



press clip



Impressive: Alana Chang Weirick and Lauren Chang Sommer at Moi Moi Jewellery
Picture: John Fotiadis

Creating a glittering future

Two sisters have turned a gem of an idea into a thriving business, writes

DIAMONDS may be a girl's best friend but, in times of economic downturn, showing a little restraint is in vogue. That doesn't mean you can't splash less cash for some equally impressive sparkles.

Sisters Lauren Chang Sommer and Alana Chang Weirick tapped into a lucrative market when they signed on as the exclusive wholesale distributor of the Charles & Colvard-created Moissanite brand for Australia.

Moissanite, which is touted as the most

brilliant jewel in the world at a fraction of the cost of diamonds, is not a synthetic diamond. Apparently, moissanite is a jewel in its own right. Discovered by French Nobel Prize-winner Dr Henri Moissan, moissanite, also known as silicon carbide, is a mineral found in limited quantities.

Lauren was the first to spot the potential of moissanite. When her parents returned from an overseas sojourn and showed off the pieces they had brought back with them, she formulated a business plan to

bring the brand to Australia. "I told Alana I wanted her help to launch a new business and I wanted it to be up before Christmas, which was five months away... it goes without saying she needed a little convincing," Lauren says.

Lauren was entering unfamiliar territory, but was passionate about the brand and had shown a flair for business. Aged 20, while completing a Bachelor of Art Theory at UNSW's College of Fine Arts, she founded Art Essentials with her now husband Justin Sommer.

"At the time we were looking at launching this business, I was 24 and Alana

was 22. We knew it was an amazing opportunity but we really didn't have the

finances to make it work and our parents decided to give us a loan," Lauren says.

"My parents had always been in business for themselves, so they encouraged it... we've since paid it back."

Having secured the rights for the brand in Australia, they could have concentrated on a wholesale business, but launched into retail with their inaugural Moi Moi store in the Queen Victoria Building in 2004.

In 2006, Moi Moi opened another shop in Hamilton, New Zealand, and the sisters now manage more than 200 jewellers across Australia and New Zealand.

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wholesaler, page 2**



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how to be a ...

Jewellery retailer/
wholesaler

Qualifications

Lauren Chang Sommer (pictured) and Alana Chang Weirick are both tertiary educated in fields not related with jewellery design



or business management but both their degrees, Alana's in communication and Lauren's in fine arts, assist with running their business.

Course

Australian Retailers Association (ARA) Diploma of Retail Management and TAFE NSW has a number of courses, although none is offered at the moment.

Cost

The ARA Diploma of Retail Management costs \$2995 for members and \$3250 for non-members.

From the inside

Despite their lack of experience in the jewellery business Lauren and Alana have had the imagination and determination to make their business a success.

"We really love working with jewellery," Lauren says. "And going into retail has meant that we can control how we want to market our business."

**More information: retail.org.au;
tafensw.edu.au**