

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Combining work with the needs of a young family while making room for your true passion might sound like an impossible mix, but as **Clare Patience** discovers, these three friends have done it.



Lana Taylor, Erin Cayless and Bonnie Hindmarsh are the trio behind Three Birds Renovations.

Photography by Maree Homer; Chris Warrens

Before having children, Lana Taylor had established a career in marketing for an international company, working with big-name skincare and hair-care products. But with motherhood came the realisation she no longer had the same priorities.

“After having kids, I lost my drive to claw my way up the corporate ladder,” says Lana. “So I quit my job even though I had nothing lined up.”

“While I was planning my next move, I even tried my hand at dropping catalogues into letterboxes. But I only did it once as it was bloody hard work and hardly paid a dime – and I was waving to the school mums while I did my rounds!”

A call from her friend Bonnie Hindmarsh dramatically changed everything for Lana.

Bonnie was also struggling to combine parenting with work. Knowing that Lana was ready for something new, she proposed they get involved in one of her long-held passions – the renovation game. So, together with Erin Cayless, they established their business and called it Three Birds Renovations.

“Bonnie and Erin had been sharing a job in event management, and they had complementary skills,” says Lana. “Bonnie is the creative one, while Erin is incredible at organising events – stuff like run sheets, bookings and project management.”

“To be honest, I would have agreed to pretty much anything they suggested. I was so ready for something new and I had the utmost trust in them. I knew that together we could make anything work.”

Over a coffee catch-up, the three women decided to take the plunge and search for their first property to flip.

They went equal thirds in an \$800,000 property in the north-west Sydney suburb of Castle Hill. “The home was an ex-hoarder’s house

and it was a very challenging first renovation for us,” says Lana.

Little did they know this project of refurbishing “the worst house on the best street” would pave the way for a rapidly growing property renovation empire that celebrates the trio’s shared love of coastal-farmhouse style with luscious white interiors.

The home was completely unliveable, the floor was hidden under mounds of junk and it had become an eyesore in the neighbourhood. As they knuckled down, the renovation revealed not just a beautiful home but also the individual strengths the three friends brought to their new alliance.

“Bonnie’s parents were keen renovators, so she grew up with the knowledge of how to plan and design. Erin has a natural knack for project management, so she ran the process.”

Lana found her place in the company running the marketing elements – creating content for the website, on social media and, more recently, for The Reno School, a six-week online course that teaches students about renovating.

“We started without a major strategy but it has evolved over time,” says Lana. “I never felt any fear. I believed that the worst-case scenario with our fast-flip renovations would be simply breaking even, rather than making a profit. This risk felt manageable and we were so ready for something new.”

The home went to market, selling above the reserve, and the trio learnt plenty of valuable lessons.

“One of main things we discovered was there is a lot of goodwill out there for people who take up a challenge,” says Lana.

“The neighbourhood loved that we were rescuing the old home – they’d often toot their horns and give us a wave as we worked. But it was also seeing the reaction of the other school

mums when they heard we were renovating houses with our best mates, they told us we were living what they had been dreaming of doing.”

After the success of the first home, they quickly moved on. The trio are now on to their 10th renovation project, having accumulated a huge social-media audience along the way with Three Birds TV, which documents their projects and is watched in more than 100 countries.

“When we were house-flipping, we’d never put a house on the market that we wouldn’t want to live in ourselves,” says Lana. “Transforming



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Above: Bonnie designed a laundry for her own home that includes a tiled dog bath.

suburban houses into magazine-worthy homes is what we’re all about.

“We launched The Reno School to help renovators find their own aesthetic and see a project through. Our mission has evolved to inspire women and help them create their own dream homes”

The Reno School’s main aim is in empowering women to articulate exactly what they want when taking on a renovation project in their own homes, and encouraging them to stick to their guns when challenged by a shady tradie. The trio lay out all their hard-won expertise, including advice on budgets, bargain buys and how to save.

“We’ve all met that kind of tradie who says it can’t be done, or says it won’t work out, but we arm all our students with the know-how and the confidence to stand their ground and create the home they want,” says Lana.

Despite the wins, the women have faced challenges. Lana admits that she had to reassess her corporate style to fit in with the way her friends express their professional needs.

“I came from a large company where everyone was trained to approach projects in the exact same way. I’ve had to adapt and respect that Bonnie and Erin come with a different style and fresh perspective. I’ve also had to let go of wanting everything to be perfect because in a small business you can’t do it all.”

The big question, however, is whether the team have achieved a work-life balance nirvana.

“My husband says I’m working harder than ever,” admits Lana. “The difference is we usually finish around 2.30pm to do the school pick-up and after-school activities, then we’re back online in the evening if need be.

“We work on our terms now and we’re doing something we love. We really are living the dream.” •