



be inspired

## THE RISE OF THE RECESSIONISTA

*While we were all busy panicking about negative equity and whether we could justify another pair of shoes, some women were taking on the downturn – and winning*

PHOTOGRAPHY LANCTON WORDS RACHEL EATON

### “WE HAD TO GO BACK TO BASICS”

*It wasn't until their fashion label Frost French went into receivership that actress and mother-of-four Sadie Frost, 45, and business partner and mother-of-four Jemima French, 44, realised how far it had drifted from their original plan.*

**SADIE** “The call came on my birthday two years ago, when I was celebrating with my family. The main investor in Frost French, the fashion label Jemima and I had created, rang to say the company was being liquidated. It was a huge shock.

By the time the recession hit, Frost French had become a very different – and much bigger – company to the one Jemima and I originally envisioned 12 years previously, when we'd decided to start a girly, fun fashion label.

Frost French grew quickly; a little too quickly in hindsight – and by 2006 Jemima and I both had growing families and no longer wanted the responsibility of the day-to-day running of the company. So we sold the majority shareholding to an external investor. The idea was that he and his team would look after the finances, while we concentrated on the creative side. The investor expanded our business, hiring 30 staff and developing a huge infrastructure. But when he realised a recession was on its way, he lost confidence and pulled the plug – and there was nothing we could do about it.

It was then that we realised we'd lost control of our business – even though

our names were still above the door, it didn't feel like our company any more. And not only had we lost financial control, but in trying to broaden the label's appeal, the clothing itself had become too commercial and bland.

Jemima and I were determined that it wouldn't be the end of Frost French. Instead of giving up – and with the help of several friends who acted as investors – we bought back all the assets we could afford, including the Islington shop, and decided to start again.”

**JEMIMA** “Of course the liquidation was a huge blow, but after it had sunk in, we realised the recession could be an opportunity. The whole experience had taught us a lot; even before the company went under we weren't happy with the direction it had taken. We thought we wanted it to become huge – isn't that the aim of every business? But we realised that no matter how successful something is, there's no point in having it if it makes you stressed and unhappy. We also learned that having someone run your business could cause as much anxiety as it relieves.

So we went right back to basics, relaunching Frost French the way it used to be – small, unique and full of our personalities. Just me, Sadie and the girls who worked in the shop.

Over the past few years, Sadie and I have discovered a lot about ourselves. ▷

Five years ago we'd fight if we disagreed on designs. Now we listen to each other and compromise – and we realise that we're even more determined than ever.

The past two years have been hard work, but we've turned a huge corner and the retail stores are almost profitable now. Harvey Nichols has just ordered stock, and our tiny but lively Soho store, in particular, embodies the quirky spirit we first envisioned.

Sadie and I are slowly buying shares back so that eventually we will be the sole shareholders. We're not in this to make millions – we don't want 100 shops. We're in it for the fun and creativity, and we're getting some fantastic projects on the side; such as contributing to car designs and devising beautiful tea glasses for Lipton Infusions – with a Lipton tea boutique in our Islington store. For us the recession has been a fabulous opportunity; we haven't been in such a good place since the early days – we've never felt better about our business or our friendship.”



Rosie Nottage swapped publishing for garden design.”

## “BEING MADE REDUNDANT GAVE ME THE FREEDOM TO FOLLOW MY DREAM”

*When mother-of-one Rosie Nottage, 31, lost her job in publishing, she realised it could be the beginning of a whole new career.*

“WHEN I WAS TOLD I was being made redundant from my job in a publishing company, the news didn't come as a complete shock. It was late 2008, the recession was well under way and I'd already had to let several members of my team go. And, when my boss told me, I immediately felt a sense of relief.

I'd never planned to work in the conference department of a publishing company; I'd just fallen into it after uni. However, the culture had changed and I felt very stressed with little sense of achievement. Once I left, I was so much happier and realised that my redundancy payout, together with my partner Roger's financial support, meant I could spend a few months reassessing my options.

I even threw a 'freedom' party – and it was then that a friend told me he had just quit his job in marketing to enrol in a garden design course. As we talked, I felt a pang of jealousy. I'd always loved gardening – it had been my way of

relaxing – and I realised I'd like to do something similar. I let the idea brew as Roger and I spent a month backpacking. By the time the holiday was over, I'd made up my mind. We landed at 5am, and by 9am I was on the phone enquiring about a garden design course at Hampton Court Palace. When they told me it had started that day, but a student had dropped out, I knew it was meant to be.

The course was part-time, but I'd wake up buzzing with ideas and spend my free time doing extra work or research. Half-way through the course, I won a competition to help plant an exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show. That was when I started Rosie Nottage Garden Design. First I set up a website with the help of Roger, who works in digital marketing, and registered with Companies House. That led to a few small projects, which I juggled with the course. After I graduated, I marketed the business properly, posting notices on various chatrooms.

I learned important lessons – like finding reliable contractors – very quickly. On one of my first jobs I was left high and

dry when my contractor failed to turn up, and ended up spending a frantic hour phoning around for a replacement.

So far I've worked for eight private clients, but I had to take an unexpected break when I fell pregnant with my daughter Lola. Luckily, as I work for myself, I was able to delay jobs and only take on what I could handle. I design from home and take Lola along to appointments, so I haven't needed childcare.

Switching from a secure, sizeable income to an uncertain job that, even in good times, will probably never pay me more than £30k has meant that Roger and I have had to make some major adjustments to our lifestyle. But it's not about the money, it's the enjoyment. I love looking at a client's garden and envisaging the potential, then seeing their reaction when it's finished.

My job allows me to be there for Lola, now four months old, and I've found new clients from the mother and baby circle! And Roger and I appreciate the simple things much more – I even grow my own vegetables. Without doubt, redundancy has changed my life – it's the best thing that's ever happened to me.”  
Visit [rosienottage.com](http://rosienottage.com).



Astrid Jeffery's business selling pyjamas has taken off

## “IF I FAILED, I WAS GOING TO BLAME THE RECESSION!”

*A fear of failure stopped banker Astrid Jeffery, 33, from launching a nightwear business – until the financial crisis hit.*

“I'D ALWAYS WANTED to start my own business and five years after university did an MBA, but I fell into investment banking because of the money. It wasn't until I moved to the UK from Australia six years ago, that I came up with an idea to launch a nightwear company.

I would come home from work, put my pyjamas on and write my business plan. In Australia, you can get some really cool, modern pyjamas, but here I couldn't find anything except tartan flannel and Victoriana lace. However, I never took the leap as it seemed insane to turn my back on a £75k+ salary and gamble our savings. And I was worried about the stress and the possibility of failure.

That changed when the recession hit two years ago. All around me people began losing their jobs, including friends who started exploring new careers. Suddenly, the idea of stepping off the career ladder didn't seem so scary. After all, thousands of other people were doing it – and if the business failed, I could always blame it on the recession!

I had a long chat with my husband Marton and we worked out that we could live on one salary. Quitting my job was a huge decision, but last summer I decided to make the leap. My last day at work was frightening but exhilarating. I veered between thinking I was mad for trying to start a business in a recession and feeling it was the best thing I'd ever done.

My first days as a business owner were spent sketching designs and researching manufacturers. I contacted a friend in Turkey, and they helped me source factories and a supplier, who turned my sketches into reality. They even found the fabric. I inspected everything at each stage and, overall, spent about half our savings – £30k – on fabric, production, marketing, photography and a website.

I finally launched the company earlier this year, and in the first two months had 50 customers. I'm on track to turn over about £50k in the first year and double that for the second. I can still remember my very first client, who emailed me >

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to order a racer-back nightie. I was so thrilled I went to the pub to celebrate.

I'm so much happier with life now and see myself doing this forever. I'm also in a position where I can plan for a family, knowing that I'll be there for them – something I felt was impossible in my old job. I used to wake up, see the red light flashing on my BlackBerry and tense up. Now I wake up excited about my day.

I have no idea how long it would have taken me to launch the business if the recession hadn't happened. In a way, it took the pressure off me – and since then I've never looked back!"  
Visit [zadehome.com](http://zadehome.com).

## "I SAW AN OPPORTUNITY IN THE DOWNTURN"

*Single mum Elizabeth Bacchus, 44, realised she could make money in the recession.*

"I'VE HAD A VARIED CAREER – from marketing director of a rehab centre to working as a lifestyle assistant to wealthy families, including a royal family. That was a fabulous job. One day I'd be shopping in Harrods with a £150k budget, the next following them to their yacht.

I'd never considered the possibility that I would lose that job and when I was made redundant, my immediate reaction was panic. I'd been earning up to £100k but I had no savings and, as a single mother, I didn't have a partner to lean on financially or emotionally; I felt so alone.

However, a few years earlier, during my job in rehab, I'd become interested in life-coaching and attended a couple of courses. As the recession grew worse, I found myself helping friends who'd become unemployed. Many had lost their confidence, others needed help finding work or tweaking CVs. It was my sister who made me realise I could translate this into a career. "Everyone keeps telling me how helpful you've been, why don't you do this as a job?" she said. "It's exactly what people need at the moment with all these redundancies."

I used some of my redundancy money to pay for a 12-week course in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), a type of hypnotherapy. And after looking around on the internet, I realised there weren't any companies that offered a CV-writing



Elizabeth Bacchus created a successful business by helping people find work

service, together with coaching and support. So I took the leap. In three 16-hour days, I built my website using knowledge I'd gained in a previous job in publishing. With a budget of £500, I posted some Google adverts, so when people searched specific words around CVs and coaching, my website would appear – and it worked. Within a week, I began getting phone calls and emails.

Over the next few weeks I developed packages, ranging from £4-£400, that included telephone consultations, CV writing, 12-month support, career counselling and CV distribution. I contacted specialist CV freelance writers, who I contracted by the job, and apart

from that, my only overheads were my internet connection for £22 a month and the £32 cost of registering my website.

Now, two years on, I've had more than 6,000 clients. I have 20 specialist writers on my books and I'm turning over about £7,000 a month, with a £3,000 profit. Sunday night dread just doesn't exist any more! I love that the buck stops with me and that I'm helping people.

I'm not under any illusions; my company wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the recession and the huge number of people looking for work. But once the economy improves, more businesses will start recruiting. So it's win-win for me." •  
Visit [thesuccessfulcv.com](http://thesuccessfulcv.com).

➔ HAVE YOU MANAGED TO MAKE A SUCCESS OUT OF THE RECESSION?  
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