
*After an unexpected redundancy and time at home with her daughters,
Jo Mathewson just wanted a new creative hobby.
But then a candle-making kit led to reinvention and accidental
entrepreneurship as founder of JoJo Co.*



BURNING

ambition

By Ketsuda Phoutinane

First met Jo Mathewson, in a way, on social media. Enchanted by images of Jojo Co candles dotted around her cosy Burntisland home, I longed to be immediately transported to a leather lounge chair with a book and a candle burning beside me.

Idyllic as they appear, the posts are accompanied with the expected friendly messages and shop updates — but also those of a more candid nature, chronicling the multi-tasking behind the scenes, along with the few moments of calm, behind the one-woman show that is Jojo Co.

Stepping into Jojo Co HQ in real life, it is exactly as pictured, in that it is simply Jo's home.

Jo cuts a casually stylish figure in a loose top and grey leopard print patterned culottes, curly blonde hair framing her face. She is affable and unguarded, happily sharing the unplanned beginnings of her business.

When Jo's husband Neil bought her a candle making kit in late summer 2017, entrepreneurship was not on the horizon. The intent was to start a hobby together and maybe make nice Christmas gifts.

It didn't quite go as intended.

"We lasted basically an hour in the kitchen before we fell out and I threw him out," Jo laughs. "Because he wanted to put colours in and stuff."

They each called the other bossy and that was that on their shared hobby.

But Jo continued on alone and about one month later, after nearly giving up, she developed what is now 'Pink Spice', her company's signature scent. It snowballed from there.

She had felt a bit flat and yearned to do something creative.

Originally from Dumfries, Jo studied fashion design at Galashiels, but worked in finance thereafter. When she was made



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redundant from a commercial banking job in 2010, Jo was a new mother four months into maternity leave.

"I was absolutely devastated when it happened to me," she recounts.

"In hindsight, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Because why was I working in banking? How the heck did that happen to me?"

Jo spent the following years looking after her daughters, Grace, 9, and Rose, 8.

Two years later, she started Classic Companion, a part-time companion service for the elderly. She realised that self-employment was the way forward.

But Jo didn't mean to start a candle business. For thrifty Christmas gifts two years ago, she fashioned candles from used jam jars, spray paint and labels from eBay.

With the success of her gifts and encouragement from friends and family, she felt bolstered. Her hobby became known at her daughters' school. Other parents were asking to order candles on her school run.

Last year, in the space of a weekend, Jo

decided to sell Mother's Day gift sets to her friends' partners, albeit with hesitation.

"I felt horrendous asking people I knew if they wanted to order. I felt like a real idiot. But I got something like eight orders and it just kind of stemmed from there."

Since then, Jo has created six scents available as soy wax candles, diffusers and wax melts. She overcame fear and self-consciousness to become a regular trader at markets. Confidence came while working with stockists. The business grew organically. She learned to stick with her gut and occasionally say no.

She only joined social media for the first time on behalf of Jojo Co, then finally, made a website.

"Everything was an eye-opener, but what I would say was that my confidence was growing," Jo said.

"And I wouldn't say I was quite reclusive or shy or quiet, but what had happened to me, I think, losing my job in the bank and just being at home being a mum with the girls tends to — you lose a bit of yourself."

Now her days are non-stop. Not just making candles, but developing new products, attending markets, handling shipping and doing social media, the business is all Jo. Family and close friends lend help, but there is no other staff.

Soon after we sit down at her kitchen table, a customer phones regarding an order of wax melts.

Jo debuted the already sold out wax melts to the online shop the night prior. Unlike an ordinary candle, these rather cute

star-shaped pieces of scented wax are gradually melted by a flame or electric warmer. In fact, she needed to head back into her workshop to make enough to fulfil last night's orders.

I embark on a wee tour of Jojo Co productions and, thereby, Neil's handiwork. Jo's husband converted part of their garage into a packaging room. Most notably, he built a wooden shed in their back garden as a candle making workshop. The exterior has the look of a charming log cabin in a children's programme.

"I am trying to slow down a wee bit because it can be really consuming, but I do love it, which is the first time ever in my whole working life that I've loved something."

Jo is certainly not one to navel-gaze, fuelled by the thought that this bubble could burst and repeatedly expressing appreciation for her circumstances.

"I don't pretend to know what I'm doing or anything. I just do what I like, go with my gut. I don't want to pretend to be anything I'm not."

The business has also made some extraordinary moments possible.

This past May, Jo coordinated an open studio to raise funds for a friend with terminal cancer. Local businesses, including Playroom Pottery and jeweller Hamespun, set up stalls. More than two dozen

businesses lent support, contributed to a raffle, or both. Roasting Project of Burntisland's high street brewed coffees.

A queue had formed outside her house by quarter past nine in



the morning. They raised £4,000 in just over two hours.

"I was just so happy that I had this little business so I could do something like this, but I never ever thought that we would raise that amount of money. These have been real life-changing moments for me. The whole weekend, it was so emotional."

Jo credits the community's support, encouragement and kindness for making Burntisland a place she deems her true hometown.

That said, she didn't intend to live in Burntisland for more than a few months. After university, a six-month stay turned into 20 years (and counting) when Jo met her husband.

Now Jo is in a mind to champion local businesses. Hoping to encourage hesitant artists to set up stalls, she's lending her market knowledge on a committee for Burntisland's Christmas market. A monthly town market would be a dream.

"Since I've started doing this, I cannot believe the amount of people who are making stuff — amazing stuff, real talent — in the town itself."

"I really do think that Fife is ready. I think people are really trying to source their gifts and things they buy locally or handmade. I think, you know, people are getting a bit fed up with mass-produced stuff."

And to think only two years have passed since Jo and Neil tried candle making.

"If I can do it, anybody can, because I was so scared," she says and again with emphasis: "So scared."

"I'm like a different person. I wasn't unhappy with the person I was, I wasn't depressed or anything like that, but I can't believe I'm a different person to who I was two years ago."

"I think people are trying to source their gifts locally or handmade these days"

