

# Crafting a new career

Ever wondered what it's like to quit your day job to pursue your creative hobby? We meet the people who made the jump and never looked back

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Julian Love

**H**ow many times have you stared at your computer wishing that you were sitting in front of a pottery wheel instead of your desk? Even if you don't harbour a secret desire to be Demi Moore in *Ghost* (1990), the chances are you've fantasised about escaping the office and packing it in for something a little more hands-on. Whether you're already an amateur potter or you're thinking about giving carpentry a go, working with your hands to make something is a welcome change from eight hours spent in front of a monitor.

Megan Riera took up calligraphy 'with a view that it might be useful for work'. A designer for moving image, she quickly became addicted to her new-found hobby. 'I was sick of sitting in front of a screen all day and

calligraphy was a much-needed break from my digital life,' Riera says. 'As I improved, I started to realise that it may have potential to generate an income.' She's not the only one. More and more of us are reconsidering our nine-to-five jobs in favour of learning and earning from our craft.

'There are many reasons for this,' says Patricia van den Akker, director of The Design Trust, an online business school for designers and makers. 'Some have been made redundant, others want to escape the rat race and get more out of life,' she explains. 'People are living longer and see that they can have another career instead of slogging it out.'

It seems there has never been a better time to get into crafts than right now. 'There's been a huge surge of

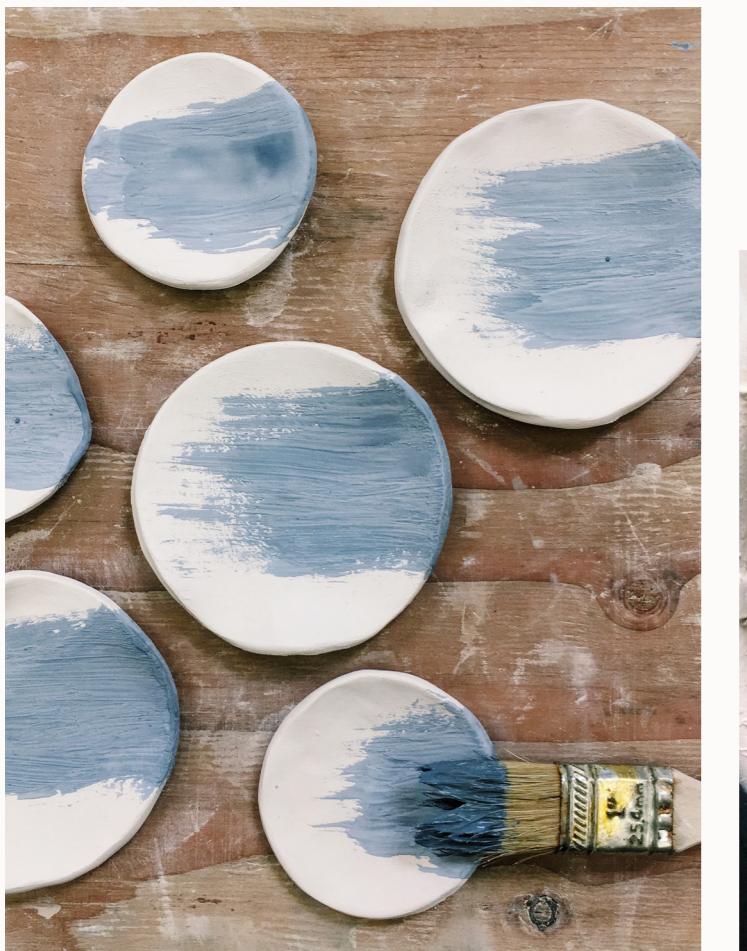
successful "maker entrepreneurs" in the past few years,' says Riera, 'more people than ever seem to be turning their creative passions into careers.' Rosy Greenlees, executive director of the Crafts Council, agrees with her. 'Craft is one of the most entrepreneurial of all the creative industries sectors,' she says. 'Eighty-eight per cent of makers set up their own businesses, and many come to professional craft practice as a second career,' she adds. So, how do you know when you're ready to graduate from evening class to every day?

For some, hearing those four little words – 'you could sell those' – is enough. But unless there's a pot of gold at the end of those stained glass rainbows you're thinking about leaving your day job for, you're going to need a plan.

Courtesy Loyal Stricklin



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When Peter Bellerby started making globes in his living room, that was the only plan. Formerly a salesman for ITV, he started making his handpainted, handcrafted Bellerby & Co globes by accident. 'After giving my father the usual socks, ties and books as birthday presents for the whole of my adult life, I set out to find him something special for his 80th – a globe,' he explains. Disappointed with the level of craftsmanship available, Bellerby thought 'somewhat naively' that he could make his own in a few months. 'I came to a point where I either canned the whole thing as an expensive disaster or turned it into a business and just got on with it. Even then, it took more than a year and 200 failed attempts for me to make a globe I was happy with.'

Patience is a virtue that Grain & Knot spoon carver Sophie Sellu also had to learn when starting out. After being made redundant from her job as a trend forecaster, she decided to make the leap to self-employment. 'It took me over



a year of making before I sold one piece,' admits Sellu, 'but my skills grew rapidly from there.' Her advice? 'Take it slow, don't spend all your money setting up, and be realistic.' Sage words, but for some it's easier said than done.

I started my business with the idea that I'd work whenever and have the freedom to do whatever I wanted all the time, but that only lasted for a little while,' says architecture graduate Michael Stricklin, leather maker and owner of Loyal Stricklin. By his own admission, he learnt the hard way that managing your finances is as important as honing your craft. The equal parts craftsman and entrepreneur admits that it can sometimes feel as if the business is taking over your life. 'But if you love it and are savvy enough to bring in new and returning customers, then you'll find a way to make it work. You'll have to,' he laughs.

For Van den Akker, making it work hinges on your marketing strategy. 'A strong online presence is crucial if

you want to make a good living as a designer maker,' she says. 'There are so many great tools now – Etsy, Folksy, Not On The High Street – Instagram and Facebook are excellent too.'

It was a post on social media that kick-started former visual manager Jade Drndak's second career. After taking an introduction to pottery class she decided to try to sell what she'd made online. 'I posted a message offering to hand-deliver a few of the pieces I made as Christmas gifts to those who lived locally. I sold out within two days,' says Drndak. Pleasantly surprised but convinced there was no way she'd be able to continue to sell at that rate, Drndak returned to making for the pleasure of it. 'A few months later, I decided to update my shop, Salt + Stone. I sold out again.' The success was her Aha! moment: 'I knew I would enjoy running my little online shop. The making, the packaging, the connecting with like-minded folks from all over... It just feels right,' she says. Can't argue with that. ■

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*Eleanor Howard*