

Rossladies

From Cathy

01.

A company can successfully create and sell two different product lines that have entirely different customers.

02.

Every once in a while, sit down with your employees, one at a time, and ask them these three questions: Do you think your team is efficient? Do you think your team is effective? What keeps you up at night?

03.

If you find your portfolio becoming too niche, partner up with another designer or business owner who does different kinds of projects, so your partnership will have a more varied portfolio.

04.

As you grow your team, match every new employee with someone who has worked for the company for a while. This can be a mentor, or it can be more of a peer role – someone who can, as Cathy says, tell you the best places to grab lunch. This helps new people integrate more quickly.

05.

As a culture, we need to rethink our definition of success. Running a sustainable business that prioritizes local making and creates hundreds of local jobs should be considered success – not just selling your company and getting a large payout.



SHILPA SHAH

CUYANA
CHAPTER TWO

words: MEGAN DIZON | photography: MARISA VITALE

Set foot in Cuyana and you'll feel as though you've just stepped into the way you wish your closet looked: effortlessly chic, full of luxe essentials and zero fluff.

As the brand that invented the “Fewer, Better Things” movement, Cuyana offers a highly curated experience. From baby alpaca capes to the ultimate day-to-night bucket bag, their collections evoke a feeling of luxury and simplicity. Though as Shilpa Shah, co-founder of the growing fashion and lifestyle brand, knows best: there’s a story behind everything.

Before Shilpa co-founded the business, she was a UI/UX designer, working for Disney and other design agencies. Yet after years of working in technology, she grew tired of the limits of virtual design.

“In the five years that I worked at the agency, where there were many late nights and deadlines, only two things ever made it to market. It frustrated me that products never actually made it to people. I wanted a tangible element to everything.”

She considered going back to get a master’s degree in design, but felt her career had outgrown it. With a one-year-old in tow and a husband in medical residency, she decided that if she wanted to make products that went to market, she needed to go to business school.

As Shilpa was applying to MBA programs in 2009, she had a fortuitous meeting with her Cuyana co-founder Karla Gallardo, who was then an MBA student at Stanford. Karla needed a UX designer, so they collaborated on a project. When Karla started Cuyana in October 2011, she asked Shilpa to join her. With her second child only three months old and one semester left of business school at UC Berkeley, Shilpa admits launching a business on top of that was not easy.

“I didn’t know what the hell I was doing, to be honest. It was pretty overwhelming. There were times when I was like, ‘What did I just do to myself?’”

But committed at heart, she and Karla decided to double down instead of quit. It was then that they made their first serious breakthrough: the “Fewer, Better Things” movement. Launched in June 2013, “Fewer, Better Things” put Cuyana on the map.

“[Initially,] it would take us 10 or 15 minutes to describe what Cuyana is and does — from the job-producing luxury factories and retail supply chains to our principles of

environmental sustainability and premium quality. There were so many messages. What we would see time and time again is that people really didn’t care how it was made. And I mean that in the best possible way. They didn’t care first. They cared second or third, which is okay. I think most sustainable brands want them to care first, and that’s where they fail.” Shilpa and Karla realized that they needed to sell customers on style, and then follow up with their sustainability message.

It’s true. Though fashion may come off as a materialistic pursuit, the smartest minds in style know there’s a psychological element that drives us to choose one brand over another, and strong, values-based storytelling matters.

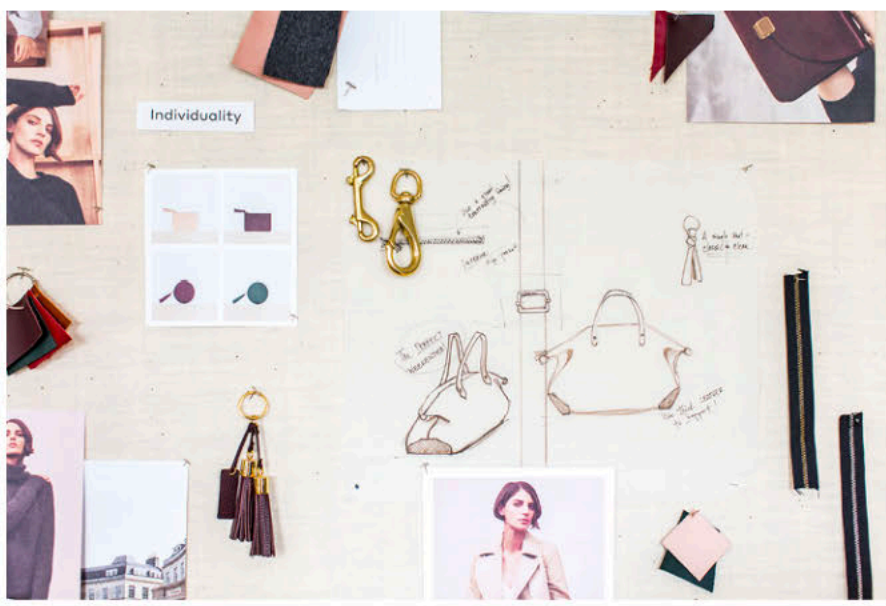
Yet as true academics, Karla and Shilpa didn’t stumble across their brand story by accident. They did their research by asking women to walk them through their closets and tell them about their clothes. What they found was that most of our beloved pieces have stories behind them. Whether it’s that over-the-top dress we bought for our bachelorette party that we now wear every Valentine’s Day, or the hand-painted silk scarf we bought from an artist in Italy — when we walk through our closet, we realize our things mean something.

www.cuyana.com

@shilparshah

@cuyana





Karla and Shilpa wanted Cuyana's products to feel like a treasure, so this re-messaging was a huge aha moment for them. As Shilpa says, it was about not getting in the middle of "the love affair between a woman and her bag."

Cuyana means "to love" in Quechua, which is the language of the Andean craftsmen who made their first product, The Panama Hat. The meaning of the brand Cuyana is, as Shilpa explains, "loving what you wear ... and loving where it comes from."

Origins matter to the company. As a sustainable, conscious brand, integrity is at the heart of everything Cuyana does. Though they've grown to 65 employees across four stores, they still distribute from their warehouse in Oakland, with every product packed and shipped by a Cuyana employee to ensure quality. And with all of their products made by skilled craftsmen from Europe, South America, and the United States, they're not afraid to cut ties with factories when things don't feel right.

They also made the strategic decision to seek out investment early on to help them grow.

Shilpa says, "We couldn't really make the impact we wanted without getting money. We were pitching to a lot of men who just didn't really get it. Then we found this Pinterest board, where someone had pinned pictures of every female venture capitalist in the valley, so Karla and I literally went after every single one of them."

Their grit paid off. The duo secured Maha Ibrahim from Canaan Partners, a female investor who completed Cuyana's first round of funding and fully supports the company's efforts and vision.

As a self-described momtrepreneur, Shilpa has also learned to invest in her work/life balance. With two kids and a doctor husband, she admits that starting Cuyana put a lot of pressure on her marriage, and the two sought counseling. Shilpa and her husband eventually decided to hire a nanny to care for the children on the weekdays. Shilpa says her incredible nanny is the reason Cuyana exists and credits her with easing the pressure placed on her marriage.

"A month after having her in our lives ... we had another [counseling] appointment and my husband was like, 'I'm actually pretty good. Are you good?' And I was, too. We had just needed really good help," she says, laughing.

Shilpa adds another insight for working moms: "Anyone who doesn't highlight their childcare situation is doing other women a disservice. I feel like someone should do a

whole article on Sheryl Sandberg's childcare team. What should be required to lean in?"

Bold and unapologetic, yet compassionate and committed, Shilpa embodies the qualities of an enduring entrepreneur. She seems to have discovered truths that many of us tend to overlook: that balance can foster growth and that no entrepreneur can do it alone. As co-founder of the "Fewer, Better Things" movement, Shilpa's approach to business and life is not just part of her brand, it's something to aspire to.



What is the inspiration behind your business?

We design for a modern woman who has set out to accomplish so many things and wants a beautifully curated wardrobe that will not only keep up with her, but will last a lifetime. Our woman is very intentional about what she invests in. She cares for the pieces in her closet; she is thoughtful about the fabrics and the countries they were crafted in. The categories we develop are with the intention of enduring time and trends. Pieces like a classic pebbled-leather tote, a crisp cotton-poplin shirt, or a warming wool coat are foundation pieces that are built to last.

How do you hope to help shape a better tomorrow?

Social responsibility is the foundation our company was built on. Everything that we have set into motion — from the way we source, to the materials we select and the way we do business with our family-run partners — was started with this value at heart. From there, we're able to concentrate on creating beautiful products with a distinct design point of view.

What was your personal highlight of the past year?

I have always been an avid traveler with a love of discovery. This year, my family and I took a ten-day road trip to Yellowstone National Park where we camped and totally disconnected from the world. It was unforgettable.

What are the unique benefits or challenges that come with building a business in San Francisco?

The innovative spirit of San Francisco is uniquely inspiring. Being removed from the traditional center of our industry has made us think about building a business differently. We have set out to change the conventional retail method, approach our production chains with great purpose from beginning to end, and design for real women who desire both practicality and luxury in one. There is an abundance of fresh ideas floating around this city that are meant to improve the way we live, and I think this is a great asset.

Do you believe that politics and business should be separate? If not, how have you integrated politics into your business?

We believe in running a business that already reflects all of our political beliefs. We've built a company that empowers women, has a built-in element of philanthropy, is environmentally sustainable and socially ethical — this is how we associate ourselves politically. Action is our tool.

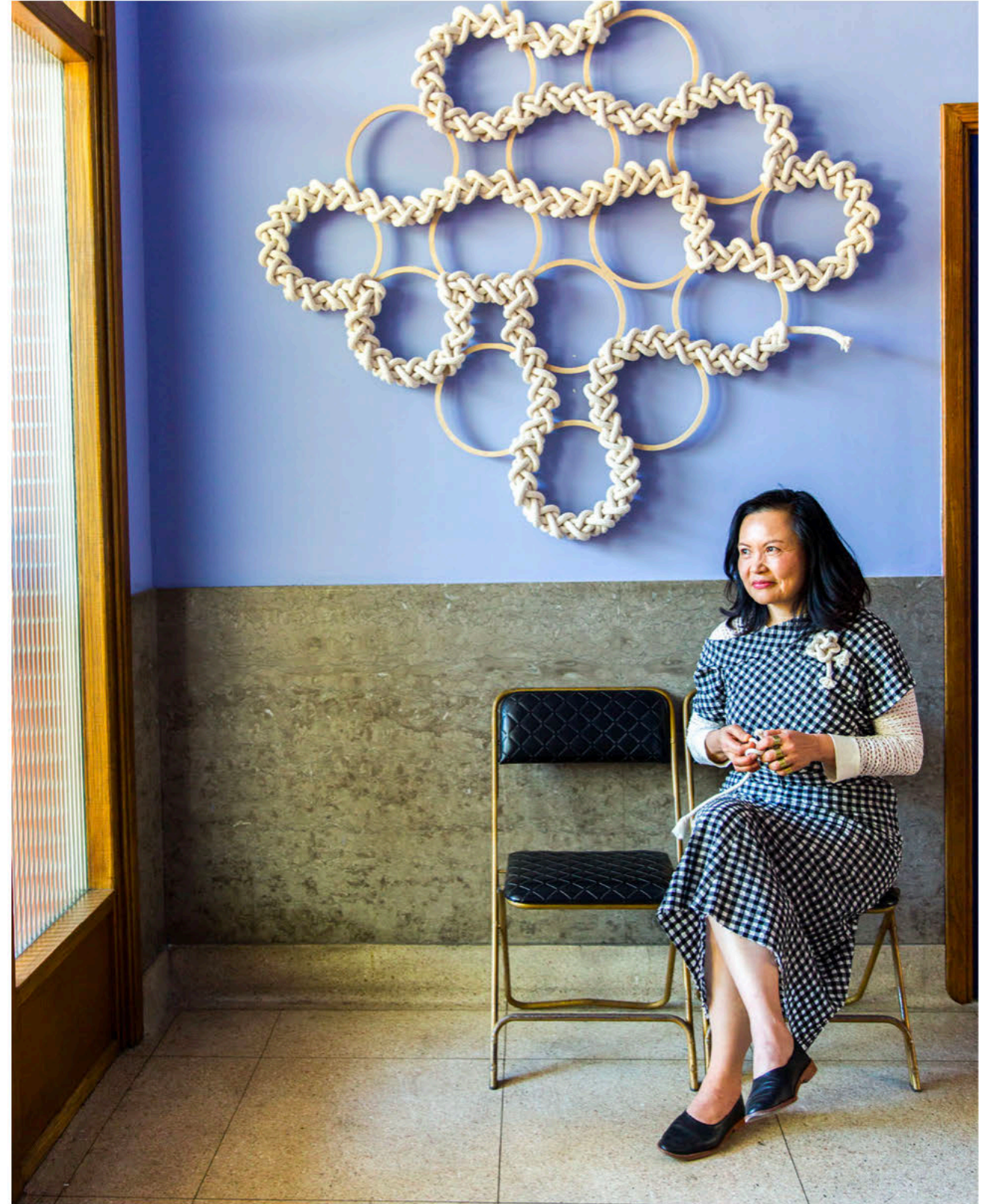


San Francisco

BY: GREY & ELLE



AN ESSAY IN PHOTOS



CHAPTER FOUR

words: CHELSEA SONKSEN | photography: MARISA VITALE

Many of us assume that becoming an expert in an industry requires working in that field for years. We assume that we can't change our minds, redirect, start afresh, and still be successful. But Windy Chien has proven this wrong time and time again.

She is an omnivore of experience — allowing herself to sample different paths and create moments of powerful metamorphoses throughout her life.

Today Windy is a recognized fine artist, creating large-scale fiber art installations for clients like IBM, Facebook, and Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, as well as private collectors and designers. Before that, she helped Apple build iTunes and the App Store. And prior to that she owned Aquarius Records, a legendary West Coast record store. She's been a guiding force in San Francisco's music scene, the emergence of a tech behemoth, and the return to handmade, tangible, thoughtful pursuits — always, it seems, staying one step ahead of the impending cultural trend.

In college, Windy studied film; her undergraduate project *Assimilation / A Simulation* played all over the world, including at Sundance. But music was her true passion, so after school she began working full-time at Aquarius Records, purchasing the store from the owner only a couple years later. She moved Aquarius to Valencia Street, one of the hippest areas in San Francisco, and began modernizing the store, making it a more inclusive place where all types of people would feel welcome.

After spending fourteen years championing the work of her favorite musicians at the record store, Windy decided it was time for a change. “I was like, I'm 35, and if I'm ever going to do something else I should just go do it ... I really wanted to see how other people lived and what other lives were possible.” She sold the store to a couple of her employees and took off without any calculated plan — only a clear intention.

In this year of exploration, Windy worked for several political campaigns, coordinating house parties and concerts. Then, while searching for jobs in the music industry, she noticed a job posting for a position at Apple. “At the time iTunes had just opened. iPod was already out, and they had just opened the iTunes Store. Remember, it was 99 cents to buy

a song? In the early days of iTunes, they really needed music experts to come in and help build it. So they hired me quite early on, and I spent eight years at Apple.”

Windy worked on the iTunes Essentials project, coordinating curated playlists like Bruce Springsteen For Beginners, Reggae for Lovers, or Sludge Metal. “When I started at iTunes it was just a music store, and it was just in the U.S. After five years, it was podcasts, TV, movies, books, iTunes U, and we had expanded into what is now more than 140 territories around the world. [It was a time of] explosive growth.” Windy then transitioned to the App Store team, seeking out the most interesting apps and promoting them on the store's front page. When I remarked that a lot of her career up to this point had been about curation, first at the record store and later at Apple, Windy nodded.





“That’s what I realized after a few years at Apple. I started looking back at my career ... and I realized, wow, I’m a natural curator. It’s what’s interesting to me. But at that point, it wasn’t enough. I loved supporting and evangelizing other people’s work, and I have an appetite for what’s new and what’s interesting ... [but] it wasn’t enough anymore. I wanted to focus on my own creativity. And I feel like I had earned it at that point. When I left Apple I was 46, and thought, I can’t believe I’ve been neglecting my own creativity for so long.”

Windy left Apple without knowing precisely what her next step would be. She traveled for a month – venturing to Morocco and Barcelona, and then she started taking classes. She studied everything from ceramics to LED wiring. In the midst of this exploration and education, Windy took a refresher macramé course and studied woodcarving. Something about those two arts resonated with her more than the others. Windy’s mom had taught her macramé, and her father had been a woodworker. “There’s kind of a poetic moment there,” Windy told us. “But I didn’t realize it until later. These things that my parents had done when I was younger were resonating somewhere inside me, laying dormant all these years.”

Eventually she started thinking about creating products she could sell in an online shop. “Originality was important to me ... I look at my work pretty critically and don’t want to repeat what other people are doing,” Windy told us. She designed a wooden spoon with a corner (for getting the crusty bits off the bottom of the pan). “When you make something that’s actually original, it speaks to you immediately. It’s like, *Ah, this is me, this really reflects who I am. This doesn’t reflect anyone else’s aesthetic.*”

While she sold products for a time, and even made it into West Coast Craft (SF’s most highly curated, exclusive craft fair), soon Windy decided to move away from products

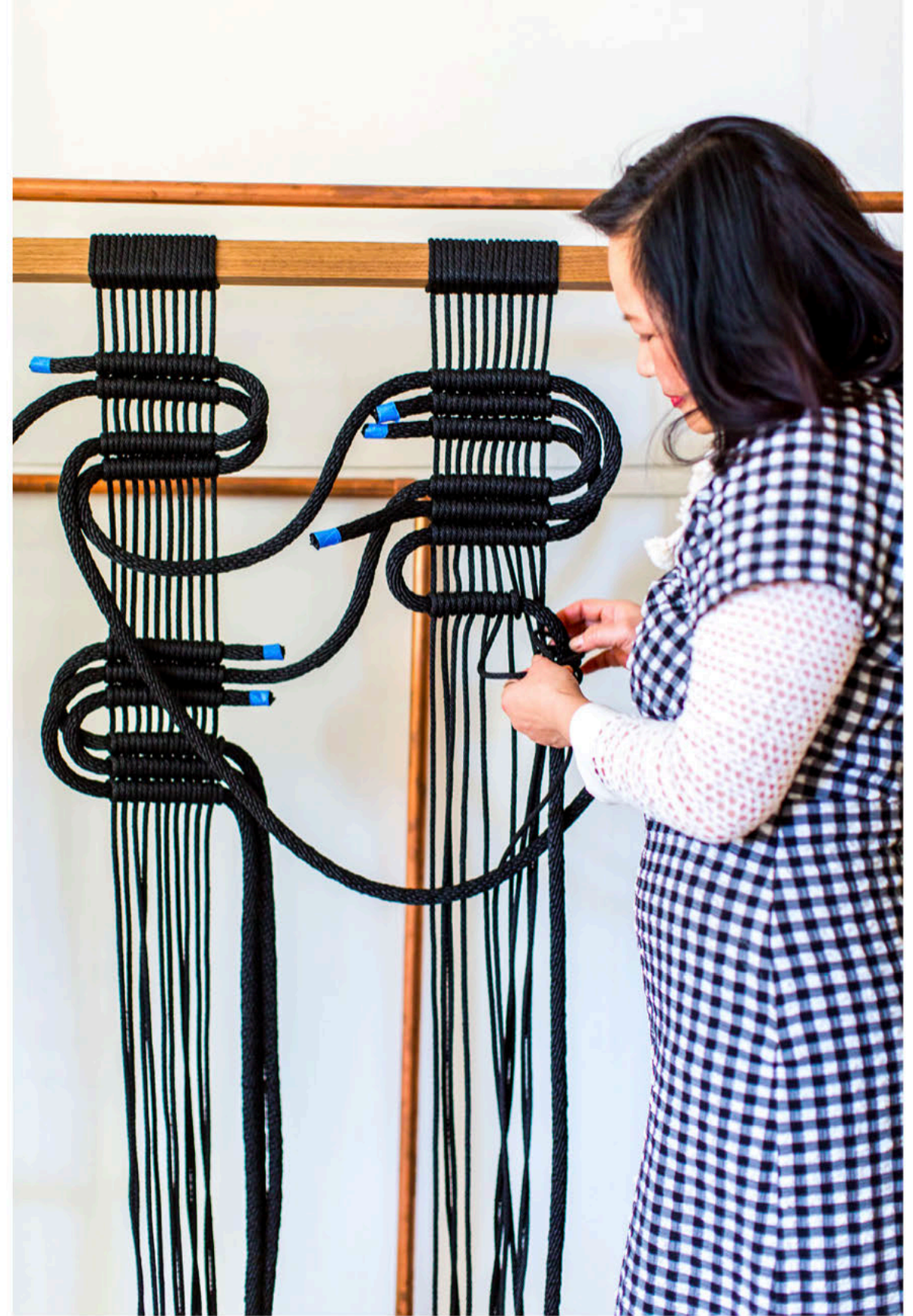
toward a fine art practice, creating immersive installations. “The idea of making products is exhausting to me now. Basically, you are repeating yourself over and over again. And there’s quality control, and everything has to look identical, and [you have to deal with] packaging and mailing. I find it a little exhausting.”

On January 4, 2016, Windy started the project that she’s now known for: The Year of Knots. “Most macramé is comprised of the same two or three knots over and over again,” she told us. “And that is why most macramé being done today looks so similar to everyone else’s. Because there’s only so much you can do with two or three knots. One day I woke up and realized that I needed to learn more knots, and that was the way my work could begin to speak for itself and more clearly reflect who I am.”

Windy taught herself a new knot every day throughout 2016. When she was finished with the knot, she photographed it, posted it to Instagram, and nailed it to the wall. “It wasn’t until two or three months into [the project] that I realized that the work was going to become a single piece of art.” Windy’s Instagram following grew as people tracked her progress. When the project finished, she had several publishers interested in a modern knotting book, a fine art gallery interested in hosting a solo show, and Facebook approached Windy about creating a second edition of The Year of Knots on their campus. It seemed Windy’s unique aesthetic and the ritual of the project had struck a chord.

One could argue that Windy’s circuitous path is visibly present in her art, as though her life’s journey is translated into the fibers of her installations—wandering, meandering, and resisting stasis with every curve. Perhaps that is one of the things that is most compelling about her art, the way it almost beckons to us, giving us permission to iterate, explore, and reshape our very existence again and again, just as Windy so bravely continues to do.

“We like to say, ‘It all happened in a flash,’ but, really, I feel that for the previous couple of years I had been laying the groundwork: taking classes, building a little bit of confidence ... I wasn’t forcing the project to come out of me, but there was something about my mindset that allowed the project to emerge. And I had set up my life in such a way that I was totally open to whatever was going to happen. I was literally following my muse and letting my creativity take whatever path it wanted to.”



Have you found that your work has been impacted by having a studio?

Windy: Oh yeah, that is such a good question. Nobody ever asks that, but it's HUGE. Because it has made me take it more seriously – not only because I'm paying rent. I mean, that's just a little part of it. But this is my place. This is my space where I make all the rules. I treat it like a job; I come here five days a week. The work has been very free. I'm very in my element. And I've gotten a ton of commissions and projects. Something about being in my own space has been very fertile. It's brought work to me, while also allowing me to make new bodies of work to put out into the world.

Did your parents consider themselves artists?

Windy: Uh-uh. No. They were pretty traditional Chinese parents. My dad is a military man. So were my grandfathers. My dad would do woodworking on the weekends, and my mom was a homemaker. Nobody really did art except my grandmother, who I am named after, so that's kind of nice. She had never done it full-time either. They were all weekend warriors.

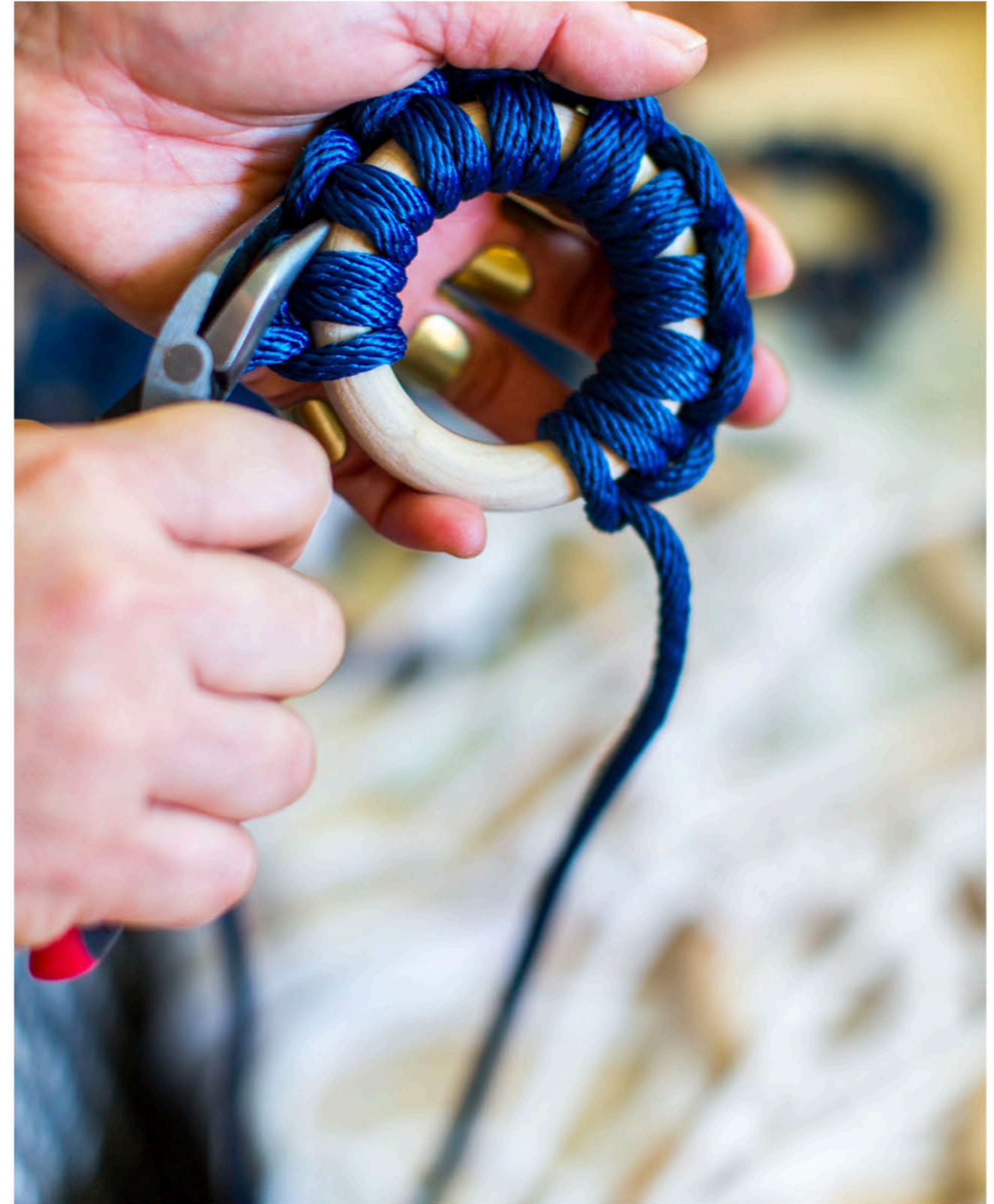
What medium did your grandmother work in?

Windy: She was a painter, and she did the most beautiful petit point. She and my father had the most beautiful design sense. I get that from my dad's side.

Do you still have some of her paintings?

Windy: I have all of her petit point. I made sure that I got them all when she passed, and they're all hanging up in my home. I wish I could show them to you.

“I get all my rope from a supplier in Ohio. I would have bought it locally if I could have, but men are so awful to women who want to buy rope. You have to go to a rigger or maritime supply shop to get quantities of rope, and they aren't friendly. (And I'm not the only one who has had that experience.) So I buy it online.”



by Maya Angelou

What are the unique benefits or challenges that come with building a business in the Bay Area?

Oakland is a special place with a real sense of community. I love living here and raising my son in such a diverse city.



CHAPTER SIX

words: CHELSEA SONKSEN | photography: MARISA VITALE

I met Christina Bryant a couple years ago when her company, St. Frank, hosted a pop-up shop up in Los Angeles. I moseyed into the store, drawn to the pattern on one of their pillows, and stopped to flip through Rebecca Atwood's book, which was displayed on the table. Somehow Christina and I began chatting about Rebecca's work. (I was a huge fan – still am – and Christina is friends with Becca.) I told Christina about *Bossladies*, and she immediately recommended women for future issues. We've featured a number of them; Christina has very good taste in brands. She also has an innate warmth and kindness. It is not at all surprising to me that her brand, St. Frank, is centered around hospitality, the home, and entertaining.

But let me share Christina's backstory and tell you about the magic that is St. Frank.





After studying Art History in college, Christina took a job at MoMA in New York. “I really thought I was going to work in the art world long-term and, you know, wear all black every day ... But I realized I was passionate about international development, which is really different than the art world in New York.” She moved to Rwanda to work with Partners in Health, an NGO whose mission is to provide a preferential healthcare option for the poor.

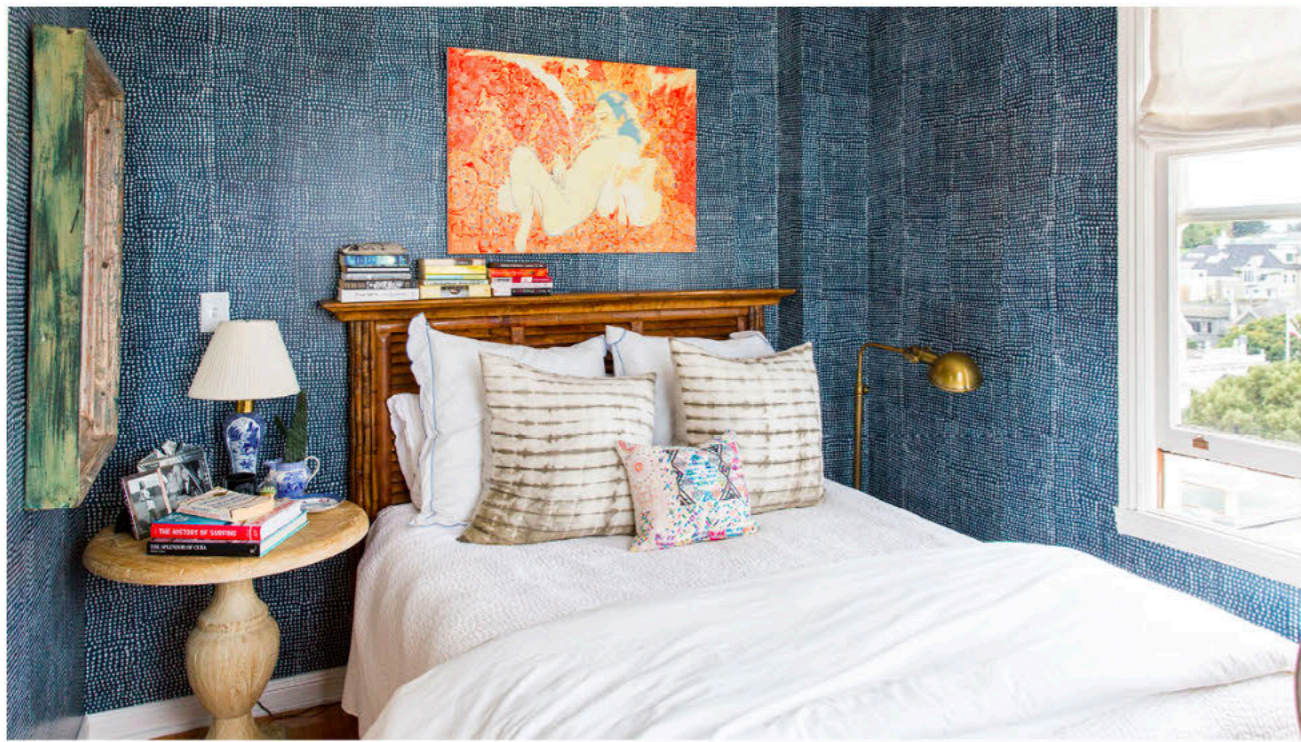
“[In Rwanda] I met the artisans in my community, and I realized a few things. One, there were amazing stories behind their crafts, and they were often women’s stories that told the history of the place. And [two], they were beautiful handwork, but not necessarily a western luxury product that would work once you got it home.” Christina began collaborating with the artisans to design apparel and accessories, not as a business venture of any kind, but for her own personal use. When she left Rwanda for Stanford Business School in 2009, Christina realized “we can give people health care and education, but what’s going to sustainably change their communities is going to be quality jobs.” Whatever she did next, she knew she wanted to be supporting quality jobs for people who didn’t have access to them.

When decorating her dorm room at Stanford, she had an aha moment. “I really wanted to create a space that told my story and spoke to my values, which are: 1) Travel around the world off the beaten path. 2) Have authentic products with stories behind them. 3) Source ethically. There really wasn’t a go-to source for [finding home goods like] that.”

Christina knew that other millennials had similar values and would want to decorate their home in the same way, but big decor brands weren’t serving that customer. “Millennials were about to enter the home-buying market at that time,” she said. “I thought the market opportunity was huge and the timing was urgent.” With that, the seed for St. Frank was planted.

Christina developed a business model in which she could work with artisans in underserved countries to design and create products for customers who wanted to decorate their home with objects that had authentic value and told a narrative. She decided to start the brand with one product – framed textiles – and she set off on a journey around the world to meet artisans she could partner with to create these meaningful pieces.

Now, five years in, St. Frank has expanded to a range of other categories including tabletop, fabric by the yard, and wallpaper. They even did a surfboard collaboration with shaper Gary Linden. Christina has raised three rounds of financing, opened four brick-and-mortar stores and eight pop-ups in different locations, and built a community of more than 450 artisan partners around the globe, who create unique pieces for St. Frank using ancient techniques and local materials.



CHRISTINA'S TIPS FOR Raising Capital

A WORD OF CAUTION:

“I think before raising money the biggest thing to consider is what your goals are for the business. Not all businesses require outside funding. And it doesn't even mean it's going to be a smaller business or that you're going to make less money ... I think if you can build a great business and own it, most people would prefer that ... When you're running a business, you always feel like you need more money than you have. When you take in outside funding, you're committing to doing exponential [times the] results than you would without that funding, so you feel just as resource-strapped as you would without funding.”

01.

Put together a business plan and a pitch deck. If you've never created a pitch deck before,

ask other folks who have raised money to share their deck as a model.

02.

Put together an Executive Summary that you don't mind circulating. I don't like to share my deck until I've met with someone [in person].

03.

Share your pitch deck on DocSend, so you can restrict people from downloading it, as well as see who downloaded it and which pages they spent time on.

04.

Have conversations with people who invest in businesses like yours. For example, I pretty much don't talk to VC firms because I don't think they are the right match for my business. I focus on angel investors and family offices that specifically invest in consumer brands because I think they understand my type of business and can support its growth.

05.

Reach out to everyone who might be interested and ask them to introduce you to other people. Shamelessly follow up.

06.

Plan to spend three to six months raising a round.

07.

Just as investors do their due diligence on your company, do your due diligence on investors. Ask what their other portfolio companies are. Make sure the founders of those businesses feel treated well and fairly by their investors.

FUN FACTS ABOUT

St. Frank

01.

St. Frank currently has nine full-time employees: six at the headquarters and three store managers.

02.

The founder of Build-A-Bear, Maxine Clark, is an investor in St. Frank. Maxine is also a mentor of Christina's and helps her think about curating innovative in-store experiences.

03.

St. Frank works with artisans in over two dozen countries – 85% of whom are women.

04.

Christina raised a friends-and-family round of 350k in financing to start the business. St. Frank ran on that money for two years.



01.

Christina's business partner, Steph, runs everything internal in the business: HR, operations, and finance, while she handles design, sales, and investor relations.

02.

She regularly hosts pizza parties at her home for her team.

03.

Christina's younger brother had his first child last year. Becoming his aunt was one of the highlights of her year, and spending time with him and her five-year-old niece helps her remember to put work down for a bit.

04.

Last September, Christina was traveling so much for work that she only slept in her own bed four nights throughout the month.

FUN FACTS ABOUT
Christina



stfrank.com

[@stfranktextiles](https://www.instagram.com/stfranktextiles)

What were the most difficult things you encountered as you built your business?

Learning to manage my stress and not waste time and energy worrying was one of the hardest things for me. I've found that sleeping eight hours a night, meditating/praying regularly, consciously dismissing fear, and telling myself positive messages helps.

What three books have influenced you most profoundly?

It's not in vogue in modern culture to admit this, but the New Testament of the Bible is the book that has influenced me most profoundly. I didn't grow up with a great experience in church and don't feel comfortable with Christian culture, but the message I found in the Bible through the life of Jesus allowed me to grow spiritually and develop my own view of

and relationship with God. That's something I keep coming back to and informs my life today.

Second, growing up, my dad often read *The Little Engine That Could* to me and emphasized the value of hard work. That's still one of the most influential books for me because of the early, consistent lesson that perseverance can bring unlikely things to fruition.

And, finally, *Native Son* had a big impact on me when I read it my senior year of high school. It helped me to consider the experience of people who are in some way different than me – in this case, a black man in America - who I may have misjudged. I think this book was the first step for me in becoming really passionate about social justice.

What is the best part of your day?

I love that no two days are the same, but overall a consistently great part of my day is calling my mom on the way to work. I can be myself and tell her what's going well or what's weighing on me, and she always makes me feel better. It also reminds me of my mom calling her parents on the way to school every day when I was young.

What are the unique benefits or challenges that come with building a business in San Francisco?

The benefit of building a business in San Francisco is that it's a hub of innovation, so it offers an amazing community of investors and other entrepreneurs who can support your journey. But San Francisco's distance from New York is sometimes a challenge, since that is where our industry is really hubbed. I've found myself taking a cross-country flight almost every week for the past year, which is pretty brutal.

Do you believe that politics and business should be separate? If not, how have you integrated politics into your business?

The underlying values of our business are rooted in social justice and supporting quality jobs for those around the world and locally who don't have easy access to quality jobs. Because that moral compass is essential to what we do, there is a shared sense by our team of our role in bettering our community and our world. Every business is different and I don't think that there is one hard and fast rule about the overlap between business and politics. That said, I want to create a company that encourages diversity, including diversity of thought, and I would not want someone to feel that working at, shopping from, or otherwise supporting St. Frank dictated party alignment, but rather a shared sense of responsibility in creating a better world. Personally, I think the social values of our business are left-aligned, but the means for creating social change are related to free trade, which historically (not under the current administration) is right-aligned. I believe business is more efficient than government, so we have a great opportunity to harness the power of business to create social change.



CHAPTER SEVEN

words: CHELSEA SONKSEN | photography: MARISA VITALE

Around the time her second son was born, Whitney Lundeen understood that she needed to leave her marriage. But as a single mom, she had to start earning money to support her small boys. She'd been out of the corporate world for more than four years, and she didn't feel equipped to return to her former career in commercial interior design. She was terrified.

In the midst of this fear and uncertainty, Whitney took her boys for a walk. Their neighborhood Walgreens had a "HIRING" sign in the window, and Whitney considered applying, willing to do whatever was necessary to support her boys. In the end, she decided to pursue a business idea that she'd had the year before: a dress line that would remind moms to play with their children, with pieces made from easy-to-care-for materials that wouldn't require dry cleaning.

On New Year's Eve in 2012, Whitney's family was sitting around talking about their goals for the coming year, and Whitney said she was going to make and sell ten dresses. "Learning how to make a dress was a pretty big obstacle for me, so I was pretty proud of that [number]." Her brother, who was at Stanford Business School at the time, convinced her to bump up that number to 100. While the idea of making 100 dresses was daunting, Whitney dove headfirst into her goal. "I gave myself a deadline: I said, *in six weeks I'm going to launch the website and in two weeks my sister is going to come take photos [of the prototypes].*"

Whitney named the company Sonnet James, a combination of the two names she had chosen for her children, had they been girls. For the next month, every day after she put the boys to bed, Whitney worked on her company. She read business books she'd bought on Amazon and taught herself how to pattern draft and sew. Before she had any prototypes of the dresses, she called her sister Remi to say she was buying her a plane ticket.

"Remi said, 'Don't you think we should wait until you have some dresses before we buy a plane ticket?'"

"And I said, 'No, because then I'll never make any dresses!'" Whitney laughed.





