

Enterprising Spirit

by Renée Bennett

Throughout the 130-year history of The Masters School, Dobbs alumnae/i have gone on to make their mark in the world personally and professionally on the career paths of their choice. We continue to celebrate all of their achievements and contributions, both large and small.

Among them are graduates whose entrepreneurial passion has driven them to pursue their dreams in a business of their own design. We asked three such women, all from different classes with diverse companies, to share insights about how they keep their entrepreneurial spirit alive as they strive toward success in today's highly competitive environment. They are alumnae who have chosen to work hard and control their own destiny—to do it their way with all of their might!

Hosting a Romantic Escape

White clapboard Victorian cottages with green tin roofs dot the distant hillside. Rocking chairs beckon guests to relax. Honored as “Best Honeymoon/Anniversary Getaway” by *Inn Traveler*, named as one of the top twenty-five “Best Undiscovered Incredibly Romantic Inns” by *BedandBreakfast.com*, and featured in *Southern Living* magazine, The Red Horse Inn is owned by Dobbs alumna **Mary Stroup Wolters** ’71.

Situated in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains near sophisticated Greenville, South Carolina, it's the perfect backdrop for a romantic weekend cabin getaway, memorable honeymoon vacation, or corporate retreat. “Guests have commented that our inn looks even better in real life than the photo gallery shows on our website (theredhorseinn.com),” Mary proudly states.

When they met at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, Mary and soon-to-be-husband Roger dreamed about an artist's retreat “where you could go to your cabin and get in touch with your muse,” she recalls. They ran an advertising agency in New York City for more than fifteen years, and so, Mary says, “It took us twenty-one years to get here. Roger was very drawn to restoration, and then my parents moved to this area and we decided this would be a fabulous place to build our dream.”

In 1993 the Wolters bought 200 acres on which they built houses that quickly sold. “Because we thought it would be a wonderful area for a bed and breakfast inn, we sold most of our land and bought new acreage nearby on which to build our ‘retreat,’” Mary says. “Roger was busy doing home inspections, and I bulldozed the property myself with a used bulldozer that I purchased!”

The Red Horse Inn is Mary's dream come true. “The luxurious main inn has six suites and a center courtyard with a lovely garden and fish pond,” she explains. “With intent, six individual cottages with equally luxurious amenities are a quarter of a mile away, and the guests really like it that way. We live in the main building and stopped offering a communal breakfast in the inn because the guests weren't showing up. Sometimes after they check in we won't see them all weekend.”

Because running a bed and breakfast is a 24/7 job, Mary suggests, “You better be a high-energy person willing to crank out the hours and have no regrets. But you have no idea the joy you bring to people's lives. Today, because of the Internet, our guests come from all over the world. Our client-

tele is wonderful—from young honeymooners to older couples celebrating an anniversary—they all come here for a very romantic weekend.”

Mary Wolters grew up in Scarsdale, New York, and although she only spent her senior year at Dobbs, she remembers, “It was the best move I ever made. I was able to take all of my music and art talent, apply it to academic endeavors, and really blossom. As a girls' school it was an environment in which women were being groomed to take on the world.”



Sharing the Aloha

“We have worked with some of Hawaii’s most well-known brands, including Hawaiian Host chocolates (“Hawaii’s gift to the world”) and recently on the creation of the Hawaii Seal of Quality to ensure both quality and Hawaii origin for agricultural products and value-added products,” explains **Gloria Etzbach Garvey-Hanington ’67**.

Gloria started her consulting business, The Brands Strategy Group, in 1988 in an office off of her garage, and she was joined by ever-since-then business partner, Brook Gramann, in 1990. With backgrounds on the management side of the advertising agency business, they have focused on building strong brands.

Because they became good at what they do, “We decided we would put our money where our mouth is,” Gloria says. “Our small hometown of Kailua (on the other side of Waikiki) was growing, and we wanted also to contribute to its growth so that it would have local retailers, not just nationals like Pier One, Starbucks, and California Pizza Kitchen.”

They thought about what women their age needed, and concluded, “Nothing, except time and pampering.” Working with a woman on Maui who is an expert in horticulture, they developed the Lanikai Bath and Body line of more than twenty different scents and more than a hundred different products. “They are all natural, and all made in Hawaii,” Gloria reports. “We worked with local designers to create the packaging and the store, which we opened in October 2005. We launched our Internet site in May 2006 (lanikaibathandbody.com).”

Gloria suggests that the power of a brand is to know what it stands for and who wants/needs your product—“making the right promise to the right people and keeping it brings success,” she says. “But we have found out that retail is detail, and so we have a great deal of respect for our clients that we advise in the consulting side of our business.”



The greatest challenges as an entrepreneur, Gloria points out, are staying motivated and being able to juggle a lot of balls at once. “Having a partner who is the only person I know who works harder than I do really helps,” she says. “The particular businesses we have chosen—brand consulting and retail—have led to much learning and satisfaction. Retailing, in particular, is instantly satisfying—if you do it right (or wrong) you usually know it right away.”

Gloria advises anyone considering starting his or her own business to first get a partner—“someone you get along with and with whom you can ride out the storms. Second, understand that you have no one to blame but yourself.” She adds, “Being an entrepreneur is incredibly rewarding...and you can do what you want when you want to—as long as you’re willing to own it.”

Looking back on her years at Dobbs, she observes, “I have never known or cared for so many people as well or as much as I did then. I learned to love being a woman there. I learned to respect myself. In retrospect, my experience at Dobbs glows more brightly than any other three years in my life. I loved Dobbs—everything about it was great, and I think I was smart enough to appreciate it at the time!”

Putting the Bling into Bling

From the time she can remember, **Erin Brown ’98** has always had an appreciation for the finer things in life, especially exquisite jewelry. It was only a matter of time before she established her own business—Diamer Fine Jewelry—to offer high quality, stylish products.

A business major at Northeastern University, Erin says, “While at school I spent many hours working in jewelry stores in Boston in order to acquire first-hand experience about the industry and its beautiful products.” Subsequently, her passion for jewelry and precious stones took her to Los Angeles to attend the world-renowned Gemological Institute of America (G.I.A). She became a gemologist and an accredited jewelry professional.

She started her company in 2004, and today she offers an extensive selection of jewels ranging from traditional to high fashion to handmade one-of-a-kind designs. The company caters to all occasions, including bridal and corporate gifts, with unique and fine jewelry such as pendants, earrings, bracelets, and rings priced from \$150 to \$65,000.

Though Erin continues to design some pieces, in particular engagement rings, much of her time is now spent traveling to major trade shows all over the world to find special designer pieces. “I enjoy the buying and seeing the trends,” she reports. “But I love selling engagement rings and working with the guy because it’s such a happy occasion.”

Besides her website, diamerjewelry.com, which features only a few of the beautiful pieces she offers, Erin sells her jewelry line privately in people’s



homes via “trunk” shows and at Junior League and various charity events. “A retail store on Nantucket does sell my jewelry, but mainly I have relied on word-of-mouth to build my business,” she explains. “I did a trunk show this past spring in Manhattan and several other Dobbs alums attended.”

Given the nature of her business, she relates that security is her main issue, especially since she takes many high-end pieces on consignment. And her advice to anyone wishing to have his or her own business is simple: “Be prepared not to sleep and give it your all, especially in the beginning when you have to do everything. If it’s something you are passionate about then chances are that you will succeed.”

Erin was married in September 2006, and she and her husband recently moved from Los Angeles to Manhattan, putting her closer to her family ties in Irvington, New York. When asked which gem is her favorite to buy and/or design with, she answers without hesitation, “Diamonds are a girl’s best friend.”