

Bedtime stories



Vanessa Sofia always had a fascination with pyjamas and, coming from a family of fashion-focused entrepreneurs, she knew she wanted to run her own business and make it on her own. *Australian Giftguide* talks to Vanessa about her blossoming pj business, Gingerlilly.

Q: How did the name Gingerlilly come to be?

A: It took me a long time to come up with it actually. I knew from the beginning that I wanted the name to be two words put together and I knew that I wanted one word to mean sweet and one to mean spicy, so finally I came up with Gingerlilly. I wanted people, when they even thought of, or said the word Gingerlilly, to really envision something spicy and sweet.

Q: What was your background before launching Gingerlilly?

A: My background is in design and I've worked for Country Road and lived for three years in Milan where I worked for Prada. Working at these businesses has helped me to develop mine, particularly when it comes to my experience with fabrics and fits. I have also been lucky enough to have two fantastic mentors in the business - my mother and father. They ran a children's clothing company called Prodigee for over 40 years that was really big in the 70s, 80s and 90s. They had over 400 accounts and 18 retail stores in Australia. While other kids were busy playing after school, I'd hang out at the family factory, absorbing everything around me, and then couldn't wait to join the business when I left school.

Q: What made you decide to start your own business?

A: Being the daughter of successful business parents, I always had a great need to get out there and make it on my own. You question yourself when you go into a family business and rise in the ranks within it, because you're always wondering whether you have what it takes to make a business a success on your own. I was grooming myself really, because I always knew, even when I worked with my parents, that I wanted to run my own business. I also grew up with a working mother and I wanted to create a similar, great environment for my own children. Now I have a baby, I love juggling work and motherhood. As they say, if you want something done, give it to a busy person. It's all about time management and the adrenalin and passion for what you do.

Q: Do you have a creative process that you stick by?

A: My creative process begins with always knowing what colours and trends are coming through for the next season. Some may think this is not important but the thing about Gingerlilly is that although it is sleepwear it is also fashionably right which makes it perfect for lounging around. Overseas travel, magazines and lots of local shopping all give me inspiration. We work from an office in West Melbourne where we start by creating fabric prints that we like. We buy the occasional fabric but most of the prints are designed in-house. Once we have our fabric prints we lay them all out and group them into story boards. From here we decide which base cloths will be used. It's funny how you just know after years of working with fabrics what print works in satin, silk or cotton and whether it should have a shine or be matt. These are the things that make it all work! Once the fabrics are established we then begin designing the styles, and we always keep in mind at this point which styles



worked well for us in the past and create a replacement or new version as well as adding in fresh new looks. I work together with my mother who has great style and flair and recently I have employed Nancy Casuscelli who is very much on our wavelength.

Q: What are your tips for successful wholesaling?

A: Simple. Good product, good value and good service.

Q: What are some of the Gingerlilly highlights so far?

A: It would have to be the fantastic feedback we get from people both locally and internationally such as emails from people overseas who have purchased the product in Australia while on holidays and are so in love with it that they are tracking us down to buy more. Just the other day a gentleman from England emailed us to say he was surprising his wife with a new pair for Christmas. Our distributor in New Zealand is having great success with the product and just the other day I sent an order to Switzerland. The lady bought a pair of pjs for herself while on holidays and wanted to stock them in her store in Verbier.

Q: What is some of the best advice that you have been given in life?

A: Be good at what you do and do it because you love it and the rest will come. This was passed on to me from my father. And I have also learnt from my parents and through working at Prada and Country Road that a good business needs to be really well structured right from the top and for that structure to filter down smoothly through the layers of the organisation from the top, so that everything functions well. If there is passion and organisation at the top, then it filters down and through the business. I'm not that big yet, but I'll get there!

Q: How important is a great website to your business?

A: Our website is vital to the business. At a wholesale level it's a great tool to keep retailers up to date on what has sold out and what new styles have been released. From a branding perspective, it is just so important. My advice to any new business would be to spend the money on a great website as it is a representation of your product, standard and quality. When I started Gingerlilly I made sure I had a graphic designer put the website together from start to end. He directed the photo shoot and catalogue layouts and posters and actually still does. I also recommend using a great photographer, I know it can be so expensive to start a business but my belief is that you must really believe in what you are doing and be confident that you will be successful, so do it right, right from the beginning.

Q: What's new for Gingerlilly?

A: We have had a great reaction to the launch of Gingerlilly for Men. There were always so many requests for men's ranges at trade shows and I think there is a real lack of men's gift out there, so it just made sense. Women love buying them for men. We've had such great feedback. And at the February show we're launching Gingerlilly Baby. The beautiful thing about the range is that the pjs come presented in a box that can be kept as a keepsake box. The box will be just as special as what is inside. It's all very exciting! 🐻



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