

Leaders of the Pack

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photo by JENNIFER LISEO

NANCY NIENBERG

Owner and architect, wUNDERground Architecture

"In school, I really loved art and I was good at math and science," says Nancy Nienberg, founder and principal of the New York City-based architecture firm wUNDERground. "Somehow I thought architecture would make a respectable career while letting me dabble a little in what I loved... and the balance on that scale has been better than I ever could have hoped for." Nienberg was recruited right out of Yale University for an international commercial interiors firm. "I learned a tremendous amount about designing and managing the process of architecture, but the politics of those kinds of intense projects in a young expanding office took over," she says. So in 2002, Nienberg established wUNDERground. She explains, "My partner, Jen, encouraged me to take a leave. I honestly thought I would go right back to it, but I took a small business seminar on a whim and forged ahead with my own practice, and I have not looked back." her advice to folks looking to set out on their own is simple. "Be brave!" she says. "When I left my old job, my mom sent me a hat that said, 'never confuse having a career with having a life.' Letting what really matters in life guide you is a great mantra."

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RED HOT ENTREPRENEURS



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INGRID SAUER

Owner, Insanitea

After six years of stability and financial security in the field of retail, Ingrid Sauer needed a fresh challenge. "I wanted to take a go at the American Dream, a blind leap taken in hopes of living a more fulfilling life with fulfilling work. A dull feeling of complacency urged me to find my own niche, since I never felt like I fit in anywhere," says Sauer, the founder of InsaniTea, a Montclair, N.J. tea house. Perhaps that feeling made Sauer sympathetic to the plight of tea, so often overshadowed by coffee. "I wanted to give tea a welcomed place," Sauer says. "I also wanted to provide a place for the rest of the 'odd types' out there to feel safe and comfortable. InsaniTea has become a safe haven for local artisans." In addition to serving and selling loose-leaf teas, InsaniTea also carries items created by local artisans and crafters, everything from pet treats to tarot readings. InsaniTea also features local bands and hosts classes taught by a neighborhood music teacher. Sauer's willingness to try new things has helped InsaniTea stand out in her gay-friendly community. "Stay true to your original vision without ignoring the need for positive change along the way," she advises her fellow risk-takers. "Be flexible and give up your days and nights in an effort to succeed."



NIENBERG: JENNIFER LISEO; SAUER: LAURA PESKOSKY