

look at me

# blazing an organic trail

words leigh robshaw photo kate johns

That Mukti remembers wanting to change her name from a very young age says a lot about the kind of person she is: spunky, smart and self-determining – the orchestrator of her own success.



IT WAS DURING A YOGA CLASS IN 1997 that she first heard the word 'Mukti' (pronounced Mooktee), meaning freedom and liberation in Sanskrit and rebirth in Hindi. She made the name her own and shortly afterwards, she indeed went through a rebirth of sorts. She left her husband while her first child was still a baby and began crafting a new life for herself.

As the creator of Mukti Botanicals, one of Australia's few truly certified organic skin care ranges, Mukti has built her success from the ground up. From humble beginnings stirring pots of cream with a baby strapped to her front and tackling 4am starts to sell at Eumundi Markets, she now distributes her range to outlets Australia-wide and exports to seven countries.

She has formulated and developed more than 60 products, and now acts as a formulation consultant for clients who want to develop their own skin care ranges. She employs eight people at her Maleny showroom and is happily engaged to Evan, who has worked alongside her in the business for the past four years.

Softly spoken and radiating an inner strength that shines through her striking blue eyes, Mukti has the skin care and beauty industry in her blood. Her mother was a National Institute of Dramatic Art-trained makeup artist for stage and theatre as well as a catwalk model.

"She was always very conscious of her appearance and consequently her dressing table and bathroom vanity were stuffed full of all sorts of goodies, much to my delight," says Mukti. "I remember whenever she was preparing for a fashion show I would observe her carefully applying her make-up and as she did so she would explain each step that she executed along the way as I watched her reflection in the mirror."

Mukti was also inspired by her grandfather, who made herbal ointments and creams in Sweden and recorded his formulas in an apothecary tome that survived World War II and was one of the few

possessions Mukti's grandmother bought with her to Australia on an immigrant ship in 1953.

The impetus to launch her own skin care range came when Mukti was living in the hinterland's Crystal Waters eco-village in the late 1990s, immersed in an organic lifestyle. Frustrated by the lack of natural, chemical-free skin care products on the market that actually worked, and being the kind of go-getter she is, her next move seemed almost mapped out. In 2000 she moved to Maleny and launched Mukti Botanicals.

**"You have to be motivated and you have to believe in yourself. No one can give that to you."**

"I named it Mukti Botanicals not so much because it was my name, but because the ethos behind the brand is freedom and liberation; becoming an informed and aware consumer – accepting nothing, questioning everything."

With qualifications in natural therapies and cosmetic science already under her belt, Mukti drew on her innate tenacity, work ethic and understanding of business to forge ahead.

"I've always worked for myself and I could not bear the thought of working for someone else and following someone else's dream," she says. "To me there's absolutely no reason why you can't do something you're passionate about, but you have to have strong conviction and an entrepreneurial capacity, where you take risks and face your fears. You need to look for what makes you go 'wow', what makes you excited. There's no easy way. You have to be motivated and you have to believe in yourself. No one can give that to you."

Mukti says she has been blessed by a supportive community and has used mentors and business coaches when necessary. She believes much of her success comes from the ability to move past obstacles

and recover quickly from setbacks. She's had her fair share, both personally and professionally, but she doesn't dwell on them or buy into a victim mentality. Rather, she does her best not to take them personally and to remain objective.

One of her major challenges is that the market is now saturated with pseudo-organic products. When she launched her range she was a trailblazer; now she's in competition with a slew of greenwashing impostors jumping on the organics bandwagon.

"As a consumer it's very important to differentiate between the two and to look for the logo from one of the Australian organic certifying bodies," says Mukti. "Read the ingredients list and look out for anything that seems like a chemical, any numbers or colours. Plant-based ingredients will be identified by the botanical or Latin name. Price is also an indicator."

Mukti has reached a point in her life where the ego-driven ambition of her younger years is giving way to an increasing sense of contentment for what she has in her life – glowing good health, two gorgeous daughters, a supportive partner, a successful business, a charming Queenslander close to work and the kind of lifestyle that allows her to travel, or to just potter around the house, work in the garden or laze in bed on weekends and satiate her voracious appetite for reading.

"I think I've humbled a lot," she says. "If I can be peaceful and gentle every day, that for me is an accomplishment. I had some major challenges and issues in 2009 and as a result of that I understand myself better and I'm feeling more content. I don't feel a sense of urgency anymore. When there's a sense of urgency, you're out of touch with your true nature. To me it's not about the money. It's about being happy and content with what you've got right now." ☑

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