

Women Who Made their Hobby into a Business January 21

By Adlen W. Robinson

While it is no secret that women make up a wide section of today's work force, a growing number of women are choosing to begin home based businesses. In fact, currently there are nearly 11 million female entrepreneurs in the United States. For many women, owning their own business gives them the flexibility they need when it comes to balancing a career with the needs of their family. And although ultimately every person who begins a business strives for success, to many women, their work is much more than just a way to contribute to the financial needs of their family. For women in the arts, their work is their passion.

As a child, Andrea Price had a neighbor who was a pottery instructor. The neighbor encouraged Price to take lessons, and when she did, the 11-year old found spinning pottery was a fun hobby. Price had no idea how her hobby would develop over the years and evolve into something she cannot imagine NOT doing. After college, Price found herself climbing the corporate ladder in Atlanta. "I had just moved back and did not know many people," remembered Price. "So, I started taking pottery lessons again and continued for the next five or six years." The more she experimented with pottery, Price found her skills improved and her love of spinning continued to grow. During that time, Price married her husband Mike and the couple began a family. When their daughter was only a baby, Price's husband surprised her one day with her very own pottery wheel—something that allowed Price to spend even more time honing her craft. "At first I just made pottery for fun," explained Price. "And then people began asking me more and more to make certain pieces for them---finally I thought, should I begin my own business?" After the birth of her second child, Price decided to leave her corporate job and become a full-time mother to their two young children. In addition, she decided to launch her business, "Art of Pottery." "I began doing lots of weekend arts festivals," said Price. "And I guess through word of mouth news got out about my business."

While much of the pottery sold in stores is poured into a mold, Price uses the age old technique of spinning a piece of clay into whatever particular piece she is creating. Spinning pottery is a highly specialized skill that takes many hours and days to actually complete even one small piece of pottery. In addition, Price makes all of her own glazes. "For me, my pottery is a labor

of love,” said Price passionately. “I am a very active person---it is hard for me to sit still---but when I am doing my pottery, I am totally relaxed.” Price’s pottery is as unique as it is beautiful. Because she uses no molds, each piece is different. “I take a lot of custom orders,” said Price. “Someone might see a particular piece they like, for example a coffee mug, but want them in a different color or slightly different style—they place their order and I will make them however many they want.” Besides being her passion, Price said owning her own business gives her flexibility when it comes to being there for her husband and their two children. “I can sit here and spin pottery and watch the kids outside playing---that is the best of both worlds.”

Forsyth County resident Esther Alarcon is another business owner who appreciates being able to run a business out of her home. Alarcon has been involved with the fashion/textile industry ever since she was a young woman living in her native Columbia, South America. After moving to Atlanta with her parents at age 14, Alarcon missed her home country and knew one day she would return there. After graduating with a degree in Fashion Design, Alarcon did move back to Columbia where she worked for years as a successful Fashion Consultant. After marrying her husband Andres Arango, and beginning a family, the couple made the difficult decision to move to the United States in 2001. “All of my family was in the states, and we are a very close family---we wanted our children to know their cousins, and their grandparents,” said the mother of two. To keep her hands in the designing field, Alarcon began working with a friend who owned a window treatment business. “After we would finish a window treatment, we would often be left with small amounts of the most beautiful fabric,” remembered Alarcon. “I asked my friend if I could have some of the scraps and then I just began using the pieces---one piece of fabric that had a flower on it, I sewed onto a jacket I had.” Alarcon noticed that people were always complementing her on the things she embellished, and soon she decided to take her craft to the next level. After much thought, Alarcon launched her business, “Vintage by Tosi.” Alarcon’s creations include unique handbags, belts, purses, scarves, shawls—all using a variety of different materials, adding to their unique appeal. In addition, Alarcon has no patterns, so none of her creations are alike. Alarcon said creating her wearable pieces of art is relaxing. “I can knit a scarf while helping my children with their homework or while watching television with them,” said Alarcon. “Having my own business allows me to work around my family’s needs, plus I am doing something I truly love.”

Price and Alarcon work out of their homes, but are also beginning to place some of their products in specialty stores like Juls, on James Burgess Road. Julie Green, owner of the shop and an artist herself, said women like Price and Alarcon represent a growing trend of women in the business world. “I think women in our generation are just so much more aware that they need to be independent,” said Green. “Whether you are married or not, women realize they need to have a strong self-identity—all of the women I know either have this sense of self, or they are searching for it.”

Green knows a thing or two about starting small and seeing success. “When I first opened Juls, people kept asking me, ‘aren’t you afraid?’ and I said, well, no, the worst thing that can happen is that I fail.” After almost five years and continued growth, Green has seen her dream continue to flourish. Although Juls main product are Green’s hand poured candles, the store is also overflowing with accessories, jewelry, home décor, furniture, fabric items, wall-hangings, pottery, and much more. Many of the items are made by local artists like Price and Alarcon. “I encourage women to find what they love to do and then do it,” said Green. “My favorite thing about doing what I do is when I help others---encouraging other women to pursue their dreams is what I love—when someone says that I inspired them, that in turn inspires me.”

For more information:

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Juls

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