

ENTREPRENEUR  
SPECIAL ISSUE

# BLISS *Victoria*

DECORATING ~ ENTERPRISING WOMEN ~ TRAVELING ~ ENTERTAINING

## *Home, Sweet Home*

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paper goods, lace,  
porcelains, and  
accessories



SOUR-CREAM CAKE  
WITH WHIPPED  
VANILLA FROSTING  
page 86

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2012

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LIVING YOUR PASSIONS  
TIPS FROM OUR FAVORITE ENTREPRENEURS





ERIN BENZAKEIN



LISA SCHROEDER

# BLISS *Victoria*

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2012

## THE BUSINESS of BLISS

In our annual salute to remarkable businesswomen, we present nine who have channeled their passions into profits.

*Possessing an entrepreneurial spirit, a creative sensibility, and an unwavering belief in themselves, these successful business owners took a leap of faith to pursue professions they love. Their personal journeys may inspire you to realize a long-held dream of your own.*



CAROLINE REEHL



DENISE PORCARO



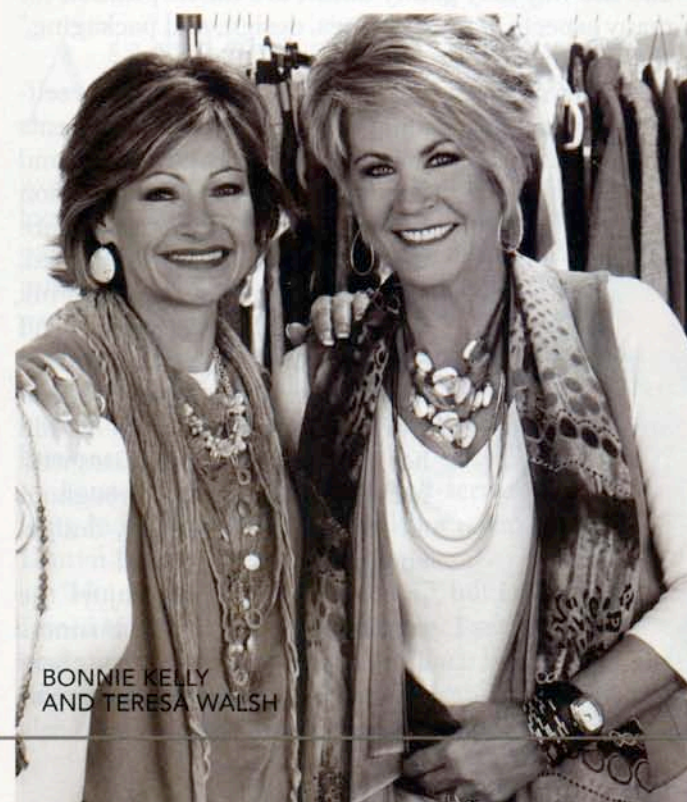
KATHRYN KLAR



LAUREN LIESS

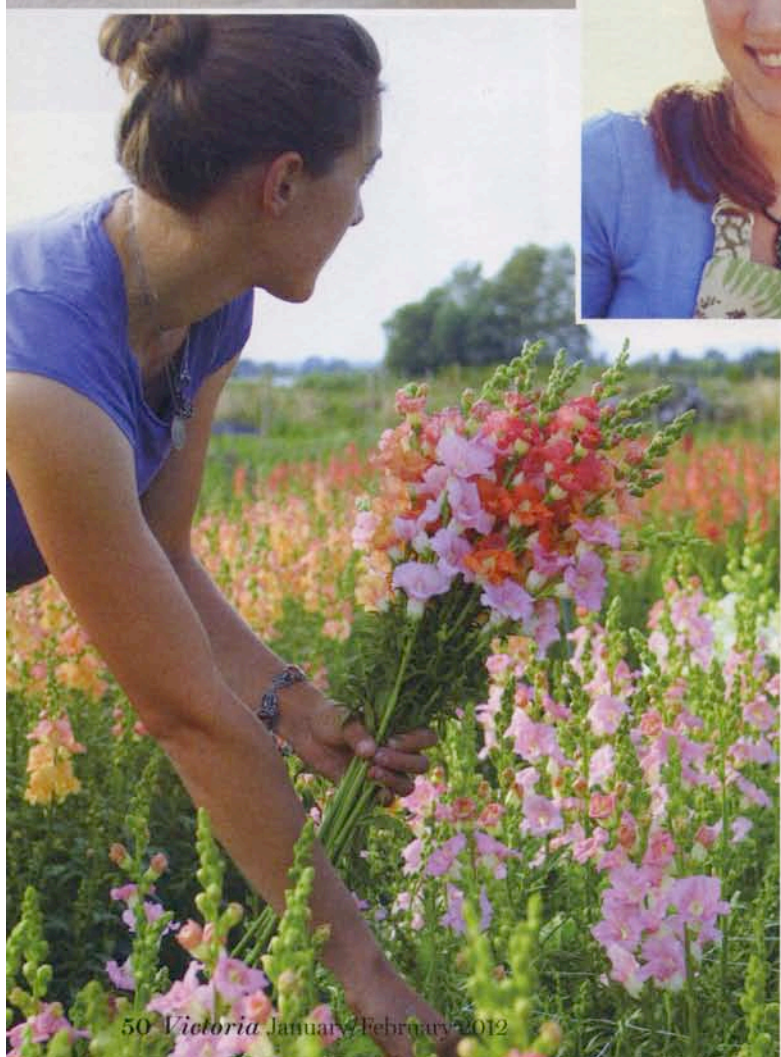


SHANNA MURRAY



BONNIE KELLY  
AND TERESA WALSH





*“Building a successful business takes an enormous amount of energy, but if you’re doing what you love, the process is thrilling. Don’t be afraid to fail! Although failure can be brutal on your ego, it is a big part of creating a thriving company.”*

**ERIN BENZAKEIN**

Floret | Mount Vernon, Washington

Living in a city, Erin Benzakein longed for a little plot of land where she could indulge her love of nature and gardening. As a twenty-something, she alleviated that desire by starting a small landscaping company with a friend. Helping others develop and nurture their lawns and gardens made her urban lifestyle more tolerable.



“My work that kept my days full was only a temporary fix. Shortly after my daughter was born, the urge to have my own land became so strong that we finally left the city in search of a quieter, simpler, more earth-based life,” Erin states. “Although it was an insane amount of work turning an acre of lawn into a thriving garden, I was having the time of my life!”

Erin’s efforts on her land included cultivating a massive vegetable garden, tending flocks of chickens and ducks, and managing an orchard,

hundreds of berry bushes, and numerous overflowing flower beds. In addition, she found time to teach herself canning and mastered the art of composting while continuing to landscape part time. She tested a variety of home-commerce ideas, from free-range organic eggs and vegetable transplants to heirloom apples and fancy baby vegetables.

But her success story happened by accident. When a long, double row of sweet peas planted in the back corner of her vegetable garden produced a bumper crop, Erin started sharing the surplus of fragrant blooms. Eventually, the word got out about her bounty, and someone ordered a jar of flowers for a friend. Erin delivered the bouquet herself.

“I was so nervous—not sure if I had filled the jar full enough, wondering what I should say and if I had charged too much or not enough,” she recalls. “But when the door opened and I clumsily handed the woman the flowers, she took one whiff, and tears welled



up in her eyes. In that moment, she was transported back to a time of happiness, childhood summers, and her grandmother’s garden. And I was forever changed. I knew I had found something worth doing.”

Erin’s thriving company, Floret, provides organic bouquets and flower bundles to high-end grocery stores, such as Whole Foods, in the Greater Seattle area. She also runs a weekly subscription service in the city and makes centerpieces, wreaths, and garlands in addition to doing some weddings and events.

After her initial “aha moment,” Erin took time to educate herself about the market she planned to enter. She shadowed buyers, took notes on packaging and pricing, studied displays, devoured trade magazines, asked questions, corresponded with people in the industry, and “really, really listened.” Six months later, she had found a theme. Rather than using her idea of what the floral market needed, she examined what the industry lacked and then came up with a way to fill that void. The landscaper-turned-floral-gardener discovered that by following her heart and filling her life with things she deeply loved, everything fell into place.

“I heeded the advice of organic guru MaryJane Butters, who suggested that rather than branding a logo or name, I brand *myself*,” Erin says. “I must confess that when I adopted her approach, Floret suddenly exploded! Don’t be afraid to fail. I have crashed and burned more times than I can count, but each humiliating experience has made me stronger, wiser, and, ultimately, a better businesswoman.”

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH MICHELE M. WAITE