

Town & Country

Queensland



Elspeth Barker is quite at home in Roma where she has successfully set up her own business design agency, Plash Creative. Now more than ever, young adults just like Elspeth, are making the move back to the bush to pursue successful careers.

Making a 'Splash'

By ANNABELLE BRAYLEY

LIKE many a modern country child, Elspeth Barker always saw her future in the city.

Having grown up between Charleville and her family's property Glendilla at Cunnamulla, she went to boarding school in Brisbane and was familiar with city lights and entertainment.

She plotted a career path that suited her city plans.

In 2008, like many of today's young adults, Elspeth recognised a hankering to return to the bush.

After completing a bachelor of business degree majoring in marketing and advertising at QUT followed by a degree in visual communications from the Design College of Australia, at 24, she packed up her goods and chattels and relocated to Roma to open Plash Creative.

It's a boutique design agency catering to a broad range of rural and metropolitan businesses and Elspeth says her advantage is she understands the language of both. Eyes twinkling she says, "I know what poll cattle are."

A very sociable young woman, Elspeth enjoys building direct

relationships with her clients.

She also likes to chat and Roma provides plenty of opportunity to interact with the community.

Once a month she does Meals on Wheels which she enjoys just as much as she does being a member of the Show Society, the Regional Arts Development Fund and the Chamber of Commerce.

Though she acknowledges the latter is obviously self-serving.

"I want to be a part of keeping the town expanding and progressing ensuring that the local community benefits."

With an eye for her own professional development, Elspeth recently undertook a six-week summer school at the Rhode Island School of Design in the US.

As an old girl of St Margaret's, she won a scholarship that enabled her to travel to the US for the summer school also undertaking an art history course at the prestigious Brown University.

While Elspeth says the courses themselves were fabulous, it was the exposure to other cultures that really fascinated her and tweaked her ambition to study further. "It was

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an international mix of students, especially Europeans and I would love to go to a summer school at the Florence Institute of Design International. They offer wonderful courses in print making, packaging and font design and of course a summer in Italy would be fun."

Having spent a few weeks travelling around the US, Elspeth admires the patriotism of the Americans.

"They really love their country and they're proud to be American. I feel the same way about Australia."

Her short-term goal is to complete an MBA externally while long-term

she'd like to study interior design.

However, that presents a dilemma as she says she'd have to go back to the city and study full time.

"I can take my graphic design business anywhere that has a fast internet connection but, for now, I love that I manage to have a very artistic career out in rural Queensland."

In an economic climate that challenges young people wanting to start their own businesses either on or off the land, Elspeth says, "I'm lucky. My parents have helped me."

Bill and Cathy Barker wanted to invest in something off farm so building new premises for Elspeth to lease ticked all their boxes.

Rising rentals in Roma prompted the move and the new Plash Creative rooms on Hawthorne Street are part of a complex that includes space for another business and a town house above where Elspeth and two of her friends live.

"Very convenient for me," Elspeth laughs.

"Because I juggle my office hours to suit out of town clients and it's across the road from the Maranoa Club."

Expanding on the theme of her

parents help, she says, "It's hard for young people to get a start. Apart from investing in this building for me, they provide practical help. Mum has painted walls and established the garden and Dad has done the fencing. Mum also looked after the first shop for me while I went to Beef Week, Agro and the Exhibition."

A member of the RNA Future Directions Committee, she relishes the opportunity to be involved in that forum.

All in all, she loves her current life.

"Roma is fun; it's close to home but not at home. This is a thriving area so I have the best of both worlds here. It is full of young professionals from all walks of life."

"It has a great social side and it's a booming town that seems to be expanding every day thanks principally to the Surat Basin."

"We have five flights a day to Brisbane and a new covered, heated pool... the only thing missing around here is Carla Zampatti and sushi."

● Plash Creative can be found at 32 Hawthorne Street, Roma. Phone 0419 165 103 or visit the website for more information, www.plashcreative.com