

Jennifer, 33, has built up a successful business in just four years



Profile: Jennifer Jones

Leaving the fashion industry to start her own homewares business was the right move for this Sydney-based, Manila-born go-getter

A rmed with stints at global fashion brands Ralph Lauren and Nike, as well as a position as the Australian general manager for Diesel, Jennifer Jones decided in 2006 to go solo by setting up a fashion agency. Starting from a home office, her business Have You Met Miss Jones was born. But within a year, Jennifer shifted her focus to homewares, specialising in bone china products. Using her Filipino background to her advantage, she designs and manufactures her products in Manila, but runs her expanding business from a Sydney warehouse. We met Jennifer for a chat.

Q SO WHY THE MOVE FROM FASHION TO HOUSEWARE?

The move was more of a natural movement back to my roots and to what I grew up with. As my parents had a homewares company when I was growing up, I was used to being surrounded by products and also remember the buyers that used to come to the Philippines.

Q HAS THE MOVE PAID OFF FOR YOU?

The move has been really enjoyable but also in terms of the global financial climate, well-timed. As people's budgets have shrunk and they have begun to move away from

luxury goods, they are focusing more on nesting and being at home. Our products are at a price point where you can afford to buy something without breaking the bank, and yet still gain enjoyment from having it in your home.

Q WHY CHOOSE MANILA AS A BASE?

I wanted to support my country and also work with the people that I had seen my parents work with. I knew that the craftsmanship and attention to detail was superb in Manila. Also, unlike in China and other countries, they were able to do the small quantities that I needed when starting out.

Q HOW DO YOU KEEP UP WITH TRENDS AND WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION?

I read a lot of magazines and blogs and I also spend a lot of time travelling and exploring different retail environments, from museum stores to auction houses.

Q WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED FROM OWNING AND OPERATING YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

That you always need to trust your gut instinct and that you should never allow yourself to be bullied into a decision. ▶

the buzz **business**

You are always going to be approached by people who will try and tell you how to run your business. Heeding everything they say is the kind of mistake that can be very costly. Start small and don't worry too much about things like the fancy office or your business cards. The most important thing is getting your product out in the marketplace where it can start to work for you and make you money. It's all too easy to be swayed by the fancier aspects

of the business, but at the end of the day what you need is sales on the board.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OF COORDINATING

WORK BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES?

I'm lucky in a way as there isn't too much of a time difference between the two countries. What has been challenging is trying to get things done when you aren't there physically to

hurry things along or to do quality control. In the end, I had to hire someone to manage the physical aspects for me in Manila and be my one contact for all my suppliers.



YOU HAVE ESTABLISHED A STRONG BRAND. ANY PLANS TO BRANCH OUT FROM HOUSEWARE TO BECOME AN AUSSIE MARTHA STEWART?

I am definitely looking into

other areas of business and would love to branch out into soft furnishings. Already, we're starting an eco-range of products with a selection of bottles that are made from old fluorescent light tubes. I've also been approached by stores in the United States and the United Kingdom, so I'm thinking of expanding our business into those countries this year. 🇦🇺

For stockist details, visit www.haveyoumetmissjones.com.au



ON THE ROAD

Manila

Thanks to regular trips to the Philippines capital for trade fairs and to see her manufacturers, Jennifer is full of handy tips

Best way to spend an afternoon

"Take one of Carlos Celdran's walking tours through old Manila – the area known as Intramuros. Carlos has a wealth of knowledge about Manila and will talk you through from pre-Hispanic Manila to the present day. He is also full of anecdotes and, in true Filipino style, a snack is provided." <http://celdrantours.blogspot.com>

Best spot for *merienda*

"Filipinos love to eat! *Merienda* is the meal between lunch and dinner and the best place to sample local delights is Via Mare. A must-try is *bibingka*, wood fire-cooked rice cake in banana leaves and covered with butter, cheese and grated coconut. Also try *pancit*, a noodle dish, and *lumpia*, a fresh bamboo shoot spring roll." www.viamare.com.ph

Best jetlag remedy

"With Spaholics Home Spa, you can enjoy the full spa experience without leaving your hotel room. Trained therapists arrive armed with massage beds, fresh linen and relaxing music. Prices are really low – about a quarter of what you'd pay at a hotel spa. An hour-long massage is PHP500 (\$\$16/A\$12)." www.spaholics.com tel: +63 (0)2 633 5880,

Best houseware shopping

"Two major department stores here both have great houseware departments, where you can pick up traditional crafts. Rustans and Shoemart both offer shells, wooden bowls and carvings, placemats and coasters, and native fabrics. They are located next to each other in the Glorietta area of Makati. I visit them often." www.rustans.com, www.sm-shoemart.com

Best spot for a nightcap

"A new place in Fort Bonifacio is CAV Wine Shop and Café. Their Enomatic Wine Dispenser has a selection of 24 wines, with serving options ranging from a tasting to a half glass or glass. Obtain a card from the staff to dispense your wine. Then just settle the bill at the end of the night." Quadrant 8, Bonifacio High St. tel: +63 (0)2 856 1798