



Beslan's children speak

Five years after
the siege, they tell
their stories
for the first time

It was a bit of a pipe dream

Losing or leaving a job needn't be the end of the world. It can sometimes lead to the fulfilment of a long-standing ambition, as three fledgling designers reveal



Laurie Robertson

LAURIE ROBERTSON

I was working at a trends forecasting company when they laid me off just after Christmas. My boyfriend was made redundant a few days later, from his job in advertising. I'd always had this idea for a company selling homewares and outdoor accessories inspired by low-budget, 70s British camping holidays, but I never had the time to get it off the ground, and it seemed obvious to use this opportunity. That's how Anorak (anorakonline.co.uk) was born.

We sell sleeping bags, cushions, picnic blankets, bedding: I studied print textiles at the Royal College of Art, and some of these designs go back to my Masters degree. Anorak is about being affordable, with a low carbon footprint. In this climate, people are buying things that are more functional.

When we started, I was terrified,

but that generated a lot of energy. My brother joined us, and the three of us now run the business together.

Starting up in a recession has been a worry, but all our manufacturing is in the UK, and we've found people willing to work with us even though we're small. They're worried about what's going on in their industry, too, and are happy to have people who are passionate about something.

It's been stressful - it's like keeping up with a snowball - but working on a project you love makes all the difference. My parents have been really supportive, and happy to see us all working together; Mum even helps with the accounts. It does make you appreciate each other in a different way. It feels as if you're building something for your family, more so than a nine-to-five. But it's bloody hard work.

SHELLEY MCDONALD

I lost my job at a film website last November. A few years earlier, I'd done an upholstery course and made a fabric screen for my home, and lots of people said I should do it as a business. At the time it was a bit of a pipe dream but when I lost my job, my fiance said, "Why don't you start today?"

A carpenter friend made me some frames and I got going - the design is a traditional three-section screen, covered in luxurious fabric I sourced in Liberty. I did worry if this was the right thing to do, but I'm happy with the change of direction. Having my own business now, Frou-Frou & Claude (froufrouandclaude.com), is a dream situation in so many ways, but everything comes down to you. It has shifted my focus from the experience of being made redundant to something I feel passionate about. If the business takes off, I'll be happy.



Shelley McDonald

In this climate, people are buying things that are more functional



Franziska Wodicka

FRANZISCA WODICKA

I was a landscape architect on maternity leave when I came up with the idea of transforming old drawers into new pieces of furniture. I did some research and found out that secondhand furniture dealers save drawers when the original piece of furniture falls apart. I've always loved drawers - they hold stories as well as things, and turning them into free-standing shelves or cabinets brings out their character. So when a local shop became vacant, I jumped, using my savings and money borrowed from friends to start my business, Schublade (schublade.de). I get drawers from antique dealers, though sometimes people leave them in front of the shop for me - I have about 800 in stock. The pieces I make are for special objects - for a bedside, say, or for keys by the front door - and I always leave any writing or marks on them, to show their history.

A local furniture maker produces the frames, then I have them sealed with white laminate. I always had a romantic idea of selling my work in my own shop, and thought it would be a more flexible working arrangement now that I have a child. But there's nothing romantic about it - it's so much work. Sometimes I think of going back to the security of a salary, but then a customer is full of praise, or I get a nice email, and I stick with it.

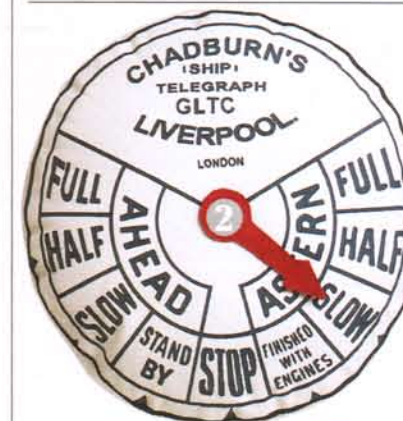
In some ways it's similar to my old job - it's about composition and working to a brief. You respect and work with the materials as you do in a garden, and it gives me the same satisfaction. But the results are much faster, and it's so nice to give old forgotten drawers a new home.

Interviews by Zoe Deleuil and Ros Anderson



Wish list

NAUTICAL



- 1 Rustic and practical, and uses 8m of rope; door stop, £59, from notonthehighstreet.com.
- 2 Too cute for kids only; nautical telegraph cushion, £15, from Great Little Trading Company, gltc.co.uk.
- 3 Tide and time clock, £36.50, from Interior Heaven, interiorheaven.net.
- 4 Four striped plates fit for the captain's table; £34/set, from John Lewis, johnlewis.com.
- 5 For that relaxed yacht vibe; Lindos bedspread (reversible organic cotton), £104, from Toast, toast.co.uk.