

HIDDEN URBAN PROJECT

Barbara, Kimberley and Kariann are three sisters who have bucked the trend; at the tender ages of 26, 24 and 23 they have set up on their own with global domination in sight.

The Ojeogwu sisters hail from Didsbury although their studies have taken them to different parts of the nation. Barbara is studying Retail Management and Japanese at the University of Central Lancashire, Kariann graduated in 2005 with a degree in Marketing and Graphic Design and Kimberley recently completed an msc in Business Psychology at London Metropolitan University.

According to the girls commerce is 'in their blood' and they have ploughed their efforts into a variety of different schemes from a very young age. Now, they've moved on from washing cars and homemade tombolas as teens, to launch the Hidden Urban Project in Manchester.

The project is a vintage oasis in the über trendy Northern Quarter that Barbara describes as a 'boutique in a bar' It's not the first place you would think of housing such an initiative but the den-type existence they have at the rear of Dry Bar on Oldham Street is strangely fitting.

It began with Barbara's interest in Japanese culture. She started to import handbags made from recycled materials from Japan and needed a central outlet to sell them in. Before long, the project grew to selling embroidered T-shirts and Swedish fish – a delightful, chewy, fish-shaped sweet from America. These items are imported by their younger sister, Charlene, who is working in New Jersey at the moment.

However, the project also includes an eclectic mix of other traders selling wares such as handcrafted clothing, vintage clothing and jewellery, photography, embroidered and abstract art and kitsch paraphernalia among other items.

So what is it that drives these girls to dedicate all of their efforts

into this project?

"We enjoy the creativity, flexibility and independence of working for ourselves," says Barbara. "We're happy working the way that we do and being happy is important to us, so it's definitely a beneficial working style."

For Kimberley it's not the financial reward that is an enticement, but rather the whole planning and process of creating a business.

"Taking an idea from paper to reality is really exciting. When we were little our mum was always organising playschemes and trips for kids in the local community and she was forever making lists. I think the way she used to plan things has rubbed off on us."

The girls display a casual elegance that appears effortless but this is contrary to their focused approach to business.

"In the next 12 months we hope to have another six projects started at least," adds Barbara.

This is no pie in the sky ambition either as the Leeds outlet is on target to begin at the end of May and they are starting a 'Swap Missy' – a fortnightly swap shop for clothing at Sofa in Fallowfield from the 19 May.

Barbara describes her sisters as being very different to one another: "Kimberley and Kariann are quite thoughtful, whereas Charlene and I are very impulsive but we each give our own little bit to the project. For example, Kariann created the face of the project and designed the flyers."

Although they each bring their own area of expertise to the Hidden Urban Project they are all united in their vision for the future – it's definitely 'global'

www.myspace.com/hiddenurbanmarket
Hidden Urban Project takes place every Saturday at Ruby Lounge, High Street, Manchester. ➡