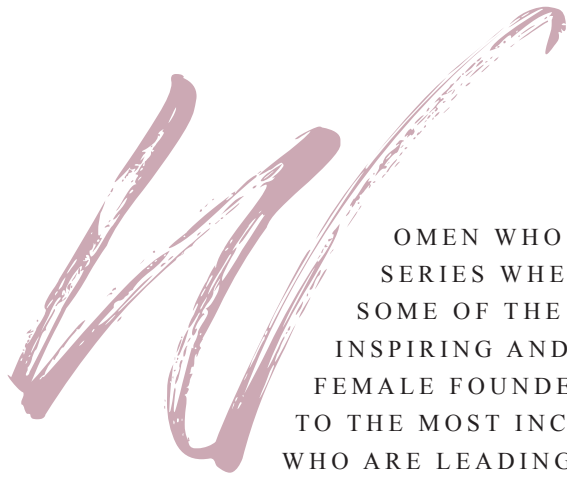


WOMEN WHO LAUNCH:

Marcy Holthus

MARCY HOLTHUS, FOUNDER OF PILOT HOTELS,
SHARES HER CAREER JOURNEY AND BUSINESS
SUCCESS STORY WITH INA YULO STUVE



WOMEN WHO LAUNCH IS A SERIES WHERE I INTERVIEW SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST INSPIRING AND INNOVATIVE FEMALE FOUNDERS. I'VE SPOKEN TO THE MOST INCREDIBLE WOMEN WHO ARE LEADING THE WAY IN THE FIELDS OF TRAVEL, FOOD, FASHION, DESIGN, AND MORE. THEY'VE GIVEN OUR READERS A BACKSTAGE PASS TO FIND OUT THE SECRETS TO RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS. FOR THIS EDITION, IT'S A PLEASURE TO INTRODUCE MARCY HOLTHUS, FOUNDER AND CEO OF PILOT HOTELS.

"There is no formula for a Pilot Hotel," says Holthus. "Everything about the guest experience is based on the individual history of the property in its unique location – it's the polar opposite of a big box luxury hotel where the interior of the Shanghai location is exactly the same as the brand's Chicago location." Holthus and her husband and co-founder, Tom, first got into the luxury hospitality business with the purchase of a 19th century schoolhouse in Utah, which eventually became the Washington School House Hotel.

After developing the property into an award-winning boutique hotel that reimagines the idea of a mountain escape, they set their eyes further afield and added a chateau in the Loire Valley to their portfolio. Originally a private home for French nobility, the Holthuses have celebrated the grandness of

Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé and invite guests to immerse in its unabashedly extravagant ways.

Tell me more about the career pivot you had when you moved from commercial banking to hospitality.

It wasn't a pivot as much as a serendipitous path. It's a long and boring story, but as I left the confines of banking and finance for the creative world of hospitality, I began investing in historically and architecturally significant properties, with a goal to deliver guests a unique, authentic experience filled with the unexpected.

If there was one thing you wish you knew before becoming an entrepreneur, what would it be?

It really is a 24/7 type of job. Even if I plan on setting things aside for a day or two, that never really happens. When I'm travelling for leisure, I find



myself seeking the hotel manager at whatever property I happen to be staying in and giving him or her a few ideas or suggestions – I can't help myself.

What are the distinct roles you and your husband play in running Pilot Hotels?

I'm a visionary and my husband is a nuts-and-bolts guy. As an attorney, he makes sure we comply with zoning ordinances, employment law and all the boring, legal stuff! He is a master of operations and has a knack for glancing at a monthly operating report and zeroing right in on an unexpected revenue or expense

item. I have a keen eye for design and a way of walking into any room in our hotels and knowing instantly if a piece of furniture was inadvertently shifted two inches or if an angle a chair is placed at is slightly off. I guess we both pay inordinate attention to details; just different details.

Is there a particular business skill you're currently trying to master?

Yes, letting go of certain elements of my daily work and entrusting responsibilities to my amazing team. I seem to have my hands on everything, even the minuscule tasks like selecting sunglasses for the team to wear while serving guests poolside. So, I am working on stepping away and allowing the experts at Pilot Hotels to execute my vision.

What's the one task you always insist on doing yourself?

I am always hands-on with our staff uniforms – and uniforms don't even describe it. We went in a trailblazing direction when dressing our team, producing a seasonal lookbook for our employees. Our lookbooks are

incredibly cool and professional, resulting in a team that looks super-chic. Some favourite elements from the Château look are the Stan Smith tennis shoes, Ray Ban sunglasses and vintage Louis Vuitton pochettes. At Washington School House, the team wears next-level denim sourced from Todd Snyder in New York.

And what is the one task you always outsource?

Something I completely hand off? The hiring. Managing Director Michael Gregory brings his genius here.

Authenticity is at the core of your brand's philosophy. How do you ensure this translates into the overall guest experience?

With Pilot, everything is uniquely curated. My quick story here is one I like to call 'The Great Pencil Debacle of 2018'. At Washington School House, guests are provided with pencils that accompany the cool notepad on the desk, to pay homage to its former life as a schoolhouse. The pencils are white with the school house logo in red, while the eraser

portion is red and the metal ferrule that holds the eraser to the end of the pencil is silver. Well, somehow, we received a batch of the pencils from the supplier with gold ferrules instead of silver. And that was the great debacle. We immediately had to place an emergency order with the correct colour of ferrules as we could never give our guests pencils with gold – only silver will do in Park City, a town that was founded by silver miners.

What's the one mistake you've made as a business owner that you wish you could take back?

Really, just taking on too much. There were some really long days and late nights leading up to the launch of Pilot's two hotels. I can't get those thousands of hours back, but I've learned I can lean on the highly skilled, super-creative and smart Pilot Hotels team, which is as committed as I am to our success. In case you can't tell, I am very grateful to them.

To explore the world of Pilot Hotels, go to www.pilothotels.com

