

Meet the shopkeepers

Trade secrets

The road to being a successful retailer – be it a greengrocer, cobbler or stationer – can be bumpy. Where to look? What stock to include? Whom to bring on board? And how to make that imaginative leap in the first place? While this book is brimming with fine retail outposts that make it look easy, the people behind each business are steely folk who've faced many a pothole.

In this chapter we've brought together a dozen shopkeepers, from an Armenian bookseller in Beirut to Milanese tailors, to shed light on how they turned an abstract idea into a thriving bricks-and-mortar space. These aren't stories of victory against the odds, designed to make your own ambitions pale. Rather, they're testaments to the returns of hard work and the rewards of running a business: our shopkeepers are here to inspire and advise. Whether you want to bring your hometown a first-rate florist or dream of moving abroad to plug a gap in a distant market, you're sure to find a word to the wise.

Valentino & Nicola Ricci Sciamat, Milan

Another Italian tailor's? The industry's weighty heritage and saturation didn't deter the self-made brothers.

Sciamat's name originates from the Persian phrase *shah mat*, meaning "the king is dead" – which demonstrates just how set the owners of this Milanese *sartoria* are on subverting the established standards of modern menswear and tailoring.

The brand's showroom sits in a small but stately quarter on Via Montenapoleone in Milan's Quadrilatero della Moda. A troop of mannequins sport Sciamat's latest designs while Nicola Ricci, one of the co-founders, is always on hand to greet customers.

The other maestros behind the venture are Nicola's brother Valentino (who weaves away in their Puglia atelier), Valentino's wife Silvana, and their childhood friend Pippo. Frustrated with hackneyed tailors who refused to accommodate their requests, the brothers ditched their jobs in law and finance respectively to start their own business, funding it themselves. "We wanted to reinterpret classical style and resurrect the old minutiae of elegance, which have been forgotten," says Silvana.

The service here is bespoke and the overarching style encompasses broad and often peaked lapels, high-sitting pleated trousers and a closely tailored waist. The self-taught Valentino is renowned for his shoulder-weave, which achieves a powerful shape with no padding – much like the whole suit. "It looks rigid but feel how pliant it is," says Nicola, rolling a jacket into a ball.



Top tips

1. It's all well and good having a dream but ensure you have a business plan.
2. Forget about personal profits for a little while. Having a business is a bit like having a child: it's all about investment.
3. Never underestimate the power of good service. Much of developing your brand and ensuring customer satisfaction comes down to this.

Janina Krinke

Bon Voyage Interieur, Hamburg

In Hamburg, an editor has put away her red pen and pursued another passion – this one for French design.

Janina Krinke, originally from Gütersloh in Westphalia, spent 18 years in the heart of Hamburg's media world editing magazines such as *Flair*. Now she runs the genteel design and homeware shop Bon Voyage Interieur in a 1900s building in the city's Eppendorf quarter.

Krinke's mother was also once a shopkeeper and retail had long intrigued the daughter as a possible foray. "I like the mixture of business and creativity," she says of her newfound profession, "especially the treasure hunt aspect of it." On show in her colourful, homely showroom are primarily French designers but it's not your pedestrian selection: the labels are high-end and little known outside their home country. There's a spread of homeware from Sarah Lavoine, on whose label the shop has exclusivity in Germany; linen by Gironde-based Harmony; and cutlery from French-Moroccan maker Chabi Chic. In late 2018 Krinke also launched her own ceramics line in collaboration with a ceramicist in Puglia.

Although it may seem unpatriotic to champion French design in Germany, Krinke is unapologetic and believes that, by offering unique and well-made products, she's already doing her bit to improve Hamburg's retail scene. "In Hamburg everyone sells the same stuff," she says reproachfully but with optimism. "I want to do something different."



Top tips

1. Everybody loves the creative aspect but make sure you study the important business principles before opening your own shop.
2. Be present. I'm in the shop every day. Clients want to see you and shouldn't get the impression that you run the shop as a hobby.
3. Location is important: it's one of the best investments. Even the most beautiful concepts will be plagued by difficulties if you choose the wrong place.

