

Meet the young and aspiring interior designer that brings old-world flavor with a new twist

OMOGENEIA



By Aphrodite Kotrotsios

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Tartan & Toile is a boutique interior design firm serving Philadelphia and its surrounding areas. It was founded by a young Greek-Irish-American, Lucy (Paschos) O'Brien, the principal interior designer. Her firm not only focuses on redesigning a space from top to bottom but also aims to incorporate a wellness aspect. After years in the healthcare industry, Lucy noticed just how important it is to be surrounded by an environment that compliments your wellbeing. Lucy graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a degree in nursing after switching over from fine arts. She is a self-taught interior designer who simply followed a passion of hers. Lucy's story inspires you to stay open to new opportunities and not to be afraid of trying new things, especially things that have the potential to bring you true happiness. Here is what she had to say to Hellenic News of Amer-

ica's publisher, Aphrodite Kotrotsios, on her decision to leave the healthcare industry which led to an exciting and fulfilling new path for her.

How was your journey to get to where you are today?

It has been a long and winding journey that I never could have predicted. I was in college during the financial crisis in 2008 and seeing the uncertainty in the economy I switched from fine arts to nursing in order to have a more dependable job. For many years I poured my heart and soul into my healthcare career. I worked in a trauma unit and a pediatric cardiac ICU, some of the most intense areas of nursing. At this time I was strongly considering becoming an MD. I had my applications for med school all ready to go. But by this time I was experiencing burn out, and I realized if I wasn't happy in nursing perhaps it wasn't wise to double down on the healthcare career. Then life intervened, and I got married and had a child and bought a house, but I was unsure of my long-term career path. We bought a fixer-upper and the first thing we did was remodel the kitchen. I threw myself into this project and found enormous satisfaction in all the design and planning that



Lucy Paschos O'Brien



went into it. Friends loved my kitchen and started to ask me for design tips. Next, I designed a bathroom for a neighbor, and before I knew it, I had made a website and registered as an LLC and had a growing business. Along the way I spent countless hours reading books, taking online classes, and participating in industry groups to pick up the knowledge I needed.

Though I have left the healthcare industry, I think this experience contributed to some skills that have been essential to my business success. Most important is that I really learned how to interact and communicate with all different kinds of people. Secondly, I realized that peoples' surroundings are a key factor in their health and well-being. Having a beautiful space can truly be life-changing.

Tell us a little bit about Tartan & Toile, how did your company come about?

We do residential interior design. My tagline is "Old World style with a splash of color". I love to take traditional elements and pair them with bold colors and patterns to make them feel fresh and new. I focus on making designs that are practical as well as beautiful, so I put a huge emphasis on space planning and the natural flow that a room creates. The sign of a well-designed room is that people will naturally gravitate to space and want to congregate there and spend time. One thing I focus on that sets me apart is that I really try to make the design process as easy and enjoyable for the client as possi-

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ble. Frequent communication and transparency are the keys to this. Most of the furniture I use in my projects comes from my private label brand which I produce at a wonderful factory in North Carolina that crafts the pieces by hand to my specifications. By doing this I cut out some of the middlemen and save money while ensuring high quality. Lots of brands these days use lower quality materials that have to be shipped from Asia.

How did you know that you were heading in the right direction with this new career choice?

I knew I was in the right direction when I was okay working long hours for no money in the beginning. I felt a sense of fulfillment because I knew my work was making my clients' lives better. When I saw how happy clients were with the transformation of their space, that also helped confirm my decision.

How do you handle the challenges that you face?

A lot of great friends and family. My husband who has been very helpful in giving me business advice. I have read countless books on everything from bookkeeping and project management to color theory and space planning. Still, sometimes you really cannot prepare for the challenges, and you learn from experience. You just keep moving forward and tackle each obstacle that comes up.

What is your greatest accomplishment?

Last year my husband was laid off, and it took him around six months to find a new job. During this time my business had only been around for a little over a year, but it had grown to the point where I was able to fully support our family. When we got through this period without having to dip into savings or cut back spending, I knew I had a successful business. Early on, it bothered me that people seemed to regard my business as a hobby. When I became the breadwinner for our family during this time, I was able to demonstrate that this was not just a hobby.

Would you say your Greek heritage has influenced your life and how?

My Greek heritage has shaped my life in a number of important ways. I attended Greek school as a child and my father frequently taught us about Greek culture, history, and food and involved the family in the Greek community. My father has always had an extremely strong work ethic and worked his way through college and law school and built his own business. I always associated his work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit with his background



as a Greek American and this has strongly influenced my own path.

In terms of my design style, though I also incorporate some modern influences, I have always favored a more traditional, classical style. Though perhaps not directly, I think this was probably influenced on some level by my Greek background. The sense of symmetry and proportion and many of the most common architectural elements you see in traditional design are all rooted in classical Greek forms. I think my Greek background helped to give me a sense of history and tradition that my designs are built around.

How are you involved with your Greek-American community and why is it important to you?

My main contact with the Greek community is through my father who is extremely involved in the Greek American business community. Through my father, I have made a number of important connections with Greek-Americans who have been very supportive of my business. I love supporting Greek-owned restaurants and other businesses. I think there is just something entrepreneurial in the Greek spirit and that part of the community has strongly influenced me.

What advice do you have for young aspiring professionals?

Stay open to opportunities whether they are professional or outside of work. Do not stay stuck in something you do not enjoy. Life is too short and there is too much wonderful experience out there. It seems to me in today's economy the tried

and true paths to professional success such as being a doctor or a lawyer involve many extra years of school and huge debt and are not the safe bet that they once were. At the same time for those who are willing to be creative, put in the work, and

take risks, there are huge rewards, both personal and professional, to being an entrepreneur.



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