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baby, you're lookin' goood!



photo by bernard clark

by josephine matyas

There's nothing like on-the-job training, so when Farzana Hudda decided to make the switch from carefree and childless, she did it one-two-three. Yes, that would be three babies in as many years: two daughters followed quickly by one son. Conceiving her business idea for Designer Baby and nurturing it through the very early stages didn't take quite as long, but, talking to Hudda, it is clear that this is also a labour of love.

"I had 10 years of a nursing career behind me when we moved to Kingston," Hudda says. "And in the first three years of living in Kingston we had our three children. My kids are my inspiration."

This young entrepreneur approached her business idea with a sense of logic sprinkled with fun. She dealt with a market that she knew well, even though she had no formal business training or background. Hudda and her husband usually took out-of-town excursions to shop for their children's clothing — opting for brand names they knew washed well, were stretchy and soft, and came in playful and hip styles. Through research, it appeared the market demand was in place for a children's brand-name clothing store in

Kingston, the business idea light bulb started to burn, and with the support and business experience of her husband, Hudda took the plunge into researching and opening Designer Baby. She says they make a good team. "He sees the big picture and I see the little picture."

Hudda followed a conventional route into what is a new and emerging market. She ventured into a field where she had first-hand experience, she looked around her for market need, and then she did her research. Before ordering a single piece of clothing or starting any renovations on the Designer Baby space, Hudda attended a large, influential trade show to get an idea of what was involved in the retail clothing market. It was a sharp learning curve in which she was immersed in the concepts of seasonal buying, exclusive territory, merchandizing techniques and negotiating with sales representatives.

So what is the stylish baby wearing these days? The tiny T-shirts emblazoned with "I Party Naked" or "Chicks Dig Me" are big sellers. Stylish hats in leopard skin or polka dot patterns turn heads. Fashionable toes are shod in suede bootlets from Ugg of Australia, and handcrafted, soft-soled leather pediped footwear is the top choice for the Hollywood set (think Julia Roberts' clan). Posh tracksuits are a signature item from girlie-style clothing supplier Juicy Couture, also a favourite of celebrities.

Hudda makes it a habit to follow the media — magazines and television shows that cater to new parents — for trends and creative products. "I watch them first and foremost as a mom, looking for items that are fun, unusual and unique."

Following up with a bit of research and then talking with suppliers to negotiate product exclusivity seems to be paying off for the Brock Street boutique. One trend that's making a comeback is what Hudda calls the "mom and child match" — matching outfits — especially favoured by young moms in their 20s and 30s.

Even though balancing work demands and home life can be a challenge, Hudda says that she is enjoying her delve into retail. "I think it's because the store is not big and I can keep control."

Pursuing the goal she describes as "providing fun and funky items to Kingstonians" keeps Hudda on a diligent watch for new products. Designer Baby has recently branched into a line of maternity wear that includes both parents in the joy of the expectant months. Daddy T-shirts scripted with a variety of fun one-liners are the hot ticket item this fall.

Farzana Hudda seems to be completely comfortable in the path she has chosen, which just goes to show that a labour of love can sometimes be a successful binding of family and business.

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