

THE AUSTRALIAN
Women's Weekly

How Busy Women **GET RICH**

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AWW LIFESTYLE



07

FAITH WILL MOVE MOUNTAINS

A decade ago, Lorraine Allanson had “a comfortable position in Sydney’s corporate world”, handling global acquisitions, business takeovers and patents for a number of well-known companies. Yet a very different world kept calling her – “like a whisper in my ear”, she says. It was the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney.

“The Mountains have always had a special place in my heart, from horse-riding in the Megalong Valley in my early 20s to then being proposed to there by my husband, Roger,” she says.

Next the whisper said, “Buy a weekender”. So Lorraine bought Varena, an historic home which she set about restoring, inspired by the glory days of the Blue Mountains with dashes of the Roaring Twenties and *The Great Gatsby* (the Robert Redford film version) thrown in. “I did such a good job of it, my friends were in awe,” she says.

By now, the whisper was turning into a mighty holler. Over the next three frenzied years, Lorraine had acquired three more properties to work on and so she quit the corporate world for good in 2006.

“My vision was to provide luxurious self-contained accommodation for discerning travellers and to recreate the golden age of the Blue Mountains,” says Lorraine. So Mountain Whispers was born, a boutique collection of beautifully restored historic homes that have gone on to win many tourism awards. Two – Varena and Leura Rose – were chosen as locations for the TV show *My Kitchen Rules* in 2012. The other properties are called Strawberry Patch and – ahem – The Gatsby.

Girls’ getaways and romantic getaway packages are popular fare. “If there is going to be a marriage proposal, everything is staged to create the perfect environment,” Lorraine says. “Receiving a text advising the proposal went to plan with a big ‘yes’ – it’s mission complete!”

Q: What was your best business decision or proudest moment, and what do you regret?

My proudest moment would be attaining the status of 5-star luxury accommodation gold winner in the Blue Mountains for three years in a row and then going on to win bronze in the NSW Tourism Awards, despite not having any formal qualifications in the tourism industry – simply a dream and a passion. My only regret would have to be not following my dream much sooner.

Q: How has the business grown?

Since inception in 2006, we have grown from one Blue Mountains property to four in total. We have seen a 45 per cent increase in turnover since we started, the business’ net profitability has increased by almost a third and plans are underway to appoint a permanent manager to oversee the daily operations.

The business has expanded with the addition of a luxury day spa targeted at girls’ and couples’ getaway stays, and

we’ve also engaged the services of a luxury branding specialist, public relations assistant and a business coaching mentor.

“Word of mouth is the best referral, so dress and speak to impress.”

Q: How do you reward yourself for the time and effort you put in?

Running my own business 100 kilometres from home and a household with three boys, and assisting my husband, who also runs his own business from home, doesn’t come without its fair share of stress. Finding enough “me” time is not always doable, although I try to indulge in a massage and pedicure every two weeks or so. Running accommodation is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year business, so I’m always on call, although we do try to squeeze in a short break or two throughout the year and those moments spent with my boys I absolutely cherish. I’m still waiting and dreaming about that three-month

European vacation, though ... perhaps for my 10-year anniversary?

Q: What’s your advice for others who have or are thinking of starting a business?

Ensure you have a thorough and comprehensive business plan. Research your market and seek advice from experts in their field. Research relevant industries, enter numerous awards, gaining exposure and recognition in your industry, and network as much as you can. Word of mouth is the best referral for you and your business, so dress and speak to impress, maintaining the integrity of your brand at all times.

Q: How do you handle seasonal fluctuations?

Since the bushfires in October 2013, overcoming the bushfire stigma has been a challenge, as is encouraging people to visit during spring and summer. People tend to think of the Blue Mountains solely as a winter destination with romantic nights around log fires, but it’s a great place to escape the summer heat – we have an abundance of waterfalls and crystal clear pools to swim in, and virgin wilderness that would alleviate anyone’s stress and strains.

Q: What’s the best part of your job?

Playing a part in so many people’s lives. All the good and bad times that we have are captured and stored in our memory, and what I do at Mountain Whispers is provide my guests with an experience which leaves an impression for all the right reasons – this is simply priceless.

As well as all the marriage proposals, another area very close to my heart is creating the perfect environment for those healing after cancer treatments and those terminally ill seeking somewhere to create those memories.

Mountain Whispers is offering readers of How Busy Women Get Rich the chance to win a luxury escape. To enter, visit mountainwhispers.com.au/ww and follow the prompts.

Lorraine Allanson

OWNER AND MANAGING
DIRECTOR, MOUNTAIN WHISPERS

