



PHOTO: ALIANA MCDANIEL

STILL GOING STRONG

Not everyone decides they're either going to leave their industry or go out on their own when they're just 22. Then again, Jaimee Smith isn't everyone. CHRISTINE MCCAFFERTY meets this talented southerner.

When speaking to someone who has risen to the top of their field, you often expect them to say they are doing the job they've always dreamed of. That was not quite the case for Dunedin salon owner Jaimee Smith. Her first foray into hairdressing began as a bit of a chore but now she says she wouldn't want to be in any other industry.

"My sister used to own a salon in Timaru and my Mum made me go and work there for the holidays. I had to do it," Jaimee laughs, recalling her early days of sweeping up hair around the salon. "I was a bit lost about what to do at the time. I didn't like school so much, but in order to leave I needed something to do and I decided on hairdressing."

At 15, she enrolled in a Timaru Polytechnic course and found she actually quite liked it. From there she moved to Dunedin and worked in a couple of salons but says her first real boost was working with Michelle Ogden for the Rodney Wayne group.

"She was the one who got me started with competitions and the creative element of the industry. That was where I really found my niche."

After spending a few years working for Rodney Wayne, Jaimee found herself at a cross roads about what to do next. "It was a case of should I carry on, or not at all, which kind of seems weird to consider quitting when at the same time you're considering starting your own salon. But that's what I ended up doing. It wasn't so much a conscious decision, it was just a turn of events."

At 22, she opened her salon Zaibatsu in Dunedin. Over more than a decade she has built a loyal client base, worked with some ultra talented stylists and firmly established Zaibatsu as one of the best in Otago. "I have an amazing

location overlooking the ocean which I think is a draw card. And I pride myself on having good people on board and a nice environment. It's not sterile. We're professional, but you can still relax and have a laugh. We're like a family."

The team has won more than 30 industry awards this year alone in styling, colouring and photographic competitions. "It has been a great year but I think a highlight was seeing my young apprentice come through. Considering she only started out this year with no previous experience and then won the top apprentice in Otago, it's a bloody awesome achievement. I was so proud of her."

When she started the salon, Jaimee says she hadn't fully considered the reality of running her own business and the pressures that would come with it. But 12 years later, she is still going strong.

"It's was definitely hard at the start and the financial side can be a struggle. It's hard out there. But there are so many flip sides. You get clients you just love and build some

amazing friendships. You see your staff turn from young people into mature, directional and talented stylists. For me it's satisfying to drive the team and watch them grow, but at the same time I'm still learning myself."

The industry has provided a whole lot of opportunities, particularly given her passion for couture hair design.

Jaimee was this year appointed to the Sebastian New Zealand creative team and next month will travel to India to design a couture collection for a major salon launch. "It's totally up my alley; I get to design the whole thing myself! I love the fashion side of things, and I also enjoy styling my own shoots as well. We work on quite a few fashion shows every year, with the polytechnic and for fundraisers. And obviously we take part in a whole lot of competitions." ☺

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Her advice to anyone considering starting their own salon is to be cautious and make sure they have a good, sound team they you can trust. "That's the most important thing – having honest people that are true to themselves. There are some amazingly talented people out there."

She says she is grateful to all those who her shared their knowledge over the years, and helped her to grow as a stylist. "For me, it's great to know that at any time if I need anything, I can just pick up the phone and get support. That's the kind of industry it is."

Jaimee is now doing the same thing herself, working with other salons as a Frog coach, aiming to help take salons to the next level through supporting growth, motivation and team bonding.

Jaimee acknowledges Wella for their support of her career and salon over the years and, of course, her parents. As a mum of two young children, she says she is lucky to have a supportive husband who understands her passion and has given her the freedom to continue building her career.

She is incredibly optimistic about the industry and her future in it. "The growth of the industry has been awesome, and there are a lot more opportunities on a global level," she says. "It comes with a bit of hard work and meeting the right people helps, but the opportunities are honestly endless when you get there."

"It's been a real journey, but in terms of creative growth, I feel like my career is only just beginning and things are getting better and better. I know I'm in this industry for the long haul, but maybe I would like to be apart of a bigger picture. I'm always open to new opportunities." ●

