

When she started modelling, JENNIFER HAWKINS worried it wouldn't be a steady income – now she has a AU\$10 MILLION business empire.

WORDS AMY MOLLOY

or someone who's happy to strip
down to her underwear on the catwalk
in front of hoards of people, Jen
Hawkins is surprisingly bashful when
it comes to talking about her business
dealings, especially when we ask the
question, 'So how many properties do
you own exactly?'

"Oh, this feels sooo weird," cringes Jen. "I never really talk about my property side of things, because I feel like I'm rubbing it in people's faces. Some people are trying so hard to get their first property and I'm banging on about how many I own. No, no, no..."

It's been more than a decade since the model from Newcastle in New South Wales was crowned Miss Universe in 2004, a career milestone that made her a household name overnight, and so she tends to downplay her achievements because people could think she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth – or at least a silver tiara on her head.

But it wasn't so long ago that Jen was earning AU\$70 a football match as a cheerleader.

"I think many people see the end result but don't see what goes into it," says Jen.

"This isn't a bad thing and I'd never go out there preaching, 'Oh I work so hard', because people don't want to hear that, but it's not like you just win a competition and you're catapulted into success. You have to work – hard – or nobody cares."

This attitude is exactly why Jen makes an intriguing cover star for *The Collective* and why we were so excited to ask about a lesser-known side of her.

It turns out that Jennifer Hawkins is a bit of an entrepreneurial iceberg – above the surface are the very

obvious, visible achievements (winning Miss Universe, becoming the face of brands from CoverGirl to Lovable, Pepsi and Mount Franklin Lightly Sparkling, and being signed as a judge on Australia's Next Top Model) but beneath the water, out of sight, is a larger, far more powerful business model that includes a property portfolio, stakeholdership, collaborations and product lines.

"I've never really said that I'm a model as such," admits Jen.

"I know I am a model at times as an ambassador and spokesperson but I wouldn't really class myself as that." Not even at the very beginning, when she was on the pageant stage?

"No, not really. I never really wanted to do [modelling] but opportunities just came along, which I am of course very grateful for, but I just wanted to be more stimulated."

Of course, Jen isn't the first model to supplement a career with side projects (look at Kathy Ireland and her homewares range, Elle Macpherson and her superfood supplement, Heidi Klum and her lingerie line), however, unlike many "model moguls" who achieved fame and fortune and then explored other revenue streams, Jen's entrepreneurial desires began long before she was financially comfortable.

"I was just starting to dabble in modelling when I bought my first property," she says.

"I remember saying to my mum, 'I don't know about this', because modelling isn't a constant income and I was really worried about not being able to buy a house. My mum reminds me of this conversation now and we laugh about it, because I'm so grateful of how far I've come since then." >



Despite having a secret dream of owning a house with ocean views, at the time this was financially impossible, and so like many investors she had to take small steps.

"My first property – in fact, my first three – were in Newcastle," says Jen, who grew up in that region before moving to Sydney.

"I knew that area well, I researched the statistics, the growth and the popular places where I knew that if I wanted to sell, I could make money."

From there, it was a process of buying, selling – and lots of packing!

"I didn't just go from a small rental property to – bang! – a big house on the water," says Jen.

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"It's been a big journey with a lot of moving between suburbs to end up where I want to be."

Jen is referring to a AU\$1.66 million plot of land in North Curl Curl on Sydney's Northern Beaches that she and husband Jake bought in 2013, shortly before they married. According to reports, this is the sixth property in their portfolio ("I don't like to talk numbers... but the speculations are normally pretty accurate").

Jen is also an ambassador for the AU\$388 million development of Trinity Point marina, at Lake Macquarie, north of Sydney, where there

are plans to build 190 residential properties, 250 luxury tourist apartments and a boutique hotel. She admits there is no greater feeling than the first time she held the keys to a house she owned.

"I think everyone has their own perception of success," says Jen.

"For some people, it's publicity or having their photograph in a certain magazine, but for me, investing in something was amazing.

"I think it's about wanting to make your parents proud and buying a property is what they saw as being successful. Once I did that, in a way, it didn't really matter what happened after because the pressure was off."

Yet her ambitions don't end at bricks and mortar, and all of Jen's dealings seem to combine style and business substance. When she signed a AU\$4 million contract to become the face of Australian retailer Myer, it was at the time the biggest modelling deal ever done for an Australian-based model, but more importantly, it also included equity in the company, making Jen a major shareholder.

She has also launched three trademarked brands that she now owns in her own right: swimwear range COZI by Jennifer Hawkins, shoe line JLH by Jennifer Hawkins and also Jbronze, a collection of self-tanning products.

"The reasons I started my businesses were never really about money," she says.

"I just had these passions and it felt very natural. I've always had this tunnel vision, which I'm sure can be annoying at times, because once I get onto something I can't think of anything else until I achieve it."

And so, instead of spending all of her free time at the beach, Jen did her homework, browsing Forbes online for business advice and reading the memoirs of Steve Jobs and Donald Trump (who owns the Miss Universe pageant and whom Jen counts as a role model).

"I think it's very important to be around people you can learn from and trust," says Jen.

"I seek advice from people that really know what they're doing in that specific field. I love learning about new industries and soak it up like a sponge. Once you start,

it's addictive and you want to learn more and more until your brain never stops. I really enjoy seeing a business grow from the ground up."

Jen refers to her first business, the swimwear label COZI, as her "baby" but she doesn't let nostalgia cloud her business judgment, and had to make the tough decision not to bring out another collection of the JLH shoe line.

"I'm very aware that when you start businesses, some go amazing and some may not," she says pragmatically.

"With JLH, I was [only] breaking even and it wasn't inspiring me anymore. You get to a certain point where you have to say the reasons I got into this was as a creative

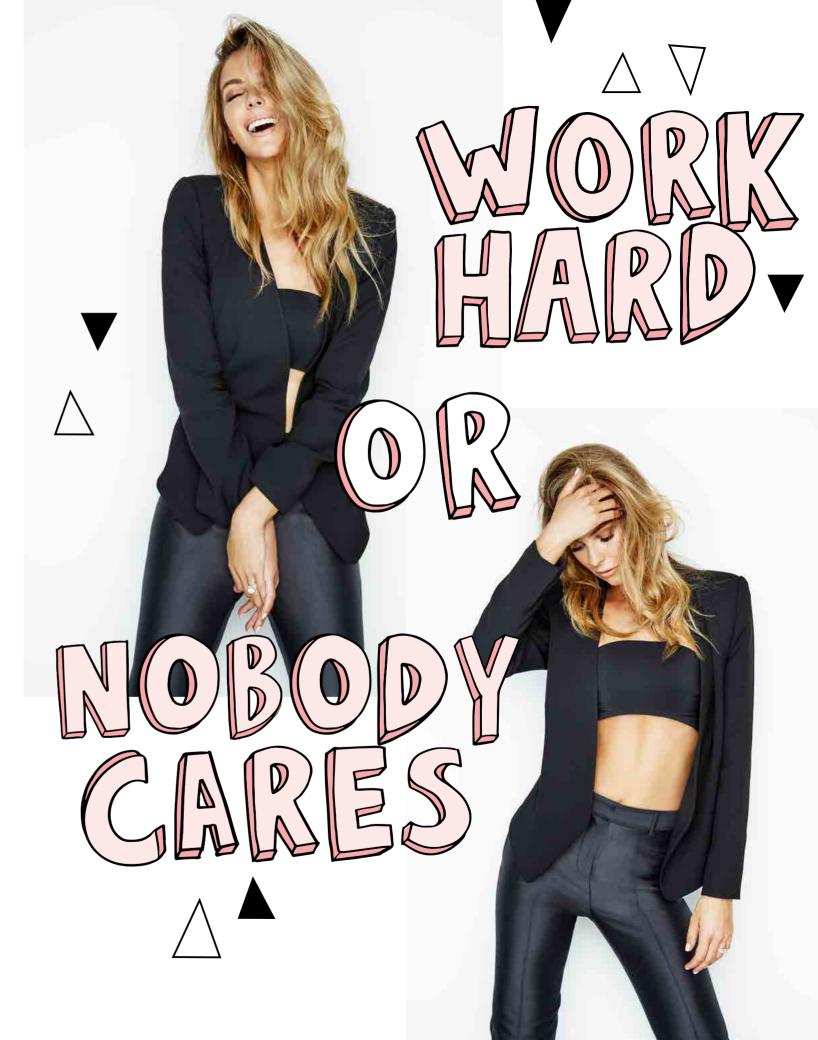
outlet and if you can't really do that, or if the price point has to change from where you wanted it to be, then it's time to get out and let it go."

Was it a hard decision?

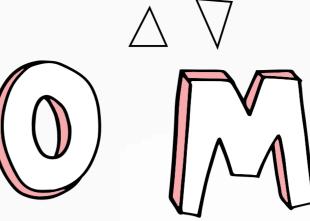
"Yes, but I think it's something a lot of entrepreneurs go through," says Jen.

"When the global financial crisis hit, I had to say, okay, it was fun, I gave it a go, but now it's time to move on..."

This lack of attachment to a set outcome has allowed Jen's career path to take some unexpected twists. >







"I think I'm quite casual and sporadic when it comes to my career plan," she says. "My mind is always ticking away, thinking what can I do next, what can I do next? But if something happens that isn't the way that I thought it would be, I just change direction and keep going."

The project she would next like to develop further is her self-tanning range Jbronze, which was a retail self-out when it hit stores in 2013, and was also a completely new avenue compared to her previous endeavours.

"I think it's got a lot of growing to do," says Jen. "It's got momentum."

But she's also had to learn the importance of saying no – or at least the wisdom of staggering her projects.

"You don't want to be doing too much, there's a certain point where you have to say, 'I've got enough on my plate'. Last year, I was working on COZI and Jbronze at the same time as a heavy filming schedule and balancing out my other work commitments. It was work, work, work and I felt like I achieved so much but it's important to balance life out – I need a social life!

"I took a month off over Christmas and I felt like a different person. I tend to go full steam ahead and then have breaks when I can. I love travelling, it's so good for your soul and creativity."

Jen is still 'the face of Myer' and, as such, is contracted to work a certain number of days per year for the department store and, despite not referring to herself as a model, she's still very thankful for that side of her career.

"When I do a shoot or the Myer parade, it's like a holiday, it's so different," she says. "But what I really love is the unglamorous, nitty-gritty side of business. I would prefer to be respected for my accomplishments rather than my external image."

Feeling like I've pushed a little too hard into an area of life she seldom talks about publicly, I apologise.

"Oh don't worry, I do love talking about it," she replies.

"I just never really put my plans out there because I don't want the pressure, and I don't want to dilute them. But I do believe that if anyone has a dream they can achieve it." So, does she think it's important to avoid being boxed in?

"I think there is no box. If you just tackle many different plans and expand your mind, you can't lose. I'm always asked if I'm concerned my career has an age limit. [They say] 'Are you worried? You must be worried.' But I can honestly swear I've never had that on my mind. I'm comfortable in my skin, more than ever. I see longevity in my businesses... I see my future."

