



MELISSA MARS DEN, 36
CHIEF CREATIVE AND DIRECTOR, MARS DEN COLLECTIVE
 MARS DEN COLLECTIVE.COM.AU

'IN BUSINESS, SOMETIMES YOU JUST HAVE TO GRIT YOUR TEETH AND KEEP GOING'

Design-firm owner Melissa Marsden talks growth, grit and sticking to your values.

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS: We are an all-female team based in the heart of Brisbane's buzzing Fortitude Valley, where we get to work with clients from all over Australia and NZ. Our projects range from airline lounges to sports stadiums, hotels to shopping centres, with a core focus on strategic workplace design [aka awesome offices!]. Partnering our business brains with design creativity, our aim is to create environments that support our clients' businesses. Collaborating closely with our clients, we develop a greater understanding of who they are, who their staff are, what they do, how they do it and what they need to perform at their peak. The outcome is a beautiful synergy between interior design and business strategy that makes our clients' spaces work for them, reflecting their own individual brand and culture and ultimately becoming an asset to their business, supporting them to succeed.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT WHAT YOU DO? I'm that person that gets to live by this quote: 'If you love

what you do you'll never work a day in your life.' I love working with other businesses to unpack them and see what makes them tick ... what it is that makes them successful, and how we can help to enhance that, to get more traffic through the door, more sales, a higher-performing team or an enhanced corporate culture.

WHAT ONE TRAIT HAS HELPED YOU MOST IN YOUR WORK? I'm a bit like a dog with a bone ... I just never give in. I think it's important to have a bit of fight in you. Business can be a hard road and there will be times when you feel like it's all too hard and too much, and you just want to go home and hide under the doona (believe me, I do!). But having that

fight in me and that resilience to get back up and dust myself off is the reason I'm still here. I reflect on the experience, learn from it and find the lesson in it to make me better.

WHAT IS THE ONE TRAIT THAT HAS HINDERED YOU MOST IN YOUR WORK? Being a people pleaser. I'm forever trying to keep everyone happy and often to the detriment of myself, or worse the business. By not setting clear boundaries and expectations of responsibility of those around me, I have found myself in less than ideal situations, as I haven't been clear about where my responsibility ends and the responsibility of the other party begins. While having the best of intentions, the outcome has often meant that we're both left feeling misunderstood and frustrated at the outcome.

WHAT IS THE HARDEST LESSON YOU'VE LEARNT? You need to be true to what you value. Understanding what's important to you and using that to guide your decisions and next steps is critical. When you don't you're living by someone else's values, and that can feel unfulfilling, frustrating and make you miserable. I learnt this one the hard way, by trying to make those around me happy by fulfilling their dreams and not my own. It's not a happy place.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PUMPED ABOUT RIGHT NOW? The next phase of growth at Marsden Collective. Having undergone a massive growth phase in the past 12 months, we've learnt a lot and are now ready to stabilise that growth and take it to the next level. When running a small business you tend to wear a number of hats, and as you grow you need to disperse those hats across the team. I'm excited about taking the team to the next level and seeing them step up and grow with the company.

DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN FIVE WORDS: Passionate, loud, adrenaline junkie and driven. ✨

Quick questions...

Last book I read I'm a juggler! I currently have three on the go: *Rushing Woman's Syndrome* by Dr Libby (I'm the definition of this ... it's a work in progress); *Scaling Up* by Verne Harnish, and *The Third Space* by Dr Adam Fraser. **Fave app** Slack – it's great for keeping me connected with my team and up-to-date with project statuses. **Top of my to-do list:** Go to yoga (it's on repeat and often doesn't get ticked). **Fave brew** T2 French Earl Grey. **Cook me this dish** Green Thai chicken curry **Quote I love** Life's Short. For f***'s sake, do what makes you happy!