

woman's home

NEW TRAVEL SIZE

OCTOBER 2008 £3.40

REAL ME

The wine & chocolate

Diet

Lose weight & enjoy!

The ONE change that **BOOSTS YOUR MEMORY**

Anti-ageing treatments **WHAT WORKS?**



GOK WAN

Yes he can find your fashion style

LORRAINE KELLY
I'll never forget where I came from

NEW!
FROM ROASTS TO TRIFLE
18 pages of *British classics reinvented*

21 ways

to bring autumn into your home from £5.99

the makeover issue

YOU ASKED FOR...

- + A BRAND NEW LOOK
- + MONEY OVERHAUL
- + BETTER BEAUTY ROUTINE
- + A LIFESTYLE CHANGE

SAVE!
20% OFF
AT JESIRÉ PLUS
travel deals on UK breaks

WIN A LUXURY CAR OR £10,000 CASH!

533035



10 >

9 771753 793020

w&h NEW DIRECTIONS

We overcame bad times to create a business

Three women tell Emma Pritchard how divorce, redundancy and burn out made them try something totally different for an exciting new beginning

DAWN SMITH, 46, lives in Guildford with her two children, Charley, 22, and Lily, 13. "A few years ago I left my job as a senior designer to spend time with my children and explore the possibility of turning a love of flowers into a career. I was fed up with my commute and had fewer opportunities to be creative in my job as the industry changed.

I signed up to an NVQ course in floristry, spending one day at college in Twickenham and freelancing on design projects for the other four days. That year was heaven, but then everything changed drastically.

I'd been married for 17 years when things went wrong. We'd drifted apart and our lives were going in different directions. Having to provide for two small children was terrifying, but forced me to reassess my situation. I needed a reliable income, but couldn't juggle my former career with life as a single mum.

I'd already sold some of my flower arrangements and thought, "Why not take control and set up my own business?" I chose to specialise in artificial silk flowers

because I felt the market for fresh stems was under threat from supermarket chains. I looked online and couldn't find any other retailers in stylish artificial arrangements, which reinforced my decision.

My partner and I sold our house, and split the money. I moved into a rented property

"BEING ON MY OWN AFTER A DIVORCE MADE ME MORE DETERMINED TO MAKE MY SILK FLOWER BUSINESS SUCCEED"

and got a loan for my start-up costs. I searched local estate agents for retail rentals and found one in the upmarket Claygate area of Surrey.

The loan covered the rent and paid

to refit the shop as a showroom.

I attended trade shows to find suppliers of silk flowers and chose a few in Europe, particularly in Holland and Belgium, where the quality was especially high. Working with more than one supplier gives me a mix of styles, which makes my displays look natural.

I approached local offices and restaurants and had stalls at events like the Spirit of Christmas Fair. The biggest hurdle was changing people's



Dawn's flowers can be seen in restaurants and celebrity homes



The beauty is ...



FACT
FILE

OLD JOB: Senior designer of childrenswear.

NEW JOB: Director of RTfact.

START-UP COSTS: £20,000.

FIRST YEAR'S TURNOVER: £120,000 and last year's turnover was in excess of £320,000.

WORST MISTAKE: Trusting clients too much. One of my first contracts went into liquidation still owing me money and I almost went under.

BEST MOVE: Keeping to my business plan and not getting led astray.

TOP TIP: Pay attention to your staff. Businesses, especially small ones, depend on a reliable workforce.

flowers.co.



preconceptions about artificial flowers, but when they saw how realistic my displays were they realised they could be stylish and beautiful. Business spread by word of mouth and we never spend more than £2,000 a year on advertising. As the orders came in I was able to buy more exotic flowers and this generated interest in my work.

I started hiring my arrangements to shops and show homes, which added another outlet to my business. Although I had regular clients, I didn't pay myself a salary, just expenses, until the end of the first year, and

any profit went back into the company. I also needed to hire staff to cope with demand, and took on two qualified florists shortly after opening to help with orders and deliveries.

There have been times when I've questioned what I was doing, but I kept going for the sake of my children. I suppose not having anyone to fall back on made me even more determined to succeed. Working for myself is all I hoped it would be. It's challenging, but I have more time to spend with my girls and that makes it worthwhile." Visit rtfactflowers.co.uk. >>