



homegrown

MALENY COUPLE LENA GERBER AND HENDRIK BRENNER ARE REIGNITING DEMAND FOR QUALITY FURNITURE THAT'S MADE TO LAST.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY JAI SMITH

INSPIRED BY THE SWISS CHALETs and German farmhouses of their shared European heritage, Lena Gerber and Hendrik Brenner launched Rekindle Design Co as a protest against poor-quality, mass-produced furniture. “Essentially, we wanted to combat the whole fast-furniture trend,” says Lena, 42. “The idea behind our name is to rekindle people’s love for timeless pieces that will live on for generations. Also, when I put our two names into a word jumble, ‘rekindle’ was one of the words that came up – so it was meant to be!”

Now settled in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, Lena and Hendrik, 43, who are partners in work and life, met when Australian-born Lena was living in Switzerland. “My father is Swiss and Hendrik is from Germany,” explains Lena. “While I was living in Europe, I developed a real passion for the cottage and farmhouse aesthetic. In Swiss chalets and German farmhouses there’s a lot of really beautiful, but simple timber furniture. That’s where our inspiration comes from.”

Relocating to Queensland in late 2019, Lena and Hendrik soon realised the furniture they were used to buying in Swiss second-hand shops and French vintage markets wasn’t readily available in Australia. “We didn’t want to go down the throw-away-furniture route, so we decided to go back to those markets in Europe and bring the original items to Australia, both for ourselves and to sell,” says Hendrik. “But then COVID hit and there was no way of leaving Australia... or returning, for that matter.”

The entrepreneurial pair decided if they couldn’t source the pieces they wanted, they’d have to find a way to make them. “We thought we should take matters into our own hands,” says Hendrik. “We started developing the kind of furniture that we would like to see in our own home.”

Equipped with little more than a passion for design and a belief in their concept, the couple started ordering samples in 2020 and launched their first retail collection in late 2022 to sell-out success.

“Teamwork has been key to getting where we are today,” says Lena. “The journey hasn’t been easy the entire way, and there’s obviously been a steep learning curve, but Hendrik has always been super supportive.”

With just the two of them looking after the day-to-day running of the business, Lena and Hendrik divide tasks based on their individual strengths and experience. “Lena is the creative – she’s in charge of the initial creation of the designs and all our marketing,” says Hendrik. “I’m more on the operational side of things, but we always help each other out and the major decision-making happens together.”

Taking a slow but steady approach to growth as the popularity of their products increases, the couple wholeheartedly embrace the slow-furniture movement. “We’re growing slowly and organically,” says Lena.

Hendrik adds: “We’re not just creating designs, we’re also using traditional materials and carpentry techniques – which is more sustainable, but takes more time and is more expensive.”

Lena and Hendrik have landed on a winning formula and look forward to producing many more collections of beautiful furniture championing craftsmanship and quality. “Our vision is that our customers enjoy the full journey with us – from an easy-to-use website to receiving, unboxing and assembling their furniture,” says Hendrik. “And the feedback we’ve received so far is that they do!” *CB*
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