Sometimes starting a business is about focusing on what you can do, not getting mired in what you can’t. When Lisa Hackwith launched Hackwith Design House’s online shop in 2013, the original model was built around a series of limited edition pieces released every Monday: two to four designs, never exceeding more than 25 pieces of each. Though the move was largely on account of not having the bandwidth to execute a full collection all at once, it gave customers something to look forward to, and the feeling that they were in on a special secret. Three years later, less bound by certain production constraints, the company has expanded its lineup into swim, basics, plus-size, and bridal. Limited edition still holds place within the brand.

Any quirks in Hackwith’s strategy in producing and selling its clothing is a wider indication of the company’s more ethical approach to fashion in general. It is a quiet revolt against fast fashion and the warped, largely unsustainable attitude many consumers have adopted: we want the most au courant pieces, on demand and in limitless supply. Too often this means goods that are not supportive of the environment, ethics, or the local economy. In fact, far from it. Instead of throwaway, trend-driven pieces made with inferior fabrics in dubious working conditions, Hackwith prides itself on quality fabrics and an attention to detail that can only be achieved when a product is made in-house, always in plain sight. Call it old fashioned, but one can only hope that such a model becomes the future of fashion.

Doubly inspiring is how Hackwith has tackled what is often seen as fashion’s lack of diversity. Online, the brand shoots its figure-friendly pieces on a number of shapes and sizes, faces and types. They are a company of women that designs for all women, not just a narrow demographic that gets the most playing time in fashion magazines. From the marketing to the product itself, Hackwith offers what many designers too often miss: clothes people can actually wear, made in a manner people can be proud of. Lisa Hackwith and Erin Husted, who joined the brand in two years ago to run operations, talk to us about 90-hour work weeks, urban markets, and the importance of a supportive local community.

**Bond Street**

How did you two connect as business partners?

**Hackwith Design House**

[ERIN] Lisa started designing and making clothes back in 2010. She primarily sold them on Etsy and had a couple wholesale accounts. She realized that if this was something she was
going to do full-time and was sustainable, she needed to rethink her business model. In September 2013, she launched hackwithdesignhouse.com. I came on as her business partner in March of 2014. For a few months, she was doing everything as a one-woman show: making every piece, designing every piece, photographing every piece, putting it online, tracking her financing, shipping. Pretty intense.
Lisa Hackwith
When did Lisa know it was time to expand?

[Lisa] At that point I was working 80 to 90 hours a week. I knew I could afford someone else. I had maxed out, basically.

Does Hackwith still operate by releasing limited-edition designs on Mondays or was that just how it started?

[Erin] That’s how Lisa started and we are still doing that for now. We are switching our model in the fall to do more full collections that will be online. We’ll continue to do limited edition in addition to that. Now that we have a little more stability, it’s a more attainable to do a full collection all at once.

So those first runs of limited edition pieces released on Mondays was a combination of marketing and production limitations?

[Lisa] Yeah, it was that and wanting to live in Minneapolis. There’s a fabric store here that gets fabric from all over the world so I knew I could get fabric from there. I would basically get whatever they had in stock and that’s the quantity I would make. So it was a
combination of all those things.

**Bond Street**

What are the benefits for a fashion company being based in Minneapolis?

**Hackwith Design House**

[ERIN] Minneapolis is affordable, for one. There’s a really big small business and maker community here. The creative industry is really well supported. We have a number of big corporations where the people who work there are interested in supporting local businesses, which is awesome. I would say that the environment here is super supportive. I wouldn’t say that it’s fashion-specific, but as a whole—from local manufacturing, local businesses, local makers, to even local artists—it’s very supportive of all those people.

**Bond Street**

As a company that produces domestically, do you think producing in America is easier than people make it out to be?

**Hackwith Design House**

[LISA] It requires more money than some people are willing to spend, but I don’t think it’s difficult. I think it’s really just a matter of being willing to let your budget primarily be labor. The growth is a little lower, but it means your quality is really high, and you know how your labor is being treated. For us, that’s worth having a slightly lower gross profit on each piece.
Bond Street

Are there particular cities that are more embracing of the brand?

Hackwith Design House

[ERIN] New York and California are our two biggest markets. Minneapolis is our third largest market. We do really well in Canada and Australia. Chicago, too. We do well in urban places. It seems the cities that gravitate towards us are where people are really familiar with the idea of investing in clothing pieces that will last and that they can own for a really long time. Our customers are the type of people that understand what’s happening with fast fashion and don’t want to be a part of it, and that seems to be in urban areas a little more right now. Although I do think that’s shifting.
**Bond Street**

How does it differ dealing with wholesale accounts versus online sales?

**Hackwith Design House**

[ERIN] Online means you make more money because you get the retail price versus the wholesale price. They each have their own challenges and their own benefits. What we really like about doing both is that it provides diversity in our income stream. If we have a slow month online, we still have wholesale accounts, which means there is still cash coming in the door. I think that is one of the main benefits for us. It’s also really fun to work with other people who are also small businesses—they understand the challenges we all share.

**Bond Street**

The brand seems to embrace diversity in body types across the board. Is that a conscious decision the company’s made?

**Hackwith Design House**

[ERIN] Yes. We’re a company run by two women who employees all women. It’s just worked out that way, but it’s something that’s allowed us to get feedback from a variety of women. Our own seamstresses will say if something wouldn’t fit them because of their body type. We have a lot of experience being women ourselves, and knowing how hard it is to find things that work for shapes that aren’t the 5’10”, size zero. Lisa wanted to create pieces that made sense for women with all different types of bodies. We fit on a size eight, which makes it easy to grade up or grade down. I think it creates better fitting clothing.
Bond Street
Would you say that accessibility informs the design of the collection?

Hackwith Design House
Yes.

Bond Street
How does the limited edition product perform compared to the basics?
[ERIN] They’re about the same. Our best-selling line right now is our swim line, and I think that’s because it was designed with all different body types in mind. Women have responded really well to that. Our basics and our limited edition tend to sell pretty close to equally online.

**Bond Street**

What do you tend to look for in your hires?

**Hackwith Design House**

The main thing we want are people who care about sewing and who have been sewing for a long time. They’re kind, hard-working. I guess we look for what we value in each other. We’ve been lucky to find those people.

**Bond Street**

Is everything–from production, design, etc–done in your Minneapolis studio?

**Hackwith Design House**

Yeah, everything is in one space, which is really nice for us because we’re still such a small business. The two of us wear a lot of hats, so it’s really nice for us to come to the same space and be able to do all the different jobs that we do.

**Bond Street**

What have you used your financing from Bond Street to accomplish?

**Hackwith Design House**

It was for bridal. It took a lot of upfront investment and Bond Street was able to help us do that and do it fast, which was awesome.
**Bond Street**

How did you hear about Bond Street initially?

**Hackwith Design House**

They actually contacted us through Rita Mehta who does The American Edit blog. Rita thought if we ever needed a loan, Bond Street would be great people to go to and she was right.

**Bond Street**

Do you have any words of wisdom for someone else starting their own small business?

**Hackwith Design House**

Be willing to put in 80 to 90 hours a week when you first start. And pick something you’re really passionate about, so that when those weeks happen it’s still doing something you really care about. That way you can make it through it.
Book every entrepreneur should read:

**Outliers** by Malcolm Gladwell

Social media fashion inspiration of choice:

@happilygrey. We are really inspired by her color palette.

Must-have Hackwith piece for spring:

**Turner Pant**. We love how it is both casual and stylish and can easily be incorporated to any wardrobe.

5 favorite small businesses:

1. **The Foundry Home Goods**
2. **Forage Modern Workshop**
3. **Camellia Fiber Co.**
4. Red Wing Heritage
5. Askov Finlayson