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# Brenda Cascio And Audrey Craig Reveal What It's Like To Be Mother-Daughter Entrepreneurs






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Entrepreneurs

*I write about entrepreneurship and small business.*

## TWEET THIS

-  Brenda Cascio and Audrey Craig are the creative masterminds behind design studio GB Design House.
-  It is a challenge to maintain that mother-daughter relationship when the business consumes all of your time.

Over the years, I've spoken with several entrepreneurs who have gone into business with family members or spouses. However, this post marks the first time I have been able to chat with a mother and daughter entrepreneur team. Brenda Cascio and Audrey Craig are the creative masterminds behind design studio GB Design House. 

Based out of Austin, Texas, [GB Design House](#) initially started out as an at-home wedding business called Gracious Bridal in 2006. Over the years, the company evolved into a multi-faceted product design house. The studio personalizes and brands events with effortless style and unique gifts meant to turn any special occasion, wedding, party or event into the ultimate celebration.



Photo Credit: GB Design House GB DESIGN HOUSE

Running a small business as a mother and daughter duo, even one as fabulous as GB Design House, is bound to face its share of challenges. I reached out to [Brenda and Audrey](#) to talk about how Gracious Bridal transitioned into GB Design House, how the pair decided to go into business, and the biggest myths surrounding doing business with family.

### **Deborah Sweeney: When was GB Design House founded and what is its mission?**



Audrey Craig, President and CEO, GB Design House PHOTO CREDIT: MARIAE BUI

**Audrey Craig:** The mission of GB Design House and Gracious Bridal is to create fabulous personalized entertaining details for parties, corporate events and weddings.

**Brenda Cascio:** When the business opened in 2006, GB Design House was a wedding-focused brand called Gracious Bridal. As an artist, I was always searching for ways to incorporating my love for design and business. I had started to notice a void of beautiful wedding favors after being involved in several weddings.

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In 2005, Hurricane Rita ripped the roof off my art studio. Having no place to paint, and a yearning to create, I opened Gracious Bridal, as an eCommerce store focusing on elegant wedding favors. It was the vehicle to marry the creative and business sides of myself.

After working in the wedding industry for several years, we began growing our corporate and party-planning clientele. My business partner, and daughter, Audrey Craig and I then morphed Gracious Bridal into GB Design House, a full-fledged entertaining design house to better reflect the needs of our clientele.

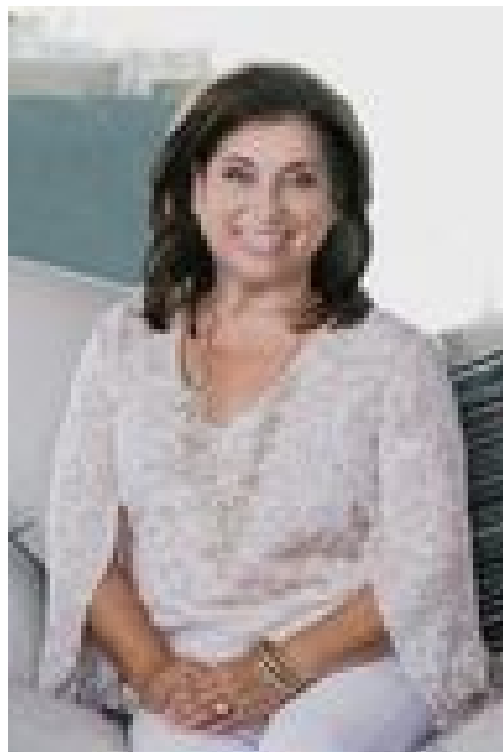
**Deborah Sweeney: How did you come up with the name "GB Design House" for the business?**

**Audrey Craig:** We wanted something that reflected the elegant style that we bring to the industry. As our business grew beyond weddings and delved into product development, more intensive design work and corporate branding, we felt that changing the name to GB Design House best suited who we are as company.

**Deborah Sweeney: Brenda, what were the early days in business like at GB Design House?**

**Brenda Cascio:** Coming from an artistic family, I've always been creative. Armed with a Bachelor in Fine Arts and a thesis away from my master's degree, creating is a way of life for me and designing is in my DNA. When my daughters were young, I began a business on a lark with my neighbor. I designed hair bows, embellished socks and tees and bandanas in the 1980s. Wearing my original designs out shopping, a store owner asked where I purchased it. I told her I had designed it and she asked if she could have two dozen of my designs by the following week.

"Of course!" I exclaimed, without thinking of the work involved. I myself knew little about business and made a classic Entrepreneur 101 mistake after I purchased all the supplies at retail to fulfill that order. This was before the Internet, so I went to the



Brenda Cascio, Founder and Creative Director, GB Design House PHOTO CREDIT: MARIAE BUI

library, found the Thomas Register and wrote down a list of wholesale suppliers.

I hired my mother to represent us to boutiques in Baton Rouge and Lafayette. Who could possibly be a better sales rep than a proud mother! We sold to retail stores within Texas and Louisiana. Utterly naïve about the business side, I hired a sales rep in the Dallas Apparel Mart, and suddenly we were selling nationwide. We quickly opened an office, trained other young moms and had large looming deadlines. My partner and I would put our kids (and husbands) to sleep, and walk to each other's homes in our nightgowns as we worked on designs. Our sales rep coordinated a contract as a wholesale supplier to more than 10,000 military facilities worldwide. We had no idea at the time what a big deal that was for a company our size.

We worked feverishly night and day. We didn't have experience but we had lots of creativity. When my partner was diagnosed with a non-life-threatening condition, we collectively breathed a sigh of relief, and took it as an "out." We quickly found a buyer and sold the company. Since we didn't have any formal business training, we were not set up to sustain the exponential growth that was getting ready to happen. We quickly realized that tossing graham crackers to our hungry children was not how we wanted to raise our families. That was a sobering time, when I realized that uncontrolled growth is dangerous.

In the interim, I was still creating and had all these ideas. I learned about business systems and processes while managing my husband's dental practice. When the opportunity arose and I believed I was ready, that is when the bridal market seemed like a natural next step.

**Deborah Sweeney: When did you decide to bring your daughter, Audrey, on the team?**

**Brenda Cascio:** It certainly did not take long from idea to inception. She was working part-time on the launch in late 2006 while employed full-time in insurance sales. We worked for months on the website, procuring suppliers, and curating products. Personally, I wasn't planning on having a big business. Audrey saw the potential, began working full-time and expanded our customer base. I

realized her skills were perfect for running the business while being creative so I could focus strictly on designing.

### **Deborah Sweeney: What are the biggest challenges you've faced as a mother-daughter entrepreneurial team?**

**Brenda Cascio:** Family businesses are not for the faint-hearted. We do remarkably well, but over 11 years, we had to learn how to navigate our business relationship. It is a challenge to maintain that mother-daughter relationship when the business consumes all of your time. 🐦 We have a rule to keep business conversations confined to business hours. It doesn't always work, but we try to preserve nights and weekends for family time.

**Audrey Craig:** I agree that our biggest challenge was being able to "turn off" the business relationship when we were together outside of work and just be mother and daughter. It took a few years to find the balance. It is all too easy to get completely consumed in new business ideas, strategies and products. Balance is key as entrepreneurs.

### **Deborah Sweeney: What are the biggest lessons that being in business as a mother-daughter duo have taught you both so far?**

**Brenda Cascio:** It's okay and healthy to have a difference of opinion. We are of different generations, and have different personal styles. Each of us brings something different to the business. Together we determined what our goals are, our mission statement and our corporate image. By keeping that in the forefront, whenever one of us goes off the rails, we point to it, and get back on track. Audrey is the President and CEO, so while I often offer my opinion, ultimately she is leading the ship and I trust her decision.

**Audrey Craig:** Coming from a close-knit family, we have always been very honest with each other. This is an asset when discussing new ideas and directions for the company. We are not afraid to hold back our opinion in fear of hurting the other's feelings. Ultimately, it works for us simply because we have a great foundation as mother and daughter and maintain a mutual respect for each other.

## **Deborah Sweeney: Challenges aside, what is a major success you're proud of that you made happen together?**



Personalized Neiman Marcus napkins and stir sticks from GB Design House. PHOTO

CREDIT: GB DESIGN HOUSE

**Audrey Craig:** I am really proud of the leap we made parlaying our success in the bridal industry into corporate branding and events. We spent a lot of time developing a strategic plan and have worked with notable brands like Neiman Marcus, Kendra Scott, Prada, Miu Miu, lululemon, Formula 1 Racing, Titos and Crown Royal.

Also, I am very proud of the amazing team of employees we have built together. It's vital, as good employees are essential for success.

**Brenda Cascio:** We've had lots of success providing gifts and party goods for some pretty exciting events. One really creative collaboration was the after party for Kool & the Gang's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. It was at a swanky Hollywood hotel ballroom. We designed personalized items in keeping with the "groovy" theme all while honoring the art-deco environment.

## **Deborah Sweeney: What are some of the biggest myths you believe people have about going into business with family?**

**Brenda Cascio:** The biggest myth is that it cannot be successful. It can, but just like a marriage it takes a lot of work. In our particular situation, we have a mother-daughter dynamic, with the daughter being in charge as President and CEO since 2010. There must be a working hierarchy in a corporate structure or else there is chaos. We discuss the issues, but ultimately, she has the final say and I trust her business acumen.

## **Deborah Sweeney: What does the future hold for GB Design House and your working relationship?**

**Audrey Craig:** We have had a tremendous amount of growth in the past two years and just launched a new line of letterpress invitations and stationery. I am very excited about GB Design House's future! I am excited to be working closely together to bring our newest ideas to life in the upcoming year.

**Brenda Cascio:** I see great things in the future. Our business relationship literally gets better each year as we continue to master the dynamic between the two of us. 🐦 We've gone through the difficult times, and respect each other's strengths.

*I am the CEO of [MyCorporation.com](http://MyCorporation.com), an online business filing company helping 1 million+ small business owners and entrepreneurs since its founding in 1998. I'm a former corporate and intellectual property attorney who became an entrepreneur after acquiring [MyCorporation.com](http://MyCorporation.com) ... **MORE***

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