



ANNA GRIFFIN®

Anna Griffin launched her own business in 1994 by creating one-of-a-kind, handmade wedding and event invitations. The business quickly grew to include a wholesale division within only two years, and Anna introduced her first “imprintable” invitation with a custom look, which is still popular today. The company has since launched its Paper Crafts, Social Stationery, Fabric Accessory, and Fabric Collections. In addition,

Anna is a recognized authority when it comes to translating exquisite, old-world patterns into modern, mix-and-match designs. As a result, Anna Griffin collaborated with brand leaders to create licensed products in an array of product categories. Anna Griffin Inc. recently launched its own licensing division, Blend, designed to take the company to the next level with modern, upscale fabrics, stationery, and gifts. The licensing division blends 18 years of successful product development and design with a truly dynamic mix of world-renowned talent.





How many of you have a dream ... one that starts like a little flicker of excitement in your belly, a fragment of an idea in your head, and fills you with a sense of incredible hopefulness? Thank goodness we have our dreams — whether secret or shared, pursued in actuality or fantasy — what else would give us the energy to slug through the low points of our days?

This is the story of my dream, the one that came to me and said, "Wouldn't life be great if I could make things every day?" I made my mark in the wedding industry almost two decades ago by developing one of the industry's first "print it yourself" wedding invitations with a custom look. These days, my signature collection includes everything from home office products to quilting fabrics. I have also licensed Anna Griffin designs in partnership with companies like Lenox, Department 56, C.R. Gibson, Windham Fabrics, and Burnes Home Accents. Oh, and I pop in on HSN from time to time. Pretty cool, right? Well, it is now. But in the beginning, I was barely pulling in minimum wage chasing my dream.

Eighteen years ago, I got it in my head to start a wedding invitation business. Fueled by my passion for creating, a love of antiques, a deep appreciation for family and tradition, and a relentless determination to make beautiful things that help women feel special, honored, and creative themselves, it came to fruition.

Though my vision has morphed over the years, the kernel of the idea has always been a constant: To do more than create beautiful things; to create beautiful things that help people celebrate and commemorate life's big and little events. I love that my designs are collaborations with the person who buys them.



The thing all of my designs have in common is ... well, a layer of dust. I take old things and reinterpret them for today. It's like repurposing, only with ideas. I love old things, the older the better. My friends say I only like how things look through three panes of dirty glass. Whether I am designing an invitation or a tote bag, I am always inspired by the past.

All little kids muse about what they'll be when they grow up, and I wanted to be an entrepreneur (try explaining that one to your third grade class!). I spent my time contemplating what kind of business I would start. It's only natural, considering my family tree abounded with entrepreneurs and artists. I grew up in a very visual world: my mother was an artist, my aunt is an artist, and both of my grandparents majored in art. I was always encouraged to notice my surroundings in a way that most people did not. I see the details first.

After design school, and a few years in Atlanta, I moved to New York and worked for designer Vera Wang, selling dresses and designing windows. It was a bit of a detour from my career path, though it ended up being a handy little short cut. Despite all the frenzied brides, there was something irresistible about the business of weddings. I was in love with reliving that "pretty bride moment" and getting to be a part of it day after day. I knew then that the wedding industry was where I wanted to focus my design talent.

You know the Nike slogan, "Just Do It"? Well, starting my business was like that. Basically, I stopped talking about the business that I was going to have someday and started doing something about it. This motto has served me over and over again. And here we are 18 years later!



FAVORITE QUOTE

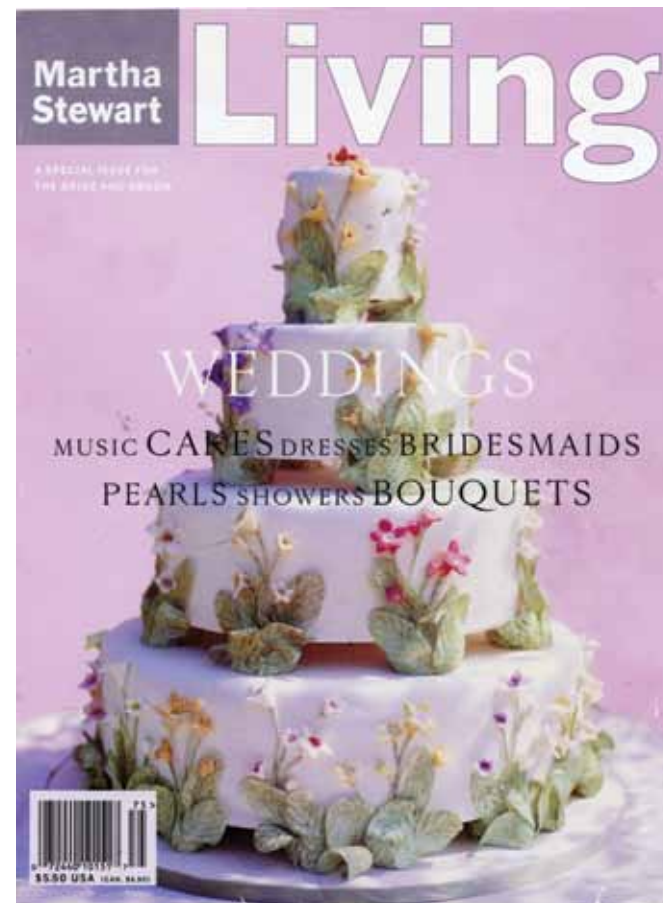
"We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face... we must do that which we think we cannot."

— Eleanor Roosevelt



In the beginning, I was the quintessential jack-of-all-trades, master of none. My first business card really tells it all — Anna Griffin: calligrapher, invitation designer, and wedding planner. I was determined, taking any project I could get my hands on, often pro-bono. I worked long and hard. The more exhausted I became, the happier I was, convinced that I was paying my dues. Yet despite my enthusiasm and my unwavering commitment to handling every conceivable component of wedding design — and I do mean every conceivable component — when I crunched the numbers, I was shocked to learn that I was barely making minimum wage. There had to be a way to work smarter, even if I was just getting started. So I regrouped and came up with the idea of a wholesale invitation line, which debuted at the 1995 Atlanta Gift Show. I came home with \$70,000 in wholesale orders and was a manufacturer overnight. So, my multi-million-dollar company was born in a 10' x 10' booth. My dream had come true.

It's been an amazing ride — tough, and filled with sweat and tears, but truly amazing and totally worth it. I'm not just talking about industry recognition or financial success — the best part of realizing my dream is understanding that it is inextricably tied to the dreams of so many other women. It's deeply comforting to know that things I create are not static, but are rather a dynamic collaboration with the women who purchase them, women like me who could sit for hours at a table creating a narrative through pictures and papers and embellishments, sure to be enjoyed by future generations. Women who can see the beauty in yesteryear's artifacts. Women who treasure family. Women who look to celebrate life. One of my greatest pleasures is envisioning how women are using the things I make to tell their own unique and poignant stories.





HERE ARE SOME BASIC BELIEFS THAT CAN HELP YOU REALIZE YOUR DREAMS:

- I believe that change is good. Even if you fear it or it doesn't look good at the moment, remember that everything happens for a reason; it is up to you to find the positive reason.
- Value your time, or no one else will.
- Pay yourself first. If you aren't taking care of yourself, you can't take care of others.
- Be present to all opportunities. It is important to see the opportunity in everything.
- Take risks. If you're not taking risks, then you're not growing. You're not playing big enough.
- Use the word "and" instead of "or." "Or" is limiting.
- Be unstoppable. Get out of your own way and get excited.

I know what you're all thinking: Why did she succeed? It's a fair enough question and I've certainly asked it of myself! What I've come to realize is that there were four main reasons: I filled a void in the marketplace; I had a strong design perspective; I built a brand; and I was willing to do whatever it took to succeed.

SUCCESS SECRET #1: FILL A VOID

Working at Vera Wang, I saw firsthand how important it was for brides to set themselves apart, how they wanted to create an event like no other. As a graphic designer, I recognized this as an opportunity to create a custom look for invitations while encouraging people to participate by printing and assembling them for themselves. I also saw this as a chance to bring a dream of exceptional quality within reach financially.

My foothold was a fresh point of view: a designer look with a do-it-yourself twist. When I first started, the order of the day was a traditional engraved invitation — the notion of DIY was fresh at the time! Eighteen years ago, if you wanted embellished and layered invitations, you wouldn't find them on the shelves of a big-box store; you'd be poring over volumes of binders in an atelier, and paying accordingly. I filled this void. I was one of the first to make do-it-yourself kits in a box, where the result looked like a custom-made invitation. We all want to feel special, especially when it comes to momentous occasions; feeling and being special comes down to doing things no one else does, having things no one else has, like monogrammed stationery or a custom-made invitation for your latest party.

SUCCESS SECRET #2: HAVE A STRONG DESIGN PERSPECTIVE

My designs all have one thing in common: they're modern interpretations of old things. While there are definitely different moods and personalities in my lines — be that coastal queen or leopard lady — they are all "Anna Griffin" at the core. I attribute that to my design philosophy. Early on, I established that each Anna Griffin product must be: pattern-driven, three-dimensional, have amazing color, be large scale (bigger than life), be embellished in some way, be renovated, but, above all, be beautiful. Really, what's the point otherwise?

A lot of people are curious about where I get the ideas for my designs. I collect antique documents like original paintings,

wallpaper, fabric, and 18th-century engravings and botanicals. We're talking about museum-quality stuff here. From this archive, I build pattern collections much like you would decorate a room. The collections all have specific themes and color schemes based on the trends in the marketplace. I call myself an interior decorator for paper.

SUCCESS SECRET #3: BUILD A BRAND

It wasn't until about five years into it that I embraced the notion of building a brand out of my business. There came a point where I recognized the natural potential for my designs to reach out beyond celebrations and into the realm of crafting and fabric designs. After all, why should we just treat ourselves on special occasions?

When it is your name behind the brand, it becomes personal. And for me, Anna Griffin Incorporated is a direct reflection of Anna Griffin the designer, the entrepreneur, the businesswoman, and, on many levels, the person. And so I made sure the core philosophies I established in the beginning stayed constant in my licensing brand ventures.

SUCCESS SECRET #4: DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SUCCEED

I think my interest in balancing business with creativity is a huge part of why we've done so well. Most designers simply want to create, and who can blame them! They seek out competent people to be their proxy in the areas of marketing and budgeting and all the other thankless, non-creative components to running a business.

I was willing to do both: the creative and business sides. On the creative side, I deliver the vision, direction, and color palette of the products we are going to make. We can have the greatest designs in the world, but if I don't also focus on the business side of finance and logistics, we can't bring them to market. I also had to take part the less glamorous tasks: the 2 a.m. office break-ins, setting up my booth, and loading and shrink-wrapping pallets with the product I designed. It's intensely satisfying to know, understand, and partake of the inner machinations of my own business. By maintaining at least some level of involvement in all areas of my company, I can be sure that there are no blind spots.

Where Women Create BUSINESS would like to thank Anna Griffin for her involvement in our Winter Issue. To learn more, visit annagriffin.com.