

# Lawyer HOW I R MY

Stepping out of her comfort zone was the right move

**G**etting ready in the morning usually consists of the mundane tasks such as brushing your teeth or making your bed. But for Nicole Rebstock, it has also included making life-changing decisions.

At the age of 22, the young law student chose to forgo a legal career and set up her own shoe brand, REB by Nicole Rebstock.

Now 27, the Aucklander confesses to *Woman's Day* that it was an epiphany when she realised she would rather take a chance on being a footwear designer than struggle to leave home every day to practise law.

The young business owner tells, "One morning I woke up, sat in bed and thought, 'Everyone has to start somewhere. You aren't just born a shoe designer



Strutting down High Street, Nicole is confident in her growing business.

# with sole!

# EBOOTED CAREER

or an entrepreneur – you have to work for it. If other people can do it, there's no reason that I can't! So I quite literally picked up a pen and paper, and started attempting to sketch."

In July 2016, Nicole took another leap by starting her own shoe brand online. Just over a year later, she opened a retail store on Auckland's High Street, in the heart of the CBD.

Nicole, who describes her label as "very much classic but with a hint of European elegance", realised she needed to be where her biggest market was and that was in the corporate hub.

"I knew it was a safe market because my designs are more classic and they tend to lend themselves to that sort of corporate consumer," she explains.

## Her kick-start

It was back in 2009 that Nicole began her studies in law, something she had been interested in throughout high school. She decided to push herself by completing a double degree with business on the side, a nod to her enterprising spirit, a trait she believes was inherited from her US-born mother.

"In America, a lot of value is placed on entrepreneurship, so Mum was quite excited about it," tells Nicole.

It wasn't until she was well into her degree that her "hallelujah moment" actually happened.

"I didn't always want to be a shoe designer," admits Nicole. "I hadn't considered it until about my third year at uni. I thought it would be

awesome to have my own shoe brand, but I had no experience in the fashion industry, so the whole thing really seemed impossible."

Instead of leaving uni then and there, Nicole decided that finishing her education would help in setting up a business.

"Law made me much more confident. It teaches you how to think and once you learn to think in an analytical way, you become more positive about your abilities.

"I decided I wanted to work in business. I'd rather work with a product I love – and I have always loved shoes. But never ever in my life did I think I would own a shoe brand."

In 2016, Nicole graduated from the University of Auckland and was admitted to the bar in 2017, a step she decided was very important to take.

"I did that because if you don't sit the bar and then decide later on that you want to practise law, they often make you resit part or all of your degree and there was no way I was doing that again," she laughs.

"With young women in business, we all wish things were fair and equal, and that everyone was treated the same, but we're not quite there yet, so having a law degree behind me helps."

Luckily for Nicole, her foray into shoe design was made easier through the help of her friends Sophie Chan Andreassend and Mandy Minting Huang.

With zero experience behind her and no formal training, her friends were able to steer her in the right direction



If the shoe fits! Nicole completed her law degree, graduating in 2016 (below right, with dad Ulf Schoefisch), and was admitted to the bar (below left) the following year.



when it came to starting a business.

"When we get together and build things, that is powerful," says Nicole.

The budding designer also took a month-long intensive shoe-making course at the London College of Fashion, studying under a tutor who had once worked for famed shoe maker Christian Louboutin.

But perhaps one of Nicole's smartest moves was taking on a part-time sales assistant job while she studied, at shoe store Mi Piaci.

"This was useful as not

only was I surrounded by the product all the time, but I got a really good feel for what consumers want," she tells.

"Observing people and listening to what they like or don't like is a powerful tool. I also got a good understanding of the components of a footwear business and what it takes to run a successful store."

Nicole admits that at times, running her own business is hard, but she gets a sense of satisfaction out of seeing her "baby" grow.

And with a flourishing brand and two more stores in the pipeline, it's clear Nicole is one savvy businesswoman. She advises, "If you want something, go and make it happen."