

# atlas

H O M E W A R E S

*because style matters...*

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## ENTREPRENEUR STORY PITCH

### **From Baubles to Knobs, Adrienne Morea's Visionary Fearless Style makes Atlas Homewares the Shining "Gem" of the Decorative Hardware Industry**



Atlas Homewares' Owner and Design Visionary Adrienne Morea—she's bold, gutsy and not afraid to roll the dice...even when conventional wisdom dictates otherwise. Her latest bold move? She changed her production line from India to China, which forced her to throw out almost a million dollars in inventory. "It will take some time to recover, but I foresaw a positive impact on my brand image that will solidly put Atlas on the forefront of decorative hardware design."

Known for its unique and fashion-forward look in a category begging for innovation, in many ways Atlas Homewares is already on the forefront. "We've grown steadily since our launch in 1994 and have never had a down year," says Morea. "Our growth this year will be somewhere between 25 and 40 percent."

Atlas Homewares' impressive fashion-forward momentum has not gone unrecognized. In addition to the numerous product placements and profiles in glossy consumer magazines the likes of *Better Homes & Gardens* and *House Beautiful*, Morea's audacious "winning" style and savvy business acumen was singled out this year by Ernst and Young, which presented her with its "Entrepreneur of the Year Award."

Although Morea says she hasn't even begun to hit full stride in terms of Atlas Homewares' potential, she does offer some insight on her success formula for growing and thriving in the highly competitive and male-dominated decorative hardware industry.

#### **Style Eyes**

"Infiltrating the male dominated hardware industry became my 'pet project' and business mission," says Morea. "How I did this was by designing product that fit into the more fashion-oriented business model of home stores such as Pottery Barn, Crate and Barrel and Restoration Hardware, and at the same time, setting a goal to be in Lowes and Home Depot. So, essentially, I looked at where hardware 'was' and where I thought it was 'going' and merged the markets between 'specialty stores' and 'big box' stores."

No easy mission, but Morea was able to draw on her former experience launching a trend-driven costume jewelry company that provided designs for Macy's, Bloomingdales and Barney's. "Although it was a different industry, I had learned the ins and outs of marketing a product quickly and making it reach the right customer."



For Morea and Atlas Homewares, the right customer turned out to be a woman. “Women like style and can relate to my designs because I treat each piece of hardware like a pair of shoes...the final detail to “dress up an outfit” or, in this case, the interior design project.”

In addition to an eye for detail, Morea had the vision to not only set the trend for decorative hardware, but to stay ahead of it. “I knew that like any good trend, my product had a ‘unique’ shelf life of about three years—one year of introduction, one year of recognition and one year of saturation,” she explains. “After that comes ‘knock off,’ but before any of the old school hardware companies could come up with the knock offs, I had already made in-roads in their market. And once my product was selling at the ‘big box’ stores like Lowes and Home Depot, I knew those companies would look to me for trends because I wasn’t hemmed in by corporate hierarchy and I could move from idea to product very quickly.”

### Quick Change Artist

Morea’s ability to change design direction quickly gave her an obvious edge over the competition—especially in the bigger mass-market stores, where the large-inventoried decorative hardware vendors typically update their styles once a year. Used to thinking like she had in her jewelry business, Morea explains, “The jewelry business is like the fashion industry: You have to reinvent the wheel every four months as seasons and styles change.”

“When we first launched Atlas Homewares, our style was ‘whimsical’ because that was the niche that needed to be filled,” she says. “Then, the niche became saturated and the style became more clean and streamlined with influences from the mid-century and modernist eras. So, being a trend designer, I moved with the trend.”

Morea describes her current lineup of decorative hardware as “clean with a retro influence.” Fluid and prolific, Morea says she likes to take chances. “I’ll put something out in the market even if I know it won’t end up in too many kitchens,” she explains. “Brand recognition is sometimes your biggest reward. But it’s worth it because I’m still branding Atlas as the trend leader of my industry.”

### Producing Results

For Atlas Homewares, reaching trend leader status depends as much on a solid production model as it does on the ability to come out with the most trend-forward designs first.

Morea explains that all of Atlas Homewares’ product is imported because it’s made with a tool and die process that isn’t cost effective to do in the U.S. “Since my line is 99.9 percent proprietary, when I’m in the market shopping for vendors, I make a choice based on what the vendors produce in their own lines,” she says. “I shop shows around the world and decide who has their act together and can meet my high production schedules and pricing needs,” she says, and adds, “I try to keep my vendors to under five, though, because it produces better results to foster dependency on both ends—you end up like family!”

The net result is a production model that’s fast and efficient. To keep it this way, Morea confronts her challenges head-on. The biggest challenge at the moment? “Right now it’s our emerging growth,” she says. “It’s a good challenge to have, but there are warehousing issues, shipping issues and supply chain issues that I’m tackling now and will solve while they’re still challenges and before they become problems. My retailers are counting on me to deliver!”

## “No Rules” Success Secrets

**Don’t be a slave to rules.** Morea attributes her ability to move beyond the rules that seem to mandate every move and decision in more corporate climates to playing a key role in Atlas Homewares’ success. “By refusing to get caught up in the red tape, it enables me to make decisions quickly,” she says. “I always look at things from all angles, but I know how to go from A to Z, without having to deal with the other letters in between.” A technique she uses for cutting to the chase? “I always ask myself how and where I want to end up?”

**Contact Your Mentors.** Because knowing where she needed to end up wasn’t as clear to Morea when she started out ten years ago, she turned to her mentors for business advice. “I was very fortunate to have mentors from both the business and art world and they’ve all helped me through the ‘tough’ questions and answers,” she says. “It’s funny,” she adds. “People who’ve ‘made it’ are usually willing to share their war stories and help you with yours.”

**Put Together a Great Team.** Morea attributes much of Atlas Homewares’ success to her team of about 25 employees. “I put together a team made up of entrepreneurial types who are loyal, hardworking and excited to come to work every day,” says Morea. “If they aren’t excited, they don’t belong here.”

**Believe in Yourself.** During the unavoidable trials, tribulations and setbacks that face any new business, Morea remembers her Dad’s belief in her abilities to achieve and the simple cardboard desk sign he had slipped into her Christmas stocking in 1984 that said: “If you can imagine it, you can achieve it.”