

HOME IS 'WARE' THE HEART IS

Margaret Butler

Margaret Butler, the brains behind renowned homeware label, *Anasazi*, speaks with *Wealth Creator* about the creation of a \$20 million international business.

When *Anasazi* hit the homeware market, it was out with the old and in with the new. Accessories were no longer limited to the kitchen and consumers were introduced to products that were functional and intelligently designed. A trend had been set that has seen this company distribute 800 contemporary lifestyle products for six international brands including its own, *Anasazi* homewares.

Who needs a degree!

Although Margaret Butler began her career by studying for a degree in business, she never completed it; she recognised in herself a strong and driven woman and involved herself in entrepreneurial courses instead.

"I was a little bit bored with going to university so I went off and started working quite young," says Margaret.

It was through her travels to America and Europe that she discovered a niche in the homeware industry where domestic products were changing. This experience fuelled Margaret's determination to offer alternatives to the

Australian market. She had spent a little time in the textile industry before and after her travels, but like all successful entrepreneurs, had recognised the potential of an emerging growth industry – homewares.

"Domestic consumer products were becoming much more intelligently designed with a greater emphasis on design," she says.

So in 1992 and at age 27, Margaret started working on *Anasazi* out of a friend's shed, passionate about cutting free from tradition.

"We really built things to be used in a domestic environment that hadn't been done here before, and we pioneered products. In our first year we pioneered a bathroom range and kitchen accessories. There was no category like this in Australia and during the last decade we have sold over four million of the product. It's a matter of getting people to trust the product and then to continue using them."

The gap in the market allowed her to promote her product as being readily available to Australia, and Margaret set her sights on producing products that pioneered various design, offering consumers exactly what they needed and at an affordable price.

"In the beginning we had about 12 products and today we have over 800 products in our range. So we've been offering products that keep building on the success of the range, by offering people the things they want," says Margaret of the company's growth.

Business victory

Margaret invested \$10,000 of her own money into the start-up, which gave her leverage to distribute those initial 12 products to



By Dominique Bambino

specialty stores. She worked in a collaborative effort with a US manufacturer to design and manufacture *Anasazi's* first range, which sold to *Myer* and *Country Road*. Within 12 months the products were going out to *David Jones*, *Freedom* and about a hundred other specialty stores. Now, after 12 years of sheer hard work, the company has expanded rapidly across Australia and New Zealand, selling throughout 2,000 retail outlets.

"From the beginning I think it was just hard work and really there was no time to consider anything else, we just had to make it happen. I think you've got to have that belief. I've never really been in business for the money; you have to feel passionate about what you're doing and like making a difference."

“ The company has expanded rapidly, selling throughout 2,000 outlets. ”

Margaret set up business strategies early on to help streamline everything that was happening. It helped shape the business and laid the foundations for its current success.

"Even today we have to make sure we have strategies that expand our business," she says.

One of the major challenges for Margaret during the first four to five years was building a reputation for her product which was crucial in keeping the company alive. Fortunately, tracking new trends in design allowed the product to propel forward. And, in the last 12 months, *Anasazi* has been asked by several major labels to look at opportunities to build the product globally.

A stake in the company

Keeping all her stakeholders informed of the movements of this privately owned company has also played an important part in maintaining a successful business.

"A lot of it has been about trust and making sure you communicate very openly with your stakeholders and proprietors," she says. She also believes it's important to have a tight grip on everything that is happening. It takes a true leader to understand every part of an operation as well as being able to focus on other brands

such as *Guzzini*, *Interdesign*, *Nigela Lawson* and *Umbr*a – all trading under *Anasazi*. However, the growth of the business and brands is in no small part due to the development of Margaret's entrepreneurial skills.

"I love buying and selling products and I love dealing with people at all levels, whether it be manufacturing or retail. This has refined my business skill, and my business acumen has changed immensely over the last decade."

Yet, one thing that hasn't changed is her enthusiasm.

"Once you get on a roll, I think your own enthusiasm creates enthusiasm and we've been very successful to be able to deliver in all distribution circles, department stores, homeware and lifestyle markets that offer slightly different versions of products. We don't focus on one area of the market, but once one particular area of the market is hooked the next area is keen to try the products."

The office

While she is accounting and administration minded, the biggest learning curve for Margaret was making sure she had a great working environment – surrounded by a team that she could trust and keep growing with.

To do this she maintains a very open working environment.

"It gives the expression that the office doesn't look like a workplace, it feels much more like a community where people openly express ideas and share information. Planning, and getting the team to plan, has been a strong point."

Often you find female role models that service the community well, but Margaret's motivation is an obsession reflecting the growth of her business. She had a great idea and went with it knowing something good was going to come out of it. **wcm**

MARGARET'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

1. You've got to have a lot of passion for what you're doing and it's important to love what you do.
2. Always keep your eye on the ball.
3. Surround yourself with a great team who understand what the business is about.
4. Pay attention to what your customers and suppliers want.
5. It's about quality, not just of the product but all the way through the business.

