

DJV Boutique: 'Our customers can see a future for us, and we can too'

Danielle Lett chats to Mandy Errington, as she reflects on her shop's 10th anniversary - and how her efforts go far beyond keeping the town looking stylish

For many, running your own business in the town you love is the ultimate dream.

And Mandy Errington from Ipswich has spent the last 10 years making that dream a reality.

Mandy is the owner of DJV Boutique, a womenswear store that has become a staple in the town centre over the past decade, celebrating its landmark birthday this week.

With 30 years' worth of marketing experience under her belt, Mandy is no stranger to the world of retail. "I've spent my career working in a corporate arena, for various advertising agencies and local authorities in the region," she explains, talking about the beginnings of the fashion business.

"Eventually I began working with the East of England Co-Op, and spent 14 years with them. And around half that time I was head of marketing."

In 2012 Mandy realised it was time to follow her true passion, and soon put the wheels in motion to becoming her own boss.

"I wanted to provide something different for the fashion scene here in Ipswich. I began looking, and saw there was a lot of the same thing in town. There was a gap in the market, and I wanted to provide something that was more bespoke for the customer."

And thus, DJV Boutique was

born. Her first shop was situated near Coe's on Norwich Road, before she made the decision to expand and move to her current Cox Lane shop in 2018.

Individual styling is one of the keys to her success.

"Customers come to us for inspiration, as they don't want to look like everyone else, or clash with someone else at an event," she explains.

And Mandy herself is a firm advocate of standing out from the crowd - something that harks all the way back to her corporate marketing days.

"I think working in a creative field, you have a critical eye. I always found myself wearing things that were different. I never followed a trend per se, and I always put my outfits together to be a bit unique."

And as you make your way through Mandy's shop, you can instantly see this reflected throughout her wares.

Think dresses adorned in vibrant and psychedelic prints, tops for every occasion, and statement handbags. Even Mandy herself, when we sit down to chat in her shop, is dressed in a cobalt blue blazer, paired with black and gold high heels.

"I like people to stand out from the crowd. One size and one style doesn't fit all, but it's all about honing in on that uniqueness."



Mandy Errington, owner of DJV Boutique in Ipswich, is celebrating her tenth year in business

When customers enter DJV - which stands for 'daring, jazzy, versatile' - they're given the full boutique experience, where the team are on hand to offer their guidance and expertise.

"We always ask the client what they're after. From there, we'll try to narrow it down by advising what's best suited to them, based on

their personal style. We try to do as much as we can, so people leave feeling confident in how they look."

Particular about what she stocks, many of her pieces are one-offs. And once they're gone, they're gone. "The majority of the time, you won't find our clothes and bags anywhere else. There's some niche labels, but we also have some commercial brands. For instance, we're a French Connection stockist, which really helps anchor us."

In recent years, Mandy has also turned her attention towards eco-friendly brands, keen to show others that you can be environmentally-conscious while still looking good.

"So far we've got some clothing, sustainable jewellery and vegan-friendly eyelash lines in. We're not fully there yet, but it's a journey, and every little helps.

"We also invest in local brands and businesses by letting them showcase their products here. If they can't afford a full shop, we'll say to them 'take a little bit of space in here, and we can help you out.'"

Mandy is always keen to give back where she can, and has long been a keen supporter of up-and-coming start-ups and entrepreneurs. She does this by

providing apprenticeships and mentoring schemes, which are aimed at helping newbies get a leg up in the retail world.

"When we were based at Norwich Road, I looked at how we could use the business to help people. But it wasn't just about getting someone in to help within the shop, I wanted to see how I could pay it forward and share the experience I've built up over the years."

Mandy got in touch with Suffolk New College, offering apprenticeships to keen students who wanted to see what it was like to work in the realm of fashion retail.

She soon received a high volume of interest as the role didn't just entail serving customers, but understanding what's needed to run your own business. "One of the apprentices was with us for about five years in total - three years as an apprentice and two years employed. It really worked out well," she says.

During lockdown, with all non-essential businesses shut for months on end, Mandy added another string to her bow and launched her very own mentoring scheme, Ambition Mentoring, available to anyone in the local area starting up a business.





"I'm not someone to sit on my hands and do nothing, I've got a skillset and thought to myself 'how can I apply myself while the shop is shut?' I looked into mentoring, and saw there were a lot of schemes for those already running businesses, but I wanted to help people who were just starting out. I know myself that journey can be daunting, so I wanted to help people from the outset, learning the dos and don'ts of business, as well as how to save money and keep a track of finances."

With such a strong sense of entrepreneurship, it's no surprise Mandy has received a number of accolades over the years, including being named as one of the UK's most inspirational businesswomen in F:entrepreneur's top 100 in 2021. She was also shortlisted in last year's Suffolk Business Awards in the Disrupter of the Year category, and this year she was selected as a finalist for the FSB (Federation of Small Business) Awards Self Employed / Sole Trader of the Year.

But with a loyal customer base and numerous accolades to her name – what's next on the horizon for the woman who shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon?

"I've got a flexible business plan. I don't think you can firmly say

'this is what I want and this is what's going to happen.'

"But I am working on exploring the men's side of retail. I did a trial at Christmas and stocked a few men's pieces, but the feedback I got was that the male clientele wanted the same vibrancy of the women's clothing. I didn't know that, and was going for more neutral tones. I'm still learning, but that's definitely something to work on."

One thing's for certain though – Mandy firmly believes in the power of the town centre, and won't be leaving Ipswich anytime soon.

"I think after the pandemic, people had a chance to evaluate how they spend their money and where they shop – and many were keen to go back into local stores when they reopened. After all, it was local shops that kept communities going and thriving during lockdown."

"So I'm keen to keep pushing the fact that there are a lot of vibrant independent shops here, and that we're worth investing in. I'm an ambassador for the town, and like to push it as much as possible. Our customers can see a future for us, and we can too."

DJV Boutique is open Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 5.30pm.

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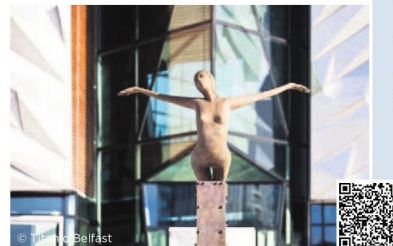
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