

VAL HARDING

With a passion for travel and a life-long love of design, entrepreneur Val Harding has always been drawn to the beautiful interiors of luxury hotels throughout the world. Val's pursuit of her passions has led to the development and success of a couple of businesses. She first founded her own hotel interior design firm in England and later, developed a new business in Australia and created "Serendipity", her overwhelmingly successful collection of botanical personal care products, designed exclusively for the finest hotels in Australia and now becoming available internationally. The elegant mother of two grown daughters, Val Harding has done more than simply create a pleasant line of amenities. Her special products are inherently reflective of her own personality – at once radiant and sophisticated, but also natural, down-to-earth and appreciative of the richness of the cultures of the world.

As a girl growing up in the North West of England, Val loved to travel with her family throughout Europe. At age 16, a foreign exchange brought her to Hamburg, Germany, where she returned on several occasions to work for the summer in a variety of retail establishments, improving her German language skills and experiencing some of the world. Back in England she trained as a linguist and continued her studies of French and German, the latter of which is now particularly useful, as her product line is about to be distributed in Europe, Middle East and Asia through a company based in Munich.

Val married and moved with her husband, a high-level British Petroleum executive, close to London to begin her family. After the birth of the couple's first daughter Kate, Val's husband was promoted to a position in Seoul, Korea, followed by a posting in Perth, Australia, where the family moved for three years and where their second daughter Sarah was born. Returning to London, again for her husbands' job, Val was finally ready to pursue her interest in interior design – an endeavor she knew she would love and which also afforded her the time and flexibility to raise her daughters.

Val developed a very successful hotel interior design company close to London, specializing in country-house hotels. Although she loved her work, once again the call came and it was time to close her business down and move back to Australia, as her husband's job took the family to Melbourne – a city she adores and continues to make her home, as her husband is now retired from BP and is engaged on several high profile corporate boards around Australia.

With no real business or personal contacts in Australia, Val wanted to continue her work with hotels, but in a different form. She noticed a dearth of fine amenities in the hotels there and set about importing established quality brands Gilchrist & Soames and Molton Brown from England, acting as a distributor of these products throughout Australia and New Zealand. She established a reputation for quality of products and service, but found the one element she missed was the creative input previously enjoyed with her interior design business. She thought about how she might increase the range of products she distributed, about the ingredients she might use and new products she could create and it was in that way that her own line of products was quite naturally born.

Val Harding's collection is known as "Serendipity" in Australia and "Halcyon blue" in the US. Reflecting her love for the places she's traveled, Val incorporates a myriad of essential and natural oils across the product range, including mandarin, bergamot, macadamia, avocado, sesame, jojoba, peppermint, grapefruit and sweet orange, along with exotic ingredients such as bamboo extract. The collection is free from artificial colours and SLS and is not tested on animals. She also recently commissioned a beautiful, white leather carrying case to promote the "Halcyon blue" collection. The case is lined with an exquisite, original Aboriginal blue printed fabric, once again reflecting Val's interest in incorporating the creations of another culture.

The names of the collection also reflect Val's personal philosophy including honoring life's happy discoveries – "Serendipity" – as well as the peace and calm that can come with going with the flow – "Halcyon blue". Starting life as a linguist in England, she never imagined creating a line of personal care products in Australia, however the endeavor has transcended even her own initial vision, yielding her an Ernst & Young Australian "Entrepreneur of the Year" award in 2007 and growing to the point that she is currently expanding to the U.S. and throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Although extremely busy managing the company, which her older daughter Kate has now joined as head of sales and marketing, Val is a passionate patron of the Australian ballet and attends as often as possible, sometimes even on their overseas tours. She continues to enjoy travel, but equally enjoys her time with family and friends at home in Melbourne.