

Early 18th century carving of Madonna and child.

Mother and Child Reunion

THREE YEARS AGO CHLOE RYMER AND HER MUM KAREN DECIDED TO TURN THEIR LOVE OF ANTIQUES INTO A BUSINESS. NOW, WHAT BEGAN AS A HOBBY, IS CURRENTLY THE SUCCESSFUL AND STYLISH DEALERSHIP MOLLY AND MAUD'S PLACE. CHLOE SHARES THEIR STORY

How did you and your mum decide to work together in antiques?

It happened quite organically. I didn't go to uni but went travelling and did various jobs; mum was a psychologist but wanted to do something different. She had an interior design business in the eighties and we both always loved antiques, so it just developed. We called it Molly and Maud's Place after the two resident lambs who lived in the orchard where we now have our showroom – they moved to a neighbouring field.

You didn't sit down with a plan for the business?

No! There was no vision or strategy and we walked into it quite blindly. We didn't even have a van, and went to pick up stock from auctions in a horse trailer. We were cheap and cheerful with a lack of funds and knowledge, but now we're much more credible. We've developed a lot since those very early days.

How?

Our client-base has changed, we did have contacts but now we work a lot more with interior designers. We're based between York and Harrogate and were a local business, now most of our pieces go south, to London and the home counties, and we've invested a lot in our website. We've learnt a lot – we never stop learning. Of course mistakes have been made, but we've grown from them and built up our knowledge. ➔



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(above) Those 19th century French château doors, one of Chloe's favourite pieces.
(right) Chloe with mum Karen.
(opposite page) The showroom with its combination of well-chosen art, furniture and decorative pieces.

What's it like working so closely with your mum?
We get on well and for the most part we agree on what we want to buy. We do have similar taste, but where we differ keeps the business moving forward. If an expensive item comes up that we both like, we give each other reassurance. We bounce off each other quite well.

So who has the final say?
Each of us says "I have to ask the boss!"

Have you enjoyed being a newcomer to the industry?
It's really friendly and although it's typically seen as an older industry there is also a hub of younger dealers. I've met some really nice people, made good friends and found that people are happy to share their expertise. They love giving advice, as, with antiques, everyone's selling something different so we're not really in competition with each other. We do our own thing but it's important to see what other dealers are doing, together we help build the profile of the industry.

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Is having your own business everything you thought it would be?
It's a huge learning curve, you have to be an accountant, a web designer, everything that goes with it. But we're taking on more help, I think to be professional you do have to utilise the right, skilled people. We've found that social media is huge for us, being new in business, it's a big deal, we have to say "hello, we're here." We're not in town with a high street, and our showroom isn't enough to sustain our business; 85 per cent of our sales are online, so it's really important to get that side of it right.

Can you describe Molly and Maud's Place?
It's actually very hard to describe it to someone outside, I often don't call it an antiques business, because we sell for so many contemporary settings. Our things can look cool in new places. We don't restrict ourselves to what we buy, things will always go in and out fashion so we just buy what we like. And I've never been a trend setter!

It's all down to your good taste...
Our tastes are developing. Mum buys art, and what we were buying in the early days to now is a long way apart. We've learnt to research things, we don't buy the same thing twice and make a point of moving forward. People ask all the time if we'll look out for stuff, but we'll never buy if we wouldn't be happy to sell it in the business. If we're buying what we love it's much easier to sell, whereas if it's only to make a profit, it'll usually turn out to be a mistake, and more often than not it's something we don't like. ♦♦





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(right) 17th century Spanish School oil on canvas.
(above) The Molly and Maud's Place showroom.



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What's your favourite piece right now?

We had an old French baker's rack and a huge pair of French château doors. We fall in and out of love with items all the time.

Do you have any plans for the business?

We're going to be part of the Blanchard Collective (a collective of decorative antique dealers just outside Newbury) and it will be great to have a permanent space there, taking us nearer to London. We'd like to work with local artists and put on exhibitions. Although we love antiques, handmade, modern design looks fabulous with old furniture and we'd like to explore collaborations.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in the antiques trade?

Just go for it, it's really good fun. Make lots of mistakes, take advice, try it. Work out what you like and in what direction you want to go in, and keep growing. We're still learning and will be when we're 85. Most of all, do what you love. 

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