

# Sisters are doing it for themselves ...

Katie Farman meets two women whose friendship has helped them to become very successful and enterprising with their individual businesses

Half way through 2009, Lorraine Hall Morison was at a cross-road. Despite the nation being in the grips of a recession, her recently established fashion label Hall was going from strength to strength and she needed to make a decision that could impact her whole future. Instead of turning to a qualified business mentor for advice, she rang her friend and sister-in-law Cathie Morison, who is chief executive of the successful Brackenridge Country Retreat & Spa in Martinborough.

"I've always valued Cathie's point of view and I trust her judgment," says Lorraine. "I was really passionate about opening a retail store that ran in conjunction with my wholesaling business, but she quite bluntly told me I was mad."

Even though Cathie insists she was just playing "devil's advocate", the upshot of the open and frank conversation confirmed what Lorraine already knew – that concentrating on wholesaling was a smarter move.

"With Cathie we bounce ideas around and use each other as a sounding board," says Lorraine. "In this instance the decision to focus on wholesaling and remain true to my principles has paid off."

Discussions like this have played out regularly over the years and it's obvious they're great friends with friendly banter and raucous laughter punctuating any conversation.

Cathie entered the accommodation business 16 years ago with little more than a gut feeling.

"I was a wife and a mother wanting something to do that didn't interfere with my family," she reflects. "Previously I'd worked at Palliser Estate winery, an experience which opened my eyes up to how visitors perceived the Wairarapa - a complete escape from the big smoke. I realized then there was a major gap in the market for boutique accommodation."

Her hunch proved fruitful and so with little more than a paint brush and an excess of ideas, Cathie transformed a 1890s workman's cottage on the edge of Martinborough. When that couldn't sustain the accommodation demand from Wellington, she followed her gut instinct to create something larger. In 1998, with a financial partner on board and mostly local shareholders, Cathie purchased 15 acres of bare paddock and devised Brackenridge – a stylish and contemporary country retreat offering cottage-style accommodation and purpose-built conference, meeting and wedding facilities.



*Lorraine Hall & Cathie Morison*

"I have to be honest and say that luck, a lot of support, good timing and bloody hard work helped get Brackenridge up and running," says Cathie. "But looking back I shudder, as I had no experience in setting up a facility of this size or knowledge of what it meant to run it, but it didn't really matter as I was determined to make it work."

Twelve years after first opening its doors, Brackenridge has developed an enviable reputation in the accommodation, conference and wedding market, cemented even further in 2008 with the opening of the Spa at Brackenridge. Cathie now employs over 20 staff, hosts more than 40 weddings a year. Her success, she says, a consequence of her passion for the industry.

While Cathie's dream was unfolding in Martinborough, 40km up the road in Masterton Lorraine was busy formulating her own. She decided to turn her childhood passion for creating clothes into a bonafide business with Hall, a contemporary label today that is synonymous with enduring style and quality.

"I've always admired and respected Lorraine for her style," Cathie says. "And while I was initially concerned for her, knowing first hand how much hard work goes into setting up a new business, let alone doing it without much support, I knew she was hell bent on doing it and wow – look what's happened."