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## She's Baaack!

Globetrotting broker and tycoon magnet **Andrea Eng** — at home and at peace (but for how long?) **p.76**



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### DONE DEAL

Xantrex's French Connection

# what women want

... is to run their own business. And in increasing numbers, that's what they're doing. Meet six successful business owners who are helping redefine what it means to be an entrepreneur

# How

did the single parent of a nine-month-old baby achieve that fabled balance between work and family life? She started her own welding business: the Welder Chic.

Theresa Stochowicz may have chosen an unusual field for her foray, but she's completely "on trend" with her gutsy move to entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs are one of the fastest-growing segments of the Canadian economy, starting four of every five new businesses. Here in B.C., the number of businesses owned by women increased almost 40 per cent from 1989 to 2004.

As more Canadian women get into businesses for themselves, they are also reshaping the idea of entrepreneurial success.

Female entrepreneurs are ditching the old-school "growth at all costs" business paradigm in favour of work that works for them — transforming our economies and our workplaces in the process.

"Women are changing the business world without even knowing it. They're doing it while just trying to meet the demands of their lives," says Laurel Douglas, CEO of the Women's Enterprise Centre, which has been helping women develop businesses in B.C. since 1995.

by DOROTHY BARTOSZEWSKI photography by NIH WEST

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The differences in how men and women approach business are there right from their initial motivations for choosing enterprise. In a 2000 Statistics Canada survey, most men said their main reason for choosing self-employment was independence, freedom and the opportunity to be their own boss. Many women agreed. But an almost equal percentage of women said they went into business largely because of work/family balance and flexible hours. Very few men agreed with that sentiment.

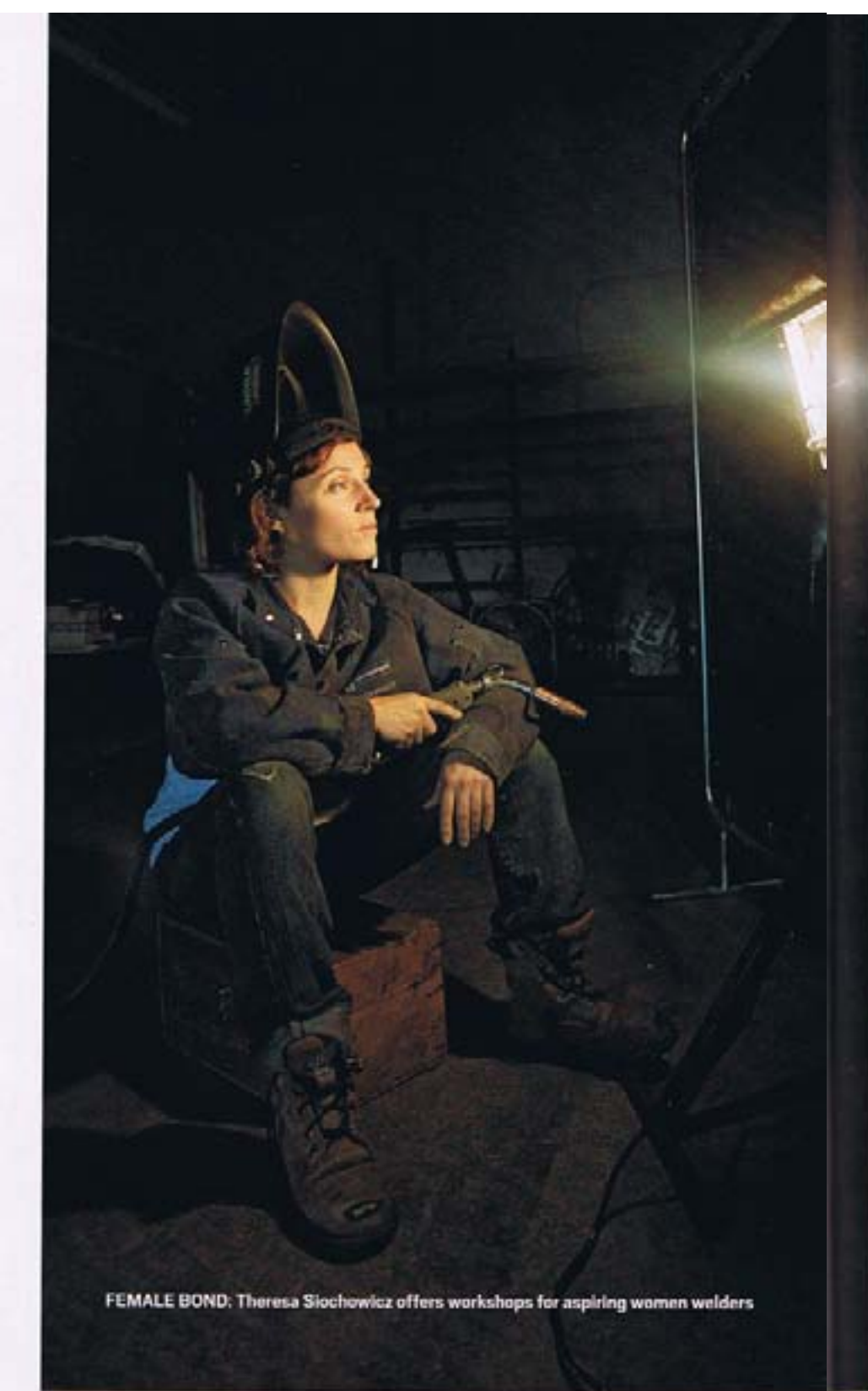
Not surprisingly, with their different reasons for entering business, women run their businesses, and evaluate their success in business, differently than men do. Take the Welder Chic, for example. "Going into business for myself gave me flexible hours and the freedom to put my son first," Siochowicz tells me, flashing her wide, endearing grin. Siochowicz loves being her own boss, and she's energized by the positive connection she has with her customers. In fact, superlative customer service is part of Siochowicz's "unique selling proposition."

"When I wrote my business plan, it was all about bringing customer service to an industry that doesn't really expect it," explains the diminutive brunette. "I have a background working in restaurants, where the customer is always king. I never understood why it was any different with welding."

For Siochowicz the importance of positive interpersonal relationships even extends to supporting her competition. She gives workshops for women welders, and in the longer term the 34-year-old wants to turn her shop into a training centre that can help ease the barriers women still face in the welding business. "Women are still not getting hired in shops. I want to give them a place where they can get good pay and on-the-job training. The shop could be all '50s style. How cool would that be?" she asks.

Her business is growing slowly but surely; almost five years after opening her doors, Siochowicz has hired another woman to work with her. Mounted over the bay door, a poster of Rosie the Riveter (with bangs and a ponytail added so she looks more like Siochowicz) gazes down approvingly over the Welder Chic's four welding machines and tidy workspace.

Douglas says Siochowicz's multiple



FEMALE BOND: Theresa Siochowicz offers workshops for aspiring women welders

markers of business success are typical of the female entrepreneurs with whom the Women's Enterprise Centre works. "Theresa values work/life balance and being able to make her son her priority. She likes being in charge of her own career and to make her customers happy, and she gives back by offering welding workshops for women. Theresa wants to

make a living for herself but she has all these other criteria in considering what makes her successful."

Douglas's anecdotal experience is backed up by a 2005 study that found that small-business owners look beyond mere profit or growth figures when assessing their business success. Other criteria they value include business excellence

(such as positive customer relations), professional achievement (such as having control over their career) and personal satisfaction (such as balancing work/life demands and "giving back").

Women cared about these "other" criteria more than men did. But men still considered those "other" factors relevant – which suggests that the traditional profit- and growth-centred approach to assessing (and fostering) business success may be missing significant pieces of the entrepreneurial puzzle for both sexes.

It was these missing pieces that Lauren Bacon and Emira Mears wanted to address in their recently published, female-oriented guide to entrepreneurship, *The Boss of You*. The friendly and fashionable Vancouver duo has owned the Raised Eyebrow Web Studio Inc. for eight years. Over that time, they've continually looked for ideas to improve their business practices. But they say most of the available advice didn't reflect their needs, or the needs of other women they knew who had gone into business for themselves.

"Most business information, whether it's coming from a book or the business pages of a newspaper, assumes you want to build an empire," says Mears, in Raised Eyebrow's aqua-blue and bubblegum-pink office in a downtown Vancouver heritage building. "There's a huge focus on quick growth. But what if you want a business that provides you with enough time and money to pursue your artistic or spiritual pursuits? Or that allows you to travel and see the world? You don't hear much about those kinds of business goals."

Bacon, whose pink hair goes well with the studio's funky and feminine ambience, recalls that her first-year economics prof started the course by saying that businesses exist for one reason only: to make a profit. Having grown up around not-for-profit enterprises, she knew that

was ridiculous. "But that perspective is very entrenched," says Bacon.

For Bacon and Mears, success means sustainability, in a broad sense of the word. "We use the term 'sustainable' to mean a system that can support itself on an ongoing, holistic basis," Bacon explains. "In terms of your business, it's not just about being socially and environmentally responsible. It's also about creating a nourishing environment for staff and owners, and growing in a way that can be maintained over the long term, without compromising your products and services, your values or yourself"

For these women, sustainability means paying themselves and their staff well; anything else, they say, isn't sustainable over the long term. Bacon and Mears also choose to work with people they really enjoy. Raised Eyebrow's clients are mostly non-profits and progressive businesses. Sustainability for Bacon and Mears also includes, in theory, avoiding the 24-7 workweeks typical of entrepreneurs – something the two women admit they didn't always manage to achieve as they built their firm.

Like Siochowicz, Bacon and Mears waited five years to hire their first employee. But for them, that was too long. "Like many small-business owners, we thought we had to do everything ourselves so that the quality of our work wouldn't suffer," Mears says. "We worked ourselves ragged trying to keep up with the workload." Now their company has three staff, with Bacon and Mears focusing on consulting, strategy and speaking engagements. "Our current setup is much more sustainable," Mears says.

Another sleek B.C. business duo embodies the fastest growing area of female entrepreneurship: women over 55. Judy McArthur and Maureen Drew started Artisan Edibles Fine Food Co. Ltd., a stylish gourmet food line, when both women were in their mid-50s. At the time, McArthur wanted to expand her small preserve-production company. Drew wanted to take her prized antipasto to market. Drew had spent her career helping small businesses launch and market; McArthur had operational and production experience. So the two

## the feminine mystique

- Women own and operate 35.7 per cent of small businesses in B.C. or almost 137,000 businesses.
- There are more than 821,000 women entrepreneurs in Canada.
- Women in Canada make up a larger share of the self-employed than in any other country.
- Since 1976 the average annual growth rate in the number of self-employed women has been 5.3 per cent compared with 2.2 per cent for men.
- Women entrepreneurs hold ownership in about 45 per cent of Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises.
- The likelihood of female self-employment increases with age.
- The fastest growth in self-employment is among women 55 years of age and up.
- Average earnings for women business owners are lower than for employed women.
- Seventeen per cent of self-employed women make more than \$30,000 a year, compared with 42 per cent of men.
- Half of self-employed women work at home.
- Women tend to own firms in slower-growth and higher-risk sectors such as retail and service, in which access to financing is relatively more challenging. □

joined forces, with an eye to hitting the big time.

After a year of market research and three years in the marketplace, Artisan Edibles products, including Quince Mostarda, Wild Mirabelle Plum Jelly and Rose Petal Scone Mix, are in stores across Canada. Drew and McArthur believe their efforts are on the verge of paying off handsomely in financial terms, which for them is a key aim. But they do believe there are other rewards as well.

"When our customers tell us how great our service is, that's our success," says Drew, on the phone from their company's office in Parksville, B.C.

"For me it's also really important that I enjoy doing it," says McArthur. "The bottom line for me is I'm happy I took this on. It's certainly a lot of work, but it's also really fun. I had no idea how much I would grow by doing this."

"Women make concessions in their careers because raising a family is really important to them. They want that time with their kids," adds Drew, who has a blended family with four children. "But after their kids have left home, women have a chance to really expand on their own creativity. Women nowadays are healthy and they have financial means. They've had these lifelong dreams, and now they have the time to fulfill them."

In fact, Drew and McArthur are enjoying entrepreneurship so much they think they'll start another venture, once they cash out with Artisan Edibles (they've had an exit strategy in place since day one). "I thought this would be my last kick at the can, my last chance to really go for something before retiring. But I'm enjoying this so much, I don't think I'll ever stop," McArthur says with a laugh.

The other big trend in women's business is, of course, the explosion of "mompreneurs" such as Theresa Siochowitz. Following in the footsteps of B.C. mom Sandra Wilson, whose cute baby-shoe designs begat the Robeez empire, more and more mothers are going into business for themselves. Mompreneur-specific statistics are scarce, but if the recent surge in mompreneur support systems is any indication, the trend is huge: it has spawned networking and support organizations (such as Momcafé Network Inc. and Enterprising Moms Network Inc. in the Lower Mainland and a host of oth-



ers across the country), websites (such as Savvymom.ca), trade shows and even a Canadian magazine, the Calgary-based *Mompreneur*.

"As women get longer maternity leaves, it allows them to think more about how they can organize things so they can be home with their kids and make money. All these talented women are spending time at home but don't want to be inactive," Douglas explains.

Observers of the trend have also noted other contributing factors: scarce child care and family-unfriendly workplaces. (An oft-cited employer survey conducted by a University of Western Ontario business prof found that most respondents did not offer flexible work scheduling, reduced hours or the option of working at home to employees.)

"Women are realizing they don't have to go back to the work force on somebody else's terms," says Kelley Scarsbrook, a

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE: Maureen Drew (l) and Judy McArthur started Artisan Edibles, a stylish gourmet food line, when both were in their mid-50s. The pair has plans for another business venture in the works

former insurance broker who started her own consulting business after "basically being shown the door" when she asked about working part time following her first maternity leave.

"I had given weekends, I had worked late nights, and when it came time for me to ask for a favour, there was no flexibility," says Scarsbrook. Her business, which eventually became the Enterprising Moms Network, is doing well enough that her husband recently quit his full-time software sales job to join her in the venture.

"My former employers actually did me a favour, by leading me to open up my entrepreneurial side. For me it's been amazing; I've found my true life calling," says Scarsbrook.

It sounds ideal: women finding work/life balance, fulfilling their passions and achieving success on their own terms. But according to Barbara Orser, it's not all wine and roses for female entrepreneurs. The University of Ottawa management professor, who authored the aforementioned study of how small-business owners assess success, does not want her research used to gloss over real problems with female entrepreneurship.

"Those warm and fuzzy 'success depends on what your goals are' arguments may come at a huge cost to women," says Orser. She notes that, on average, women-owned businesses are smaller, less profitable and grow slower than businesses owned by men.

"Women entrepreneurs are working long hours for crappy pay. That's not sustainable," she says bluntly. "Then they burn out and consider employment

again. But that leads to other problems for those women because there's an opportunity cost to having been out of the labour market. If women step out of the paid workplace, they never catch up financially."

Part of what may be holding female entrepreneurs back is that women starting businesses tend to have less managerial experience. The solution? "Women need to bring in partners with complementary skills," says Orser. "Not friends, necessarily, but people who can fill in what they are missing."

Women tend to start businesses in low-growth, low-margin service and retail sectors, where competition is stiff, Orser says. She encourages women entrepreneurs to think carefully about margins and growth opportunities, and to start businesses in higher-growth sectors like high tech. She also encourages women wanting to start their own businesses to "think big" and build expansion options in from the start. "Choosing a 'born-global' business - like something Internet-based - means you have great built-in growth potential," says Orser.

Laurel Douglas doesn't necessarily disagree with Orser's advice. But she's more bullish on the overall benefits of business ownership for women. "The last stats I saw said the average female entrepreneur earns about \$30,000 per year while the average male entrepreneur earns \$50,000. But women are working less hours for their money. And they're getting other things they want - work/life balance, personal satisfaction and control over their lives."

From Douglas's perspective, the increasing number of female entrepreneurs is helping to normalize a more sustainable, holistic approach to work, buttressing a broader societal shift toward people choosing - or creating - work that works for them, their values and their desired lifestyles.

Furthermore, while these women are helping to change society, Douglas argues, they are also changing themselves in the process. "Women entrepreneurs develop new skills, new confidence and are opened up to new possibilities. That's what's so great about female entrepreneurship - it's a real win-win for women and society overall." ■