

Aileen Hogan

Aileen Hogan (53) is a former air stewardess and the founder of Shabby.ie, an upcycling-supplies specialist. From Dublin, she lives in Tipperary with her husband, Tommy, and their children — Cathal (13) and Alex (nine)

I always thought that sheep would be quiet, but they make horrendous noises. The donkey goes ‘ee-aw’ and then he sets my dogs off. I call it the dawn chorus. I live in a cottage in north Tipperary, and we have some land.

My day starts at 7am. Although I’m a businesswoman, I’m still a mother of small children. My son, Cathal, goes to boarding school for five days a week, but I still have Alex, my nine-year-old daughter here.

By the time she gets up, I have the breakfast ready and the house warm. I let the dogs out, feed the cat, and check the horses and the donkey. My husband, Tommy, is gone from 7.30am. He works for a veterinary supplies company.

I wake up like a hungry monster, so I have eggs and bread for breakfast, with a cup of tea. I drop Alex to school and then I come back and I get on the laptop. I’m a retailer. I have a website — Shabby.ie. I’m an upcycling-supplies specialist. I pack orders, get them out to the courier or post office, and I do the invoices, too. It’s a busy life. When I’m not making tutorial videos, I go around the country teaching.

This is my second career. Motherhood was the catalyst for the change. All my life, I’d been an air stewardess for British Airways. I used to fly long-haul from London, and I commuted from Shannon. I really enjoyed my work.

I got married at 39, had my first baby at 40, and after a miscarriage and an ectopic pregnancy, I was very, very lucky to have a little girl at 44. I was blessed, and it was time for me to stop flitting all over the world.

The turning point came when I was in New York in a five-star hotel. I practically lived in NY because we did a lot of overnights. I rang home and my husband told me that our first child had just spoken. He’d said, ‘Dada’. I roared crying. Why was I not there? I’d had 20 years of this amazing career, but now I wanted to be at home with the child I’d

waited so long for. When the little girl came along, nothing was going to take me away from being her mummy.

With motherhood, your priorities change. Instead of thinking of yourself all the time, the love for somebody else takes over. You just turn into a different person.

So I stayed at home with the kids and we were down to one salary. We were struggling a bit. One day, we were in my mother’s house; her greenhouse had fallen down in a storm and she had this old pine table in the middle of it. It used to be our family kitchen table. She asked my husband to burn it. As he dragged it across the yard, memories came flooding back; all the years sitting at that kitchen table, all the chats about discos, and if I’d got a Valentine card or not.

I told my husband not to burn it, and then I painted it. I restyled it and gave it away to a broke single mother so she could have new memories from it. It looked amazing. Then I did a couple of courses, and did a few bits for myself.

Family and friends asked me to do stuff for them, and then friends of friends started to pay me. Within a year, I found that I had this little cottage industry of doing up old furniture. I put this table up on my own Facebook timeline, showing family and friends what I’d done. Then I started a Facebook group called Shabby Chic Projects, where people could share their work. I wanted to bring the community of upcyclers in Ireland together.

I noticed that they were going to several different places for their materials, so I set up an online one-stop-shop for everything. Over the years, the business has changed. I listen to people’s comments and what they need. Now there is a Shabby Colour collection for Fleetwood Paints. And I travel around the country giving practical

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workshops at weekends. I have developed an online learning project. People pay €47 for a beginner’s course, and I post a lot of free videos, too.

At the workshops, when I ask them the best part of the day, they never say, ‘I picked up a paintbrush’ or ‘I learned how to sand’. Instead, they enjoy the social aspect of it, simply making new friends. There are an awful lot of lonely women out there — widowed or retired — and they all have time on their hands.

I also set up a Paint-for-Profit course. I teach them everything — from upcycling, to how to style and sell their furniture. I never feel threatened that they want to copy me. I enjoy passing it on. I tell them what to do, and watch them progress. They earn an extra few bob, and it’s also a way of continuing their hobby. It’s great to see these cottage industries springing up all over the place. It’s a great hobby, because when you are painting a piece of furniture, you are in the present

moment. It is mindfulness.

At 2.30pm, I pick up my daughter, come home and do homework. We play and walk the dogs. We have dinner later, when her dad comes in. I love to spend time with her, even if it’s just doing her hair. She pretends to be a beautician and she gives me facials. Girlie time.

After she goes to bed, I’ll do a couple of hours on the computer. When I go to bed, I put in the earplugs, listen to a guided meditation and fall asleep.

I never dreamt that I’d get the chance of a second career. When you’re in your mid 40s and unemployed, you don’t think that you’ll qualify for anything. I started this successful business out of nothing. It’s all about passion. ■

In conversation with Ciara Dwyer

Aileen Hogan will be at house 2019 — Ireland’s premier interior design event, taking place in the RDS from May 24-26. Tickets on sale now at house-event.ie

👉 shabby.ie

📷 [@shabby.ie](https://www.instagram.com/shabby.ie)