



**NAME**  
VALERI STRATTON BENNETT

**COMPANY**  
FARNE DESIGNS

**TITLE**  
FOUNDER

**WEBSITE**  
WWW.FARNEDESIGNS.CO.UK



# PROFILE VALERI STRATTON BENNETT

If you would like to learn more about Senior Enterprise visit the website [www.seniorenterprise.ie](http://www.seniorenterprise.ie)

Setting up a business allowed Valeri Stratton Bennett to fulfil her dreams and to demonstrate that age need not be a barrier. Valeri always had a creative flair and attracted her to studying History of Art and Textiles at Art College. After graduating top in her year, Valeri moved down to Devon and then to Cornwall where she became a teacher as well as helping her then husband on their farm. Spending many years working alongside her husband on the farm, Valeri's creative impulses were largely untapped. Although she ran a small dress making business alongside her farming duties, it remained a hobby- *"I feel really deprived when I'm not doing something creative. I absolutely loved dressmaking, but at that point I didn't have enough time to make it into a full time career."*

When Valeri's first husband retired from farming, the opportunity arose for Valeri to do something more creative. She began to work in adult education and was heavily involved in teaching City and Guilds classes, putting her embroidery, dressmaking, patch working and quilting skills to good use. After some years she separated from her husband and she had to re-think what she was going to do. She had a part-time job as a receptionist and was still teaching once a week but her desire to do something more creative returned.

It was only when she met her current husband Graeme that she decided to put more effort into her fabric business. *"My husband couldn't get a job down in Cornwall, and once he realised how much I loved creating things and playing around with fabrics he encouraged me to go for it!"* Valeri and Graeme decided to resurrect "Farne Designs", Valeri's old business.

Valeri turned to the Princes' Initiative for assistance get started on a more professional footing. *"The Prince's Initiative was brilliant in helping me set up my own business. I was given so much information. The*

*packs that were sent to me also gave me ideas and supported me in creating a business plan."*

In order to get the business off the ground, Valeri utilised her husband's connections at the local rugby club, where she ran weekly classes in patchwork and quilting. In addition, with Graeme's encouragement she exhibited at the Exeter Quilt show where the hand-dyed fabrics were met with a fantastic response. Valeri also created 'crazy patchwork packs' which have proved to be particularly popular - *"I realised I had all this fabric lying around which I had collected over the years and thought I could turn them into packs for people who want to make their own patchworks, but don't have the time to go out and buy all the materials themselves."*

Valeri has taught Graeme dyeing techniques so that he has the skills to be able to dye the fabrics himself. He is now the main dyer in the partnership while Valeri concentrates on teaching and dyeing silk ribbon. The couple also continue to attend quilt exhibitions to drive sales, with plan to attend eight during 2012.

In the future, Valeri hopes to grow the online section of Farne Designs - *"I am pleased with the amount of growth, however, I would like to get more online orders, so that is where my focus lies at the moment."* To any other over 50s who are considering starting up their own business Valeri recommends creating a business plan. *"Business plans are so important, they help you see where the gaps are in your business and where you might be being too optimistic - you can get help with business plans from The Prince's Initiative, a partner in Senior Enterprise. I'd also recommend being self-employed because it's great being your own boss! I'm in control of what I'm doing, which is a fantastic feeling."*

To find out more information about Farne Designs, visit [www.farnedesigns.co.uk](http://www.farnedesigns.co.uk) or email [valeri.b@farnedesigns.co.uk](mailto:valeri.b@farnedesigns.co.uk)

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