



RISING TIDE

Isabella Macpherson on a new wave of women entrepreneurs

Isabella Macpherson up-shifted from advertising creative to CEO. She talks about grit, graft, gumption and the lessons learnt from other successful women along the way.

My family instilled a work ethic in me early on, and I have been fascinated by women who juggle and succeed ever since. My thirst for the entrepreneurial started at Edinburgh University. I did every type of work experience under the sun, and while a runner on an advertising shoot wrote to the then-MD of the newly formed M&C Saatchi (then a small but hugely dynamic agency), insisting that he had to interview me, that I could only work at his agency and that my whole life had been a preparation for that moment. Two terrifying interviews later and I got the job.

At M&C Saatchi two mantras were instilled in me – “nothing is impossible” and “the brutal simplicity of thought” – and while working at the agency I set up a luxury food and wine e-commerce site, chaired by hotelier Sir Rocco Forte. I was head-hunted from the agency and left the e-commerce business (which went hand-in-hand with the then boyfriend) having learnt valuable lessons about setting up a company and how a huge range of blue-chip brands operated.



Beauty entrepreneur Charlotte Tibury. Credit: Charlotte Tibury

In short, all of these women honed their craft, paid their dues and got really good at what they do.



The Cordwainers-trained shoemaker Sophia Webster. Credit: Hazlett Beard

Fast forward ten-plus years – and the experience of having my own agency (co-founded with a brilliant mother of three), which built businesses through creative strategy – to today. Along the way, I’ve met a number of amazing female entrepreneurs. Here are my thoughts on the key to their success:

Learn your trade

Azzi Glasser has spent twenty-five years in the perfume business creating fragrances for an array of blue-chip names from Alexander McQueen to Bella Freud Parfums, from Johnny Depp to Orlando Bloom, winning numerous awards along the way. She trained as a perfumer and has worked in, and learnt intimately, every aspect of the business. She knows her onions.

The shoemaker Sophia Webster mastered her craft at Cordwainers, London College of Fashion, and then as an

apprentice to Georgina Goodman and Nicholas Kirkwood. Within a few months of launching her own label, she had been named Emerging Footwear Designer of the Year, was on The Times Power List as someone to watch and was tipped for great things by Marie Claire.

Josie Rourke (current artistic director of The Donmar Warehouse) meanwhile trained under Sam Mendes, Michael Grandage, Phyllida Lloyd and Sir Nicholas Hytner. In short, all of these women honed their craft, paid their dues and got really good at what they do. It might sound obvious, but when (some) interns expect to go straight to the top job – leap-frogging that bothersome business of learning, fine-tuning, putting in the hours – it is worth repeating.

Dare to be different

People have been wearing make-up for 6,000 years: it is used in almost every culture in the world. Along comes Charlotte Tilbury, and suddenly we look at make-up afresh. We queue up around the block to buy it. Why? Because suddenly, after years of over-complexity, here are simple, brilliant, ready-made looks that work, accompanied by videos which show us how to master them. And Charlotte's mantra? "What really drives me is sharing the power of make-up with every woman."

Azzi Glasser said of the launch of her first own perfume brand, Agent Provocateur Parfum with Joe Corré and Serena Rees, "I launched Agent Provocateur with a fragrance that was the opposite of worldwide trends. It was a big risk." A risk that paid off, resulting in a \$20 million turnover in seven years, numerous global awards and distribution in more than sixty countries.

Another female entrepreneur, fashion designer Roksanda Ilincic, took a risk with her bold colour-blocking while all her contemporaries on the London scene – Peter Pilotto, Mary Katrantzou, Jonathan Saunders – were championing complex prints. Roksanda was named Business Woman of The Year by Harper's Bazaar in 2014, has gained prestigious, international investors and is stocked in forty countries worldwide.



Josie Rourke, artistic director of the Donmar Warehouse. Credit: Helen Maybanks

Balancing coffee with stillness and counteracting stillness with coffee.



Perfumer Azzi Glasser spent 25 years creating fragrances for other brands before going it alone. Credit: Chuck Noble chucknoble.com

Tough it out

"Saying 'yes' to directing shows that frightened me and I didn't know how to do in the belief that I could work hard to work it out. Standing up to some bullies." That's how artistic director Josie Rourke describes her early days as a theatre director. "It's all about finding a way to make things work without compromising what you believe in" says Sophia Webster. Sophia's girlish, exotic, playful designs, pitched at a lower price point than her high-fashion competitors, immediately put her on the map and created a new market.

Have good people around you

Talent attracts talent. Charlotte Tilbury is praised for her creativity, flair and drive. Her CEO, a former partner at McKinsey & Co, Demetra Pinsent, has acted as an advisor and mentor to British luxury businesses, and is universally praised by investors and colleagues for her business acumen. Josie Rourke has a unique partnership with her dynamic, charismatic executive producer Kate Pakenham.

Do it 24/7

"Balancing coffee with stillness and counteracting stillness with coffee" is how Josie Rourke describes her working mode. People who know these women talk about how they are committed mothers but that their (other) child is their career. They live and breathe their businesses. Just look at their Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat feeds, their circle of friends, their travels: their business is embedded in their lives and their family life from the moment they wake up in the morning to the moment they go to bed.



Isabella Macpherson is the co-Founder of B&B Entrepreneurs, 'a dynamic network, forum and programme for entrepreneurial women'. She is also the co-founder of Arts Co, a strategic consultant to the BFC Fashion Trust, a trustee of The Bush Theatre as well as Chair of the theatre's Development Council and is on the International Development Council of the British Film Institute. Isabella is the mother of two boys and partner of Malcolm Gooderham. @isabellamacpherson

Main image: Roksanda Ilincic. Credit: Harry Carr