

AT HOME
WITH ...

Louise Olsen & Stephen Ormandy



Jewellery designer and artist Stephen Ormandy is perfectly happy to be working for the Olsen 'family firm', as he explained to **Jo Casamento**, just before his solo exhibition opened at the Tim Olsen Gallery.

It's a house that lives, breathes and stays with you, even a week after visiting. Uncluttered but full of artistic life, the breezy beachside house of Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy, the creative couple behind Dinosaur Designs, is colourful and energetic but, at the same time, laid back.

As I puff up the steep steps to the house, which has a view over Bronte Beach, it is immediately apparent that the couple, who have been together for 29 years, have a passion for art.

"We met at art school [the University of NSW's college of fine arts] because both our names start with O, so we met on the first day and we were always seated next to each other in class. When we first met it was, 'Oh my gosh, I get this person,'" says Olsen, a member of Australian art royalty: her father being the esteemed artist John and her brother Tim the founder of the Tim Olsen Gallery.

Art runs thick through Olsen's veins ("I was born into it, it was hard to avoid"), but it is Ormandy whose exhibition *Polychromatism* is now showing at the Tim Olsen Gallery at Woollahra.

"It was a lifelong dream of mine to be a painter - I was obsessed, I'd arrive at school in kindy in my smock!" he says, tickling the family dachshund, Skipper, under the neck.

While the duo were initially friends - both had partners at the time - they found themselves drawn to each other.

"When we had to team up, we always chose each other," Ormandy says. "It's basically one long conversation that hasn't stopped. It started that first day, literally, and it has not stopped."

Equipped with passion and drive, skills and ideas the couple created their distinctive jewellery company along with a third partner, Liane Rossler. What started as a stall at the Paddington markets and has grown into a global brand. They now have a store in New York and sell their distinctive resin-based jewellery and homewares online to countries across Europe and in the Middle East. They have also branched out into rugs.

"It was totally immediate, we went about just trying to generate some income," Ormandy says of their early success.

"That's the best bit, that's the spark we love, that's what keeps us going - when you love something and that's what you do. If you have those

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Oasis of calm ... Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy have created a home space where they can relax. Photos: Jamie Barrett

two ingredients, don't worry about the rest, the rest just happens. As long as you love it and have a passion, it doesn't feel like going to work."

Olsen chimes in: "We still can't believe we get paid for doing something we love."

So working together doesn't mean they need space apart, some down time? "We have our own offices at work. It's just who we are as people. Our home is really important to us because we work with so many people during the day, it's like our quiet zone, which restores us," Olsen says.

The house has many paintings and art works. The piece above the dining table [currently one of Ormandy's works] is changed every few weeks.

This quiet zone changes, however, once the silly season hits. "During Christmas, a lot of friends come back from overseas and so it becomes a bit of a hub, we don't spend as much time overseas as we did when [their teenage daughter] Camille was younger because of school," Ormandy says.

The couple love to cook - Olsen often makes fresh salads or chicken broth with ginger and seaweed, which can turn into another meal the next night, the pot living on the stove. Her father, John, can be seen coming up the steps on a weekend with two chickens tucked under his arms. "He taught me how to cook," she says. "We lived in Spain and he worked as a local chef - he loves feeding us, he's a nurturer."

Working with Olsen's father has definitely given Ormandy a sense of achievement. He jokingly says his advice from his father-in-law for opening night was "just stay vertical". But the exhibition means more than that. And more than the year of working "two jobs". It's his chance to stand up.

"You are on your own with the spotlight on you," Ormandy says.

"You see people stand on stage and sing a song all by themselves - that

ability and trust in your own voice that you can do this - as an artist you don't do it that often, it's very confronting and nerve-wracking."

The extra dimension of working for the family firm sits well with Ormandy. "Very much so, there's a pressure. It's a gallery full of incredibly talented artists working very long and very hard," he says.

"It's a great tradition and honour to be a part of that, it's like I'm included in the run-on team and that's amazing.

"It's like a footballer getting to A grade and getting a run on the SCG. That's how I feel. I'm in the run-on team at the Tim Olsen Gallery."

Away from both his working passions, Melbourne-born Ormandy appreciates the beach. He surfs when he gets a moment and rides his bike to work. He says the open tree-lined balcony means the house is part of the environment.

"In the eastern suburbs we're all like penguins on a rock, all fighting about that add-on, but I wouldn't live anywhere else."

With the house so full of colour, Ormandy says he is often inspired by the view. "A big part of what I'm interested in is colour and the relationship in line and form and tone," he says.

"It's getting a tonal balance, there's a lot going on, it's like being a bit of a juggler and trying to get all the planets to align and you can't rush that. It's a slow process and it has to be organic and just happen in a quiet and very intense concentrating space, which is really hard to get to in a busy world where you have to shut down.

"I don't meditate but I think my understanding of what that is it's the same sort of state, where you quieten your mind to everything else and just focus on the one thing you are trying to solve.

"Just having time to wake up and know that day is dedicated to that and there's no other pressure just sit down and start."