



## Peas in a Pod

Sam McLean started making and selling fashion items at age 12 and that creative enterprise seems likely to be inherited by her daughter Tahlia.

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Sam McLean was just 12 years old when her creative streak manifested itself commercially for the first time. The enterprising youngster, always busy with her hands, started making and selling her own jewellery to classmates.

“I’d always sewn and used to make myself outfits,” Sam says. “I even made corsets for all my Barbie dolls, using offcuts of lace and pieces of ribbon for the straps. I was always making things.”

Her creative interests led her to study art and textiles at school, subjects that would ultimately equip her with skills needed for her future career. Nine years later she started her own clothing and accessories label, Oopsidaisi, following the birth of her first child, Tahlia. Naturally enough, the label had its beginnings in children’s clothing.

“I used to make babies’ hats to start with and the word spread through my mother’s group,” Sam says. “Then one day I went into a shop: Tahlia was wearing one of my hats, the shop owner saw it and asked me where I’d bought it. When I told her I’d made it, she said ‘I’ll take 25!’”

Within six months, Sam was running her sewing machine ragged to supply six shops in the Sydney area, thanks largely to word-of-mouth and her ‘model’ daughter Tahlia.

The label flourished and eventually Sam sought out her own store in the southern Sydney suburb of Cronulla where she could market her creations.

Other challenges eventually beckoned, so Sam sold the shop and moved back to the country with husband Dave, drawn to Mudgee where Dave’s parents and Sam’s mother lived, and where she herself had lived as a teenager.

Another Oopsidaisi store was followed by a brief foray into her other great love, interior design, and a shop dedicated to vintage glamour. This opened its doors just as the shabby chic craze gripped Australia and business was brisk. Working with Dave, Sam reclaimed, recycled and resold countless items of furniture.

“It was more luxe than shabby chic and extremely popular,” Sam says. “But in the end I had to close the store and my studio out the back because I wanted to get into manufacturing.”

As Sam’s children have grown, so has the scope of Oopsidaisi, the focus now being on one-off clothing, jewellery and accessories.

**Above, from left** Sam’s handmade felt bags come in all shapes, colours and sizes; Sam and Tahlia; Sam flaunts felting conventions to create one-off pieces such as these.

## UP FRONT



“I’m using vintage textiles and laces and retro-inspired fabrics — I find it much more creatively rewarding,” she says. “There’s nothing more gratifying than bringing something of beauty from my imagination into the physical world. People enjoy buying one-off pieces knowing that it is unique to them.”

Her latest work includes stunning, one-of-a-kind felt scarves, made at home using traditional methods, and quirky, colourful resin pendants embedded with fabric and unusual papers. Sam also makes a range of handbags using retro-inspired prints.

Many of her pieces are showcased in businesses that specialise in homewares in Mudgee and in various outlets around Australia.

Despite a thriving business, 34-year-old Sam is now in the process of paring back her workload and winding up her childrenswear line, so that she can spend more time with her family and concentrate on her womenswear range.

“I’ve downscaled to suit myself,” she says. “I’m not interested in mass producing or having my items made outside of Australia, even though that has been suggested to me as a way to make a lot of money.”

But while one McLean is getting ready to lighten her workload, it seems that a younger family member is just getting started on creating her own.

Daughter Tahlia has apparently inherited her mother’s arty inclinations and, like someone else aged just 12, is already crafting her own necklaces, bracelets and earrings to sell to her young friends.

“Doing something you love is one of the best examples you can set for your kids,” Sam says, looking at her daughter’s efforts with approval. “I’m so happy where I am at right now — it’s the perfect balance.” 🌿

*Sam McLean can be contacted on 0422 942 979. Oopsidaisi products are available at various lifestyle stores, including Five Rooms in Mudgee.*

**Above, left** Sam at her sewing machine. **Above, right** These resin pendants are lined with vintage fabrics and paper. **Right** Sam breathes new life into the old crafts of crochet, felting and patchwork.

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