

In the Vault

A diamond in the rough, three female jewelry entrepreneurs set themselves apart in the industry by bringing heritage and sustainability to the forefront of their brands to build a lasting legacy by preserving generational wealth.

Written by Ashlyn Rowe

Ask anyone who appreciates the finer things, and they will tell you that jewelry is a must-have investment. Jewellery has personality, character, and enhances a person's individuality. From oversized statement earrings, to dainty and elegant hand rings; various metals to suit your skin tones, and gems and diamonds to add a sparkle, there are options for everyone. But what makes you drawn to a brand? Is it their captivating marketing campaigns, or their desirable price point? Perhaps it's the location of the store or the word-of-mouth reviews. All of these factors can be considered, but many brands have an inspiring story that led them to their design's worth noting.

Entrepreneurship is a growing force amongst females, as they strive to make a name for themselves in industries that many men lead the way. Supporting female entrepreneurship has become a focal point for people when they choose a brand to shop. It is no surprise that these three radiant ladies are making a name for themselves and paving a pavé path to success.

We All Start Somewhere (Bespoke Beginnings)

Aisha Marshall knows a thing or two about pushing boundaries and the drive and determination that comes with being a successful entrepreneur. Aisha grew up in Los Angeles, in a low-income neighborhood with a single mother struggling to find financial stability, but despite their hardship, she always encouraged Aisha to pursue her education. A journalism and mass communications graduate of Arizona State University, her degree sparked her passion for media. But Aisha could see the industry evolving daily, so she decided to take her education a step further with another leap of faith and financial burden, and attended Law School at Arizona State. "I specialized in internet law, which was an emerging field at the time." As a way to make some side money while studying for the LSAT, Aisha put her degree to good use and started a small creative company selling Snapchat filters on Etsy for five dollars each. This small initiative grew into a successful marketing and branding agency. While working with multiple companies, it was suggested that she apply for the Forbes 30 Under 30 List. It was the start of 2020, and covid was about to take its swing at businesses across the world. For Aisha, the pandemic brought business instead of pulling it away. Her company continued to thrive and she graciously won the award for Forbes 30 Under 30.

An incredible accomplishment to say the least. Aisha, was often the only black female in her college and law school classrooms, feeling the odds were stacked against her for accomplishing anything with a fair chance. But she never let her background, financial hardships, or skin color define her. Triumph and resilience prospered by never giving up on her dreams.

"Receiving the 30 Under 30 award is one of my greatest accomplishments to date. Not just because it's a huge accolade, but because of where I came from and how I look. It shows me that I've beaten all the

odds and achieved success through hard work, dedication, and perseverance. It is a testament to my resilience and determination to succeed despite the obstacles I faced.”

Entrepreneurs tend to be creative minds. It takes personal willpower to be an entrepreneur as no one is forcing you to go out on your own and make something yourself. That takes drive, and a creative niche. Much like Aisha's appreciation for marketing and business development, friends and entrepreneurs, Paris Krimotat and Tara Carroll, both discovered that two creative minds were better than one. Best friends since grade school, the two grew up attending an all-girls private boarding school in the Gold Coast of Australia. Paris went on to receive her Bachelor of Business at Bond University and started her career in marketing. She developed a passion for the finer things in fashion and created her own luxury sourcing and consignment business. Paris traveled the world developing personal relationships with so many brand stores, she was able to cultivate a team across the globe. Tara pursued her masters in event management and worked exclusively with luxury auto brands, music festivals and bespoke events, giving her the eye for detail. Paris and Tara knew it wouldn't be long before they linked arms like besties once again and pursued a career path together.

Quality Over Quantity

These three ambitious females put their best foot forward and all discovered a niche opportunity in the jewelry industry. As the natural progression of an entrepreneur is to move onto something bigger and better, Aisha, Paris, and Tara all have one thing in common, a love of luxury and legacy.

While businesses can bloom from any spark in thought, or scribbled idea on a restaurant napkin, Aisha's godmother, Jody, became her inspiration for what came next. As a young girl, her godmother was always gifting her jewelry on momentous occasions. Aisha had always been curious about why her godmother chose jewelry as the gift each year, her response was inspiring.

“She shared with me that when her family came to America from the Holocaust, they would swallow their diamonds to bring with them her as a way to pass on generational wealth. By gifting me jewelry, she was honoring that tradition and keeping that legacy alive.”

When Aisha graduated from law school, her godmother offered to design a piece of jewelry together, and then the spark lit. Aisha fell in love with the process. Aisha had a name she had placed in her back pocket, potentially for client use, WHXTE, pronounced (*h*) *wite*, which became the perfect brand name for a jewelry line she could call her own. WHXTE represents a clean slate and a fresh start. To Aisha, the color white represents new beginnings, purity, and light. Aisha said the WHXTE Atelier client is “someone who values quality over quantity, and understands the significance of investing in a piece that will last a lifetime. They are someone who appreciates the artistry and craftsmanship that goes into each WHXTE piece and understands the value of supporting small businesses and independent artists.”

WHXTE is recognized for their Half-Moon collection which is designed with diamonds that have been cut in half to symbolize the idea of unending memories. A nod to the idea of completing the circle of your own memories. Setting herself apart from the rest, the diamond cut is more difficult to source in the diamond industry as most artisans don't believe in cutting a diamond completely in half. Yet it creates a unique design element not seen in the market. However, Aisha believes whole-heartedly her vision and intentional meaning behind the one-of-a-kind designs she creates for her brand. WHXTE's tag line is *Fine*

Jewelry with Feeling, adding a personal connection to each creation. “I believe that jewelry is more than just a material object, it is a symbol of love, connection, and memory.”

Sourcing can be the most challenging aspect of a jewelry business. Demand for diamonds has become increasingly higher and according to Future Market Insight, diamond jewelry has an estimated market share of 40 percent. But not all diamonds are harvested through a mine. Paris and Tara took their vision for creating diamonds jewelry by putting sustainability at the forefront of the brand. Both passionate about accessorizing, jewelry seemed like the perfect collaboration for the two to partner on, founding House of Felix. Felix is a Latin word for “lucky or happy,” which resonates with how they feel about jewelry when they wear it.

Moissanite gemstones are a sustainable alternative to land mined diamonds, and it doesn't compromise the quality of the stone. There is essentially no difference in the mineral and chemical make-up of the diamond, nor is there anything different in their appearance of cut, color, and clarity. What is highly impressive about moissanite gems is that they cost one-tenth the price of a diamond and the stone is more durable and does not tarnish in color, as some mined diamonds can turn a yellow tint over time.

When building the business plan, Tara and Paris wanted not only to set themselves apart in a heavily saturated market, but to also create a brand that betters the environment with a collective initiative to live a more sustainable life for themselves and their future generations. “It is important for every industry to do their part. We believe there is incredible value not only from being a sustainable alternative, but also the cost of your luxury jewelry. That is where lab grown becomes the perfect solution without compromising on quality and aesthetics.”

House of Felix focuses on traditional diamond jewelry with tennis bracelets and necklaces, as well as their trilogy ring which is one of the most unique pieces they have designed for their collection. As a non-binary brand, their client can be authentic to whoever they are and want to be. “If you like it, wear it.” says Paris.

The Future Sparkles Bright

Brand awareness is essential for small businesses, and as House of Felix and WHXTE look towards the future of their brand's they prioritize their client's wants and needs. For Tara and Paris, focusing on educating their market on the value of sustainable alternatives and the multitude of benefits to moissanite jewelry will help them grow a genuine and authentic brand and client base. According to Persistence Market Research Group, moissanite jewelry is expected to expand from \$42 million in sales in 2023 to \$73.9 million expected in 2033. Also mentioned by PMR is that Europe is seeing a shift in consumers preference to lab grown alternatives which will undoubtedly help fuel the market expansion across the world. Founders, Tara and Paris plan to grow their collection by the end of this year, and have an extensive product line for the years to come. House of Felix legacy will reflect the fact you can still look incredible wearing beautiful pieces and still do your part for the earth by investing in sustainable alternatives. Currently their collection of moissanite jewelry is available for purchase on their website HouseofFelix.com.

For Aisha Marshall, founder of WHXTE, looking ahead to further her impact in the market is her primary goal. In the fashion industry, strategic collaborations and partnerships can make an impressive impact on a startup business, bringing brand awareness to a broader audience. WHXTE plans to design capsule

collections with influential partners in her community who share her brand values and unique style. One of her biggest aspirations is to also partner with a non-profit organization who shares a similar mission as her brand, to create a collection that supports the cause and encourages her clients to feel even better about the impact of their purchase. The WHXTE collection, Memories Made In Gold, can be purchased at any of their local pop-ups, or on the website, Whxte.com.

Diamonds are a lasting piece of heritage that can be passed down to the next generations. And because of the longevity of a diamond, Aisha wants her legacy to last even longer than the jewelry itself. "I want to create a brand that goes beyond just creating beautiful jewelry, but one that also impacts the lives of many. I believe every piece of jewelry has a story and my brand aims to help people preserve and celebrate their memories through timeless pieces." An idea that flourished from her godmother's annual gift and adoration for jewelry and its representation, Aisha plans to preserve and honor her heritage and culture with her creations at WHXTE.

Multifaceted and Meaningful

The future sparkles bright for these three entrepreneurs. Inspired by their own personal connection with jewelry, and their aspirations for leaving the world better than they found it one diamond at a time, sets them apart by building a legacy for lineage.

Jewelry ultimately makes a person feel elevated and beautiful, and it is an incredibly personal investment. Investing in heritage and timeless elegance allows the client to curate a personal collection of stones that suits their personality with delicate jewelry from half-moon diamonds, to lab grown alternatives, both with awe-striking beautiful and high-quality value.

A testament to where you start only leads you to wear you belong, these three females inspire others to find their niche, and follow their dreams. Aisha, Tara, and Paris are each fulfilling their purpose and making an impact on the world and the industry, showing their multifaceted talents, shining light on the gems that they truly are.