

Minerva Mosaics

Success in art and business

Margo Anton, '01 BCom, spends up to six hours a day assembling glass, tile, shells, and stones into breathtaking mosaics – mirrors surrounded by smooth stones and colourful glass squares and a garden turtle whose back is covered with tiny red tiles and whose eyes are beads made from imported Italian Murano glass.

It's not exactly what Anton envisioned herself doing when she enrolled in the School of Business.

"Having taken courses in finance and accounting and knowing some marketing skills has been great," she says. "To succeed, you have to be a business person first and an artist second. The learning curve is big in starting your own business, but it would have been bigger if I didn't have the degree."

Anton was a Classics major on a dig in Cortona, Italy, when she became interested in mosaics in 1996. Two years later, she switched over to Business, seeking practical skills she could use in the work world. But after three months selling air freight for the multinational company Emery Worldwide, she realized the corporate world wasn't for her.

Art had always been important in her life, and she had been captivated

by the mosaics she'd seen in Italy. She went to the library and collected all the books she could find on the subject. Then she headed to Grande Cache to visit her mother, figuring she'd have time to read there.

She was wrong. Upon her arrival, Anton discovered that her mother wanted to lay river rock on her patio.

"I said, 'that's mosaic!' she recalled. So she read quickly and used

what she'd learned to make a patio that her mother loved.

Anton was hooked. In January 2003, she invested in tools and supplies and began building up her inventory. Not long after, she sold her first mosaic, a 12-inch sunflower. But because she couldn't support herself with art alone, she once again put her business degree to work, this time importing and selling supplies through

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her business, www.mosaicoutpost.com.

Anton started a separate Web site, www.minervamosaics.com, named for the Roman goddess of arts, crafts and strategic war, to sell her work. It's also available at galleries in and around Edmonton and British Columbia and at shows such as the summer Artwalk on Whyte Avenue. Sales have been brisk and steady with about 30 percent from commissioned work.

Earlier this year, one of her pieces, an 18" x 18" butterfly trailing a rainbow of colours, was accepted in a juried show at an international mosaics conference in Washington, DC. She went to the opening where it sold for \$1,000 US.

Anton's mosaics start at \$80 for a small hurricane lamp. She also teaches classes at a space she rents at the City Arts Centre, a business that accounts for the bulk of her income. Her goal this year is to earn more from her art than from sales of supplies, and she intends to continue waitressing as well.

"By keeping my part time job as a waitress, I have the luxury of taking this business in the direction I want to go," she says. "It's why I started it as an at-home micro-business instead of a small business. The failure rate of small businesses is huge and that's not so with micro-businesses."

Fellow artists who want to sell their work should take business courses, she says. "As an artist, you need to know how to market and how to market yourself. When you're so emotionally tied to your work, it's hard to say 'Look at me! I'm great!' Artists are full of self-doubt. It helps to have a business background to help get you through that." **B**