



NOU SCHOLLAY AND BROOKE MARSH

the Art of Friendship

words tonia zemek

NOU SCHOLLAY AND BROOKE MARSH ARE A PAIR WHO PROVE SISTERHOOD IS ALIVE AND WELL. THEY'VE BEEN FRIENDS FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS. IN THAT TIME, THEIR BOND HAS SEEN THEM LIVE AND LAUGH TOGETHER. NATURALLY, THEY'VE GOT LOTS IN COMMON, BUT THEIR HEART FOR ART IS MORE THAN MUTUAL. TONIA ZEMEK MEETS THE BESTIES-TURNED-BUSINESS PARTNERS.

If, like me, you're lucky enough to have good gal pals, you'll know the joy that comes from catching up for a cuppa, heading out for a shopping spree, or taking a trip together. In some cases, opposites attract. For others, the foundation of the friendship is built on common ground. Such is the case for Nou Schollay and Brooke Marsh, who work together creating and distributing digital art online. "We're both very visual people," Brooke explains. "We have a similar sense of style."

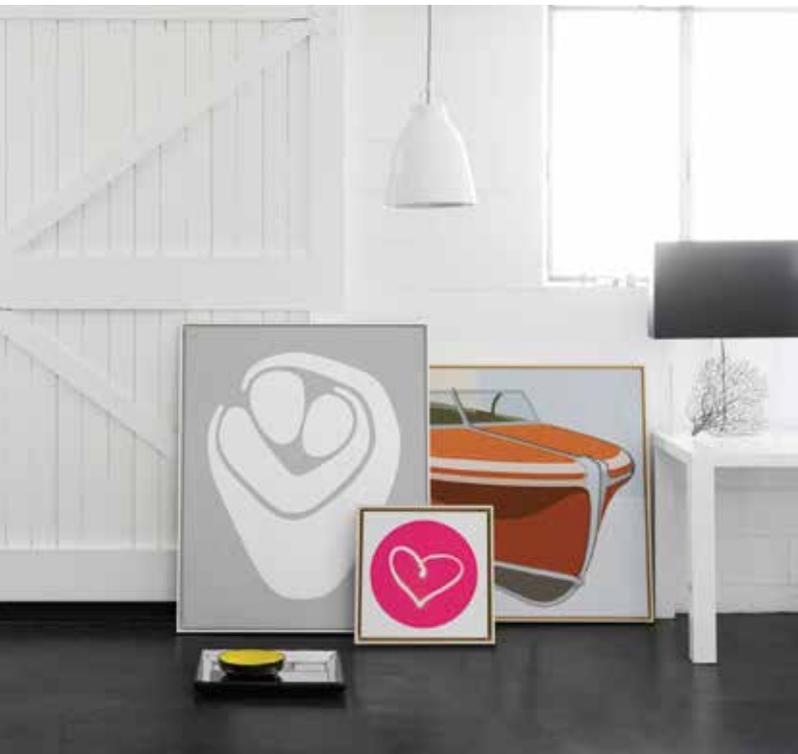
Although they met as teenagers in Brisbane, they really clicked when they shared a flat together in London. "That's when we realised we were obsessed with the same things – we both love art, fashion and interior design," Brooke says.

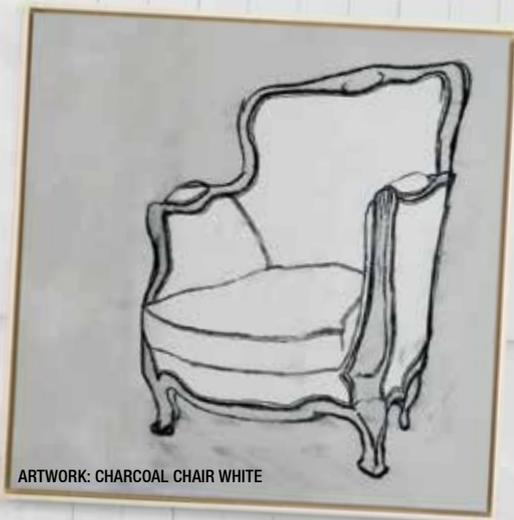
While living in the UK, Brooke worked as a graphic designer and Nou was involved in advertising agencies and digital television. Their day jobs were fun and fulfilling but it was the buzz of Britain that really inspired them. "We were exposed to the most amazing fashions," Nou enthuses. "Creatively, it was wonderful to have access to so many great galleries and museums."

Brooke says Nou naturally embraced the culture and couture. "She was classic with an edge. Nou was never boring – somehow she managed to mix expensive pieces with high street bargains. She was always well put together." Nou says the same about Brooke, describing her as "super stylish". "Brooke could wear a paper bag and make it look good. She's immaculate."

Today they share much more than a mutual admiration society. They've established a business that bonds their creativity with their friendship. It's an online outlet for digital artwork, mostly prints that can be purchased with or without frames. "We wanted to create artwork that was on-trend but more accessible than fine art you'd find in a gallery," Brooke explains.

They combined parts of their surnames and came up with the name "March", and given their website curates a collection of artwork, they added "Collective" to their moniker. So, The March Collective was born in 2011 (www.themarchcollective.com).





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While Brooke’s responsible for creating the images, Nou takes care of the logistics, production and marketing. She says it’s an ideal partnership. “We’ve never had an argument. We’re very laidback. Brooke is the only person I could go into business with.”

Brooke shares that sense of corporate companionship. “I think trust is a big thing. I know that Nou has her side of the business covered, and when I create something I trust her opinions.”

The teamwork took off from day one. Brooke recalls feeling they’d succeeded from the outset. “Our confidence levels were soaring because we received such great feedback from interior designers and industry insiders.”

Within weeks of going live with their website, Nou and Brooke found themselves shipping prints to Los Angeles for a residential apartment. Since then, their artwork has been hung in businesses and homes from Sydney to the Sunshine Coast.

When it comes to her own house, Nou admits her Noosa nest has a contemporary, minimalist feel mixed with some more informal pieces. “I have two cherished safari chairs from designer Arni Norell. They were my first foray into purchasing iconic, designer furniture, and my husband was pretty shocked because they were so expensive,” she laughs. “They’ve turned out to be the best investment we have ever made. I just love them.”

Meanwhile, bowerbird Brooke lives in what she describes as a “big, old, rambling Queenslander” that features a smattering of modern furnishings alongside antiques. “My favourite is an old banker’s desk I re-painted and reupholstered. It’s now my work desk.”

That work desk is certainly getting a workout. The pair has expanded the business to include interior styling services. They’d love to go global someday and set up offices in the US and Europe. They also have dreams of opening a gallery.

So what advice do they have for other mates making the transition from companions to colleagues? “Make sure you are 110 per cent confident that the person you are going into business with is the right person for you,” Nou says resolutely. “You have to be very respectful of each other.”

“You both need to be passionate about what you’re doing,” Brooke adds. “Just do something you love and you’ll always be motivated.”

They say they admire designing duo Sarah-Jane Clarke and Heidi Middleton from Sass & Bide. After meeting Brooke and Nou, I’d say this pair also has plenty of sass and style. Inside and outside the office, their friendship is a work of art. ■

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