

CITY  
LITIGATOR*'I did a career U-turn'*

BEATRICE RIDLEY, 38, lives in London with her husband, Matt, and children Tabatha, three, and Hugo, 18 months. Once a successful corporate lawyer, she has rediscovered a childhood love of art

AFTER LAW SCHOOL, I FELT LUCKY TO GET A JOB with one of the world's largest law firms. I spent six years specialising in litigation, working 12-hour days in London, New York and Paris. In my early thirties, I moved to one of the big consulting firms to be an in-house lawyer, earning a high five-figure salary. It was a fantastic job but, mid-maternity leave with Tabatha, something in me changed.

Suddenly, I was aware of a whole world of possibilities. As a teenager, I used to spend hours painting. Now, I didn't have time, but I went out, bought some paint, and did one landscape painting. As soon as I did it, I knew I had to do something with it. It felt magical, the process of creativity.

I thought, 'Okay, I only have one painting and this is absurd, but I'll book a gallery and have an exhibition.' Somewhat terrified, I booked the gallery (it cost £1,000 for a week-long exhibition) and the pressure started. I needed to fill that gallery, so as soon as I had that goal, I did everything to make that happen. It was hard work. Whenever Tabatha slept, I'd paint and paint.

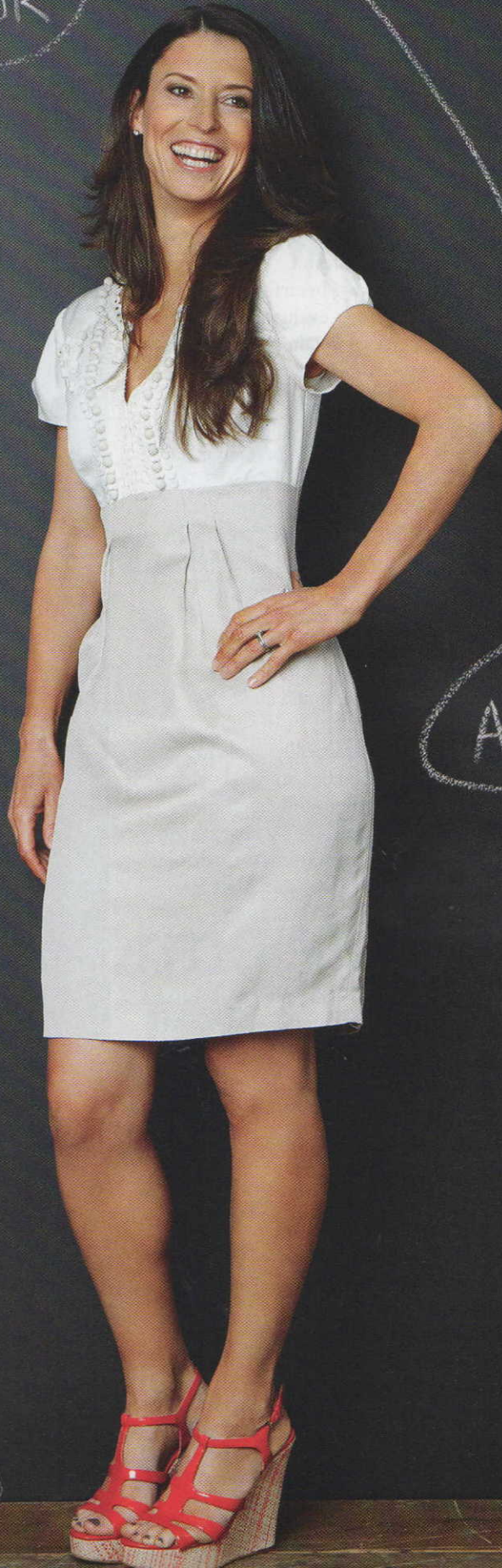
A few months later, I had 40 paintings. Initially, I thought of inviting a few close friends to the exhibition, and then I thought: 'Life's too short, I'm going to invite absolutely everyone I know.' I'm so glad I took that risk because I sold 80% off the wall and made £15,000.

I didn't want to go back to law, so I resigned, and proceeded to have three more exhibitions. By the time I fell pregnant again, I'd met a lot of talented, but shy, artists. That's when the idea of setting up my own gallery to represent other artists started up. It was the perfect balance between my creative side and my commercial training. I set up an online gallery, invited artists to feature on it and, this January, rented a gallery for a week for our inaugural exhibition. By the end of this year, we will have had six more.

I've got part-time childcare, so I work a little in the morning and when I can at night, dividing my time between my own paintings and the gallery. It's been a massive lifestyle change. I'm earning less than half what I once did, but I'm already in profit. And, more importantly, my life's in balance.

I think if you're determined and you put in the hard work, anyone can achieve what I have. It took me a long time to understand: if you're not afraid of failure, you've got a lot of opportunities open to you. >>

*The Pepper Gallery's next show, Serendipity, runs from June 11-16th, [thepeppergallery.com](http://thepeppergallery.com)*



ARTIST