

canvas of life

SARAH SWAN FINDS JOY AND INSPIRATION IN THE EVERYDAY. *By Mary Stone*

By day, Sarah Swan works in finance at a Rochester investment management firm; by night she writes, exercising her creativity and pouring moments, memories, concerns, passions and realizations into her blog.

After five years of curating and expanding thepastiche.com, Sarah's blog and online shop log up to 5,000 visitors a month.

For Pastiche, Sarah combines topics of interest with things she loves: from comparing cooking skillets to sharing baby travel tips; from seeing her mother marry her stepdad to finding the perfect one-piece swimsuit. The blog's name reflects the range and eclecticism of modern life.

"Pastiche is a lesser known term. It's been used by a bunch of different languages, and it's changed in its different uses," Sarah explains. "Our definition of it is that it's a work of art that pulls from different mediums into one canvas. That's kind of how I envisioned exactly what I wanted to do."

"I think there's a place for all of this in my lifestyle. It is just as important to me to talk about good recipes that I made as about things that are a little heavier, to my dad dying when I was young to having difficulties with my now husband, or what lipstick I like," Sarah says. "To me all of that is important. No one topic needs to be treated differently, because that to me is what life is about."

Sarah works at Howe & Rusling on East Ave.—a conservative business environment that stands in contrast to some of Sarah's far reaching interests in art, design, travel and cooking. Sarah has worked at the same firm since she graduated 10 years ago from University of Rochester (Sarah is originally from Marcellus, NY—near Syracuse).

Even as a student, her interests were "all over the map," she says. She graduated with a degree in political science but simultaneously studied brain and cognitive science and English.

It was four years into her work in finance when her need to explore other interests gelled with her passion for writing to create Pastiche. "I started writing and thought, 'If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do it well,'" Sarah says. "I had articles written to post ahead of time so I could hit the ground running. I wanted to take all of my own pictures. I learned photography for the first time in my life and just kind of went with it."

That was 2015; in 2017, with a nudge from her husband, Sarah launched an online shop.

She and her husband Jon travelled to a few major cities and attended some trade shows. "It was super fun just to get my feet wet, and we placed some orders for a bunch of wholesale stuff, stuff from some local artisans (people I knew that made stuff I would sell). When I did that there was a big jump in traffic. I really pushed that out there and then had people come to the blog for different reasons."



Sarah sells textured throw pillows, milk-white vases, enamel trays, stationery, art prints, vintage spice bottles, tea towels and other household items that reflect her warm, spare, unique sense of Bohemian-chic style.

Sarah and her husband live in Brighton, which she says is probably as far as she'll ever get from Rochester. Jon owns or co-owns five restaurants in the city: Dorado, The Daily Refresher, Ox and Stone, Swan Dive and Vern's. When Sarah met Jon, it was at his mother's restaurant on Park Avenue, Cibon, now called Roux. (Jon's sisters also own or co-own restaurants.)

While restaurants are ingrained in Jon's family life, restaurants and dining are but one of many interests Sarah cultivates in Pastiche. Sarah does not have a formal role in the restaurants' design or operation, but Jon, she says, loves to collaborate with people. He likes getting her input.

She's a sounding board, a voice of reason and source of inspiration at the same time, Jon says. He enjoys food and dining topics as they come up on her blog, but what is most important to him about Pastiche is the way it encapsulates Sarah—and their lives together.

"I have some unique interest in her blog as it is sort of a little scrapbook of our lives," Jon says. "My favorite posts of Sarah's revolve around her explanation of personal reflections she's had about her grandfather, about our daughter, our marriage and more." What and how she writes is genuine, he says, and thought-provoking.

Nine months ago, Sarah and Jon had their first baby: a little girl named Grace.

Being a new mom has its challenges. Sarah wrote about one of them in a recent blog post about coping with the permanent fear that comes with being a parent. "I had put something out there about these new feelings I've been experiencing surrounding fear, just this very vulnerable sense of all that can go wrong," she says. "There were people who immediately jumped on it. They said: 'I get it!' or 'I needed this!' or 'Here's something I read that I found really interesting...'"

"Someone sent me this essay that I was totally blown away by. It explained much more eloquently what I was trying to say," she says.

Sarah loves the range and intensity of reader reactions. "On days where I don't know where it's going, or I don't have time to post something, or put my time into this creative passion project, [connections like this] make me immediately know that what I'm doing is good and right."



"I have always loved writing, and for some reason I have no problem being expressive and really honest, and I think pretty articulate, about things I'm thinking or things I want to dive into." — Sarah Swan



Clockwise from top left, Grace and Sarah on Grace's first international trip to Seville, Spain at 4.5 months old; A meal of octopus and souvlaki in Paros, Greece; Sarah in Santorini, Greece, happy and exploring the beautiful town; More travel food, this time in Miami; Grace's bright, colorful nursery Sarah designed before she knew she was expecting a baby girl.