

renegade

game changers | thought leaders | rule breakers | style makers

COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 5

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ENTREPRENEURS**
FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE

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BRAVE +
UNDISCOVERED**

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IS WATCHING**

SHE'S PERFORMED FOR
OPRAH, ELLEN + OBAMA
+ TOURED WITH **BEYONCÉ**
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FASHION / DESIGN / FILM / FOOD / TECH / ART / SOCIAL CHANGE / TRAVEL

fate loves the fearless

building an AIRTIGHT BUSINESS

SISTERS Ariana and Anthea Hendry put their FAITH in unique workout TECHNOLOGY, which their friends thought was a gimmick. They've since decided to share the joys of HYPOXI with the nation, and we've been REJOICING ever since.

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Many a woman has found herself having an epiphany in the middle of London's Harrods department store. It's the kind of place that will do that to you. It could be that you realise you cannot go on unless you completely update your wardrobe to emulate Kate Moss. Or you discover your spiritual home isn't in some place of religious worship, but between the talleggio and St Andre triple cream in the visual feast that is the Harrods food hall. For Ariana Hendry, then a 26-year-old lawyer, it was the moment she clocked a Hypoxi machine, an airtight chamber

that harnesses vacuum technology to increase blood circulation, in order to accelerate the body's fat-burning metabolism. Its promise? That it can help you lose up to 30cm from problem areas in a dozen 30-minute sessions — without barely breaking a sweat. To date, 390,000 people the world over have given it a go, including pop singer Robbie Williams, Madonna and Cheryl Cole. "I'd been posted to work overseas and I hadn't been happy for some time," says Ariana, one half of the business duo who first introduced Hypoxi to Australia in 2006 (they now boast 70 Hypoxi studios here and in New Zealand). "With all the long hours and the stress I was under, I gained 18kg in

12 months!" Sister Anthea interjects: "When I saw her, I said, 'Oh shit, what happened to you?'" as only a sister can. Too time-poor to go to a traditional gym, Ariana decided to give Hypoxi a go and became hooked. "I began to see results almost immediately, but upon my return to Australia I discovered it hadn't made its way here yet," she says. After several calls to Hypoxi's global headquarters in Austria, where she was told there was no market for them Down Under, the seed began to plant itself. "I realised this could be an opportunity to do something different — something big." Anthea, then 23 and a management accountant for a

construction company, concedes that she didn't need much convincing to get involved. "Ariana and I were both disillusioned with our jobs and constantly having that 'is this all we're going to do with our lives?' dialogue. The [Hypoxi] reviews in UK publications were glowing and I saw what a difference it had made to Ariana, so I was on board the minute she suggested it." It was 2006 and the girls had made the decision to become the exclusive Australian distributors for the brand. Not that the road to success was smooth. The sisters were met with cynicism at every turn. "Oh, I still remember the look on my employers' face when I told them I was trading law for weight loss!" laughs Ariana. "Everyone we spoke to was convinced it was all a gimmick and that it would never work." And it almost didn't. It took nine months of pleading — and according to Ariana, a business plan the size of a phone book — to convince Hypoxi that Australia was a viable market and that these two young ladies could pull it off. "They thought we were too distant from Europe and that the average Aussie wouldn't be interested," laughs Ariana, relishing the titbit that it's actually rural women in remote parts of the country such as Kalgoorlie that are some of her most enthusiastic clients. But their persistence paid off; the girls plunged AU\$100,000 into the business and hit the books to learn; Anthea undertaking an importing course and Ariana studying marketing. "We were on a shoestring budget and knew next to nothing, so it really was a huge leap of faith at the time," says Ariana, who also used her skills as a lawyer to do most of the drafting. "And we're quite risk-averse too, so we hung onto our regular day jobs part-time for the first two years until the business took off," adds Anthea. With the sisters often working in excess of 80-hour weeks in the early stages of the business, both concede it was a lonely, chaotic time. "I sometimes wonder if given the

opportunity to do it all over again now, would we?" muses Anthea. "But back then we didn't have families and mortgages or anything of value to lose, so I guess it was really a matter of having the right set of circumstances to kick things off." Their plan was to distribute machines to gyms across the country. With four machines in play and bills to pay, the sisters began cold-calling in earnest but soon discovered there wasn't much commercial interest in a product no one had heard of.

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So they thought fast and rejigged their plans, opening up their own studio instead. It proved to be a wise play. "We found Hypoxi was a product that needed to be tried to be believed. Once retail clients came in and trialed the machines, they quickly became interested in buying one and setting up their own studio." Today, 80 per cent of the girls' commercial clients are former retail clients who are only too happy to be brand ambassadors. "What can I say?" laughs Ariana. "It's a product that gets under people's skin." It's also a product that's earned the sisters a great deal of money, although details of just how much remain a little murky ("We're intensely private," insists Ariana when pressed on the issue). But 70 studios in seven years and you can do the math. What she will reveal is that they were able to recoup start-up costs within six months of converting their showroom into a studio and that they were profitable by year two — and then some. They're sitting in a growth market with the Cosmetic Physicians Society of Australia estimating that Australians spent AU\$448.5 million on non-surgical

weight loss treatments in 2009, with 30 per cent year-on-year growth expected. "We've had 60 per cent growth year-on-year ever since." Part of this success can be attributed to hard work and good staff, but it's also about finding the right advertising stream for your brand, reveals Ariana. "We discovered early on that print didn't work for us as we were so small and to get a decent cut-through you need a huge marketing budget when you're competing with the likes of major beauty companies."

The girls embraced the move towards the online sphere — particularly social media — and now measure where all of their leads come from. "For example, the number of clients citing Facebook has increased from zero four years ago to 27 per cent this year, so that's something we're concentrating on to help us build the brand." Not that they need much help. Today, two new Hypoxi studios open every month and the girls are busy scheming their next plan of attack — to build their New Zealand market and to launch a new product in the professional athlete recovery phase, among others. "And then we're also going to be launching an e-commerce platform, as well as creating a lifestyle brand which will include workout gear and a branded cookbook. The sky's the limit really." "Well, we now have a staff of 10 to help and we employ some of the best people on the ground. "And you know what? If there's one piece of business advice I'd give to others, it would be to play to your strengths but have others take care of your weaknesses — that's one of the key secrets to success!" Something tells us she should know. ■