

# Enterprising DESIGNERS

There are many reasons for exploring your own business venture: self-expression, greater creative control, a more diversified business model or perhaps the identification of a particular product or service that would be beneficial to the public that doesn't yet exist.

While many are content to work on staff in a creative firm, in-house at a company requiring creative services or running a consultancy, others are looking for a way to utilize their unique set of interests and skills, inside and outside of visual communications, to produce a product or service and create a more fulfilling career in the long run.

The following six firms represent a variety of business models. Some are adjunct businesses to existing design consultancies. In others the designers have chosen to put all their energy into their new venture. What they have in common is a lot of determination and a lot of hard work.

by Patrick Coyne

## Dinah Coops Naturally Modern Sustainable Design

After twenty years as an art director, designer and creative director, Dinah Coops started her Seattle, Washington-based business in 2007 to create a collection of useful home products that combine modern design sensibility and sustainability.

"I began researching sustainable materials and practices and fairly early on ran across PaperStone, a wonderful product made in the Pacific Northwest out of recycled paper and petroleum-free resin used predominantly for countertops," she said. "PaperStone became the outlet for my first products, which were a series of silk-screened coasters and tablemats."

For Coops, a primary challenge is that the U.S. economy still does not easily support a business trying to be sustainable. "Finding materials that are toxin-free or fabric made in the U.S. is difficult," Coops said. "Even when I do find sustainable materials, they are often extremely high-priced. My designs are well received, but being committed to sustainability consumes a great deal of my time and results in higher-priced products. It would be far easier and cheaper to just manufacture in developing nations like so many do."

Coops started out by selling directly to local retailers, which built a solid local base in Seattle and the Northwest. She said, "I've also participated in local design shows. We have an excellent modern craft venue in Seattle called Urban Craft Uprising, which supports local artists and is a great place to both sell and gain direct feedback from customers. I've also promoted my product through submissions to different media such as magazines and design blogs. This year, I participated in the New York International Gift Fair in order to reach retailers outside the Northwest more directly."

## Giacini Atelier

San Diego, California-based designer Juliana de Freitas-Draper started Giacini Atelier in 2007 shortly after her grandmother, Catherine Giacini, passed away. "She designed gowns in New York in the 1920s and her impeccable taste was contagious," de Freitas-Draper said. "I have been surrounded by fabric my whole life, sewing with my grandmother and in later years designing textiles for American and European markets. When I looked at the types of fabric bags in the market, I noticed they were either too bohemian in style or always had leather trim. A few of the many things that makes us different from other labels are that we manufacture exclusively in the

Right: "My goal is well-designed, functional, everyday products that are also sustainable: non-toxic, long-lasting and locally-produced" said designer Dinah Coops. "My first products were a series of silk-screened coasters and tablemats. Since then, I've developed extensions based on feedback and simple considerations of related products. An easy extension was napkins. Another was to make pendants out of my PaperStone scraps. Within a short period, they became a popular part of my collection." Charlotte Westley, photo styling; Dinah Coops Design (Seattle, WA), client.

