high-pigment paint that is the Cornish Cream range comes in eco-friendly buckets and tins and is mixed to order. Evocative names include Sea Thrift, Atlantic Breeze and Frenchman's Creek.

The paint range suggested a colour scheme and style for three different facets of Cornish life that in turn became collections for Cream Cornwall. Classic is based on the Georgian gardens and maritime heritage of the county. Contemporary is all about clear modern colours and the town of St Ives, while Cottage is based around Cornwall's characteristic cosy fishermen's cottages.

Allison and Rebecca then thought about the designs they wanted to go with each collection. ‘We looked at iconic imagery of Cornwall, although not necessarily exclusive to Cornwall, such as mackerel. Then we looked at laying the designs onto products and how we could use different items such as lamp shades, tea towels or a mug,’ says Rebecca. Samples were made up with most things made locally. Rebecca and Allison often do the printing themselves and make lamp shades, while local artisan Jim Blakeston paints the lamp bases.

Both Rebecca and Allison now work full time on the business. As well as running the Cream Cornwall website, they also have stockists throughout the country, and even one in the United States.

‘We love what we do and work hard at coming up with new designs, the production and trying to get our things out there,’ says Allison. ‘It's the most amazing thing, creating designs that people really like.’

☎ Cream Cornwall, 07584 161716,
creamcornwall.co.uk. »



Sample pots and paint charts, which feature the mackerel logo. The paint range comes in recyclable eco-friendly buckets.



For Allison, silk screening (above) and making wax seals for the candle boxes are just part of a day's work.



Packet ships like the one on the mugs (above) would once have sailed in and out of Flushing Harbour, seen here at the end of a cobbled alleyway.



Rebecca (left) and Allison (also opposite, aboard the Flushing ferry) in Rebecca's dining room painted in Cream Cornwall's dramatic shade of Star Gazey. Silk-screened lamp shades and dip-dyed velvet cushion covers are top sellers, as is the Fouta throw used here as a tablecloth.



On our doorstep...

Visit... 'Glendurgan Garden (01326 252020, nationaltrust.org.uk/glendurgan-garden) on the Helford River, a beautiful subtropical garden full of amazing plants.'

Shop at... 'Baileys Country Store (01326 379888, baileyscountrystore.co.uk) in Penryn. It's like having a permanent farmers' market open, with everything from Camel Valley fizz to home-cooked pasties.'

Go for a meal at... 'The Royal Standard (01326 374250) in Flushing. It's our favourite place to eat locally and we love it because it's the way a village pub should be - lovely decor, food cooked to order using fresh, local ingredients, great staff and full of local characters.'

Small business advice

How to work with a friend

Follow our guide to teaming up for a successful working relationship

It's worked for Farrow & Ball, Oka and a host of other thriving businesses including, now, Cream Cornwall run by Rebecca Heane and Allison Hughes. 'At School for Creative Startups,' says Medeia Cohan, 'we often have co-founders in the form of family and friends and we've seen that those who are successful share a vision and are equally committed.'

Forming a business with a friend can result in a profitable venture. It certainly sounds attractive: you have someone to share start-up problems with, a partner to share the workload and brainstorm with, plus access to greater knowledge, skills and experience than if you were on your own. It's estimated, though, that over 50% of business partnerships fail, so before taking the plunge, give it careful thought...

Make sure you want to collaborate. Are you the sort of person who enjoys working in a team? Think back to your schooldays when a teacher asked you to work on a class project with someone else. Were you thrilled at the idea or did you want to do it all on your own? **Be clear in your expectations.** What do you want out of the business and what are you prepared to do to get it? Define the roles and skills each party brings and respect each others' contacts and previous experience. **Set down the boundaries between friend and business partner.** Look at whether the

dynamics of your friendship will translate into a business partnership. Are you both equally enthusiastic about the idea? Agree the distinctions between friendship and business partner mode, such as keeping work-focused and task orientated while at work together.

Keep the lines of communication open. Make it clear from the start that it's okay to voice your opinions without fear of upsetting the other person, and be honest at all times. If you're angry, let your partner know - it's better to get it off your chest and not let whatever is bothering you fester. 'Be conscious of what's going on in each other's personal lives as the effects of that can often spill over into the work environment,' add Rebecca and Allison.

Accept that you won't always agree. Differing opinions can be healthy, provided you don't fall out and you can eventually agree or reach a compromise. This may result in decision-making becoming less spontaneous though. Don't be afraid to get a third party involved in certain situations. 'If there is something you cannot agree on, talk it through with someone whose opinion you both value,' advise Rebecca and Allison.

Think about having a business partnership agreement. 'You don't want there to be any grey areas,' says Rebecca. You can find simple generic agreements on the internet or go to a solicitor and have a business contract drawn up. It's not a legal requirement to have a written partnership agreement but it is a sensible way of structuring your partnership and working out roles and helping to avoid misunderstandings and disputes, as well as putting in place possible exit routes.

'No matter how much you love someone, that friendship may not necessarily translate into a healthy working relationship,' says Medeia, 'so it's very important to have clear communication and lay out each party's responsibilities from the start in the form of a partnership agreement.'

Make time to invigorate your passion for the business. 'It's important to get out of the business regularly,' says Rebecca. 'We have little outings to places in Cornwall every now and then. It keeps us inspired and reminds us why we started Cream Cornwall in the first place. It's a good opportunity, too, to discuss things, whatever they may be, away from our working environment.'

School for Creative Startups,
020 7759 1897,
schoolforcreativestartups.com.



“ *The one lesson we've learned...* To trust our gut instincts, as they've been proved right on several occasions since we started out ”