



Photography: Igor Sapina

MY INSPIRATIONAL MUM

CEO KEEPING FAMILY AT HEART OF HER BUSINESS



 Rosemary Ryan

Roza's Gourmet CEO Jasmin Robertson grew up immersed in her mother Roza's sauce business. Though she passed away almost 17 years ago, her mum's passionate food philosophies – and recipes – remain at the heart of the booming business. We spoke to Jasmin about her mother's enduring business legacy.

As a child, Jasmin Robertson would sit with her mum Roza and their dogs under a beach umbrella at the bottom of their Brisbane driveway selling the gourmet condiments Roza created in their kitchen to passers-by.

The mayonnaises, mustards and pesto were made from produce from their garden, eggs from their free-ranging chickens and honey from their own beehives – all packed in glass jars, finished off with ribbons tied by the young Jasmin.

“I did the ribbons because I had the smallest fingers,” Jasmin recalls. She’s now the CEO of Roza’s Gourmet, the fast-growing food business that’s evolved from the venture her late mother began as a hobby more than 25 years ago when Robertson was just four.

“We had a fairly substantial garden and she was looking for something to keep her busy. She noticed the traffic doing the scenic drive up the mountain where we lived and saw an opportunity to sell the things she loved to cook – wholesome healthy foods, made from natural, fresh ingredients.

“She was very creative in the kitchen and quite ahead of her time. I’m still explaining to customers what aioli is and she was making it 25 years ago!”

After Roza passed away suddenly Jasmin, who was just 14, continued to help her father Bill operate the business while she finished school, completed a business degree (at Bill’s insistence) and then worked in a graduate position at PwC.

But in 2010, 10 years after her mother’s death and at the point Bill was thinking of retiring, he persuaded Jasmin to join the business full-time.

Since then, Roza’s Gourmet has been on a rocketing trajectory, growing at 40 per cent a year, as the naturally gluten- and preservative-free nature of Roza’s recipes aligns with increasing consumer demand for healthy, flavoursome foods.

An initially reluctant CEO – “I didn’t even know how to cook” – Jasmin says her mum’s food philosophy and ethos remain at the heart of the business and continue to inspire her.

REALISATION

It was only when Jasmin took over at the age of 24 that she understood the quality of her mother’s products, the power of the brand and the full potential of the business.

“I’d grown up eating Mum’s food and for me it was just what we ate,” Jasmin says. “I’d never bought a mayonnaise or pesto from a shop. I had no

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understanding of the marketplace and didn’t realise they were anything special.

“When I started trying to expand into Melbourne and Sydney, I didn’t have high hopes – I assumed there’d be lots of products like these – but then people were genuinely surprised at the quality and we generated a lot of enthusiasm. I saw then how distinctive Mum’s products were.”

One of Jasmin’s first moves, to rebrand the products to increase shelf appeal, was also done with her mother’s beliefs in mind, retaining the understated original black-and-white theme.

“Mum’s priority was always the product; what was in the jar was more important than the packaging. She wanted the packaging to be very simple,” she explains, adding that Roza’s original recipes still account for 40 per cent of the range and remain as relevant today as when she began.

“Mum’s approach with her food was always gourmet but the fact that they’re fresh, all natural, made with free-range eggs, it ticks a lot of boxes for people looking for healthier, authentic foods, and also gluten-free and dairy-free foods,” she says.

“It’s been fortuitous that over the last five years the health and gourmet food sectors have converged. Roza’s neatly fits into both.” **BV**