

# Letting in the light

It started as a form of stress relief, but rolling pure beeswax candles brought light back into Cate Burton's life and sparked a new business venture, writes Eva-Maria Bobbert.

**NINE YEARS AGO**, having successfully climbed the corporate ladder, Cate Burton knew she was burning the candle at both ends. She had been devoting long hours to the demanding role of business banking manager at Westpac. Then, on a sunny Sunday morning at the weekly family brunch in Bondi, Sydney, she realised something was very wrong.

"I felt funny, so I went to the bathroom," says the usually energetic 34-year-old, who was Westpac's youngest-ever female business banking manager at the time. "I was standing at the basin and suddenly began thinking: 'I'm going to die.' I couldn't breathe properly, I was shaking all over, I had chest pains and felt nauseous. I really thought it was all over for me."

Cate's worried parents drove her home, collected some of her belongings and took her to stay with them for the long weekend. Cate didn't know it at the time, but she had just experienced the first of many panic attacks.

## A glimmer of hope

Within a week of returning to work, Cate's episodes had become so regular and intense she was unable to undertake many everyday tasks, such as driving. "It was ridiculous," she recalls. "My parents had to drive me to my client appointments, then they would wait in the car for me while I was doing multi-million dollar business deals."

A psychiatrist prescribed Valium, but Cate didn't like the effects of the drug. "It really dumbs you down, and even though it was better to feel like a zombie than to feel in a constant state of panic,

I didn't want to live like that," she says.

Managing her panic attacks seemed like an overwhelming problem at the time, but it turned out to be a positive turning point in Cate's life. Her psychiatrist suggested instead of focusing all her energy on her work, she take up new hobbies. Cate tried several, including oil painting, ceramic painting, weekly meditation sessions with a Buddhist monk, and beeswax candle rolling. "Candle rolling is a great way to switch off," says Cate. "I obviously needed plenty of therapy because I was making lots of beeswax candles. Initially I gave them to friends; then, because I had such a good response, I started selling them at markets."

## The benefits of beeswax

Although beeswax candles have long been popular in alternative communities as a natural alternative to paraffin candles (a petrochemical by-product), Cate's modern designs have proved to be popular with a broad range of consumers. "Beeswax candles have always been a bit hippie-ish; in fact, some of them are quite feral," she laughs. "I like the fact I can make something that's organic, but also has a design that works beautifully in a minimalist house. Once people try burning beeswax they're hooked – even if they're not remotely interested in its purifying properties – because it doesn't smoke or drip all over the coffee table."

## Recognising a panic attack

Research shows 15 per cent of people will suffer from a panic attack at some point in their lives. They are more common in women than men, and most prevalent among women in their twenties. Signs of a panic attack can feel similar to those of a heart attack – shortness of breath, chest pain, tingling in the limbs, increased heart rate and nausea. To distinguish between the two, hold your breath for at least 10 seconds. If you're having a panic attack, the symptoms should begin to subside immediately because you've slowed down the amount of air entering your system, which will ease hyperventilation. If you're having a heart attack, holding your breath won't ease the symptoms. Panic attacks can be triggered by allergies as well as psychological stress. In addition to seeking medical assistance, diet changes, yoga, regular cardiovascular exercise and learning specific breathing techniques can help to control the frequency and impact of panic attacks.



# Notebook: Your Community

## A lighter side of life

Meet Cate Burton, who found relief from panic attacks, and a new passion, in the relaxing art of candle-making. Also this month, discover how one woman is putting an end to bullying through acts of kindness, and spend an exciting day with race car driver, Leanne Tander. Plus, *Notebook* catches up with some of the wonderful characters who have shared their stories with us.







1. The Renaissance design features the latin saying, *Aliis volat propriis* ('I fly with my own wings'). 2. A wick box for dinner sticks. 3. Cate hand-places wicks into nine-hour tea light candles. 4. The Casablanca design, \$34.95, has a 50-hour burn time. 5. Cate pours tea light candles from an enamel camping teapot.

Ever the entrepreneur, Cate saw an opportunity to use beeswax candle-making as an educational tool in schools to increase awareness of depression and anxiety. "I thought it would be great to have a signature day, like Pink Ribbon Day or Red Nose Day, dedicated to increasing awareness of depression and anxiety," says Cate. She created a company name (Queen B), as well as a logo, stationery and a website, and approached a national depression support organisation, pitching her idea of an awareness program that would involve schoolchildren making beeswax candles on a proposed 'Light Up A Life' day. However, the depression support organisation rejected her proposal due to lack of funding.

### Taking the plunge

"I'd never for a nanosecond entertained the possibility they might say no," Cate laughs. "But I'd spent \$15,000 and had a stunning product, so then I thought: 'Well, I'd better run it as a business'." Cate began spending time after work and on weekends marketing her product to retailers and creating candles with various handpainted designs on her dining room table. Soon she had secured a large order from Lane Crawford, an upmarket department store in Hong Kong.

It was then she realised she would have to give up her permanent job to make a success of Queen B. Although her friends were supportive, her parents were concerned about Cate abandoning the corporate job she had fought so hard to secure. "I can understand why," muses Cate. "I had a Commerce/Law degree and was earning good money. They



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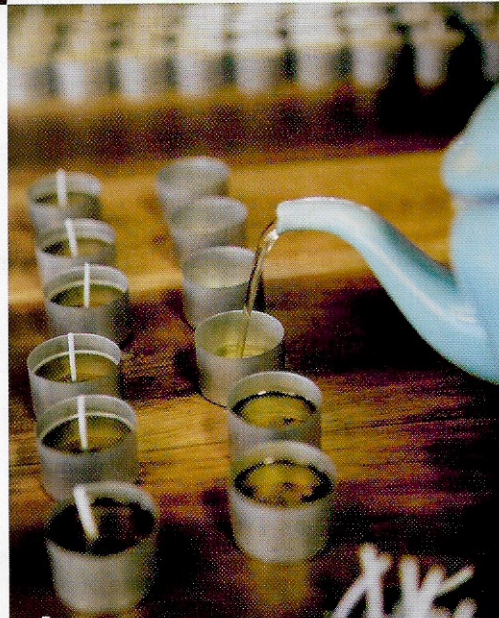
thought it was daft that I was leaving to make beeswax candles." But after she made the decision to move the business to its serene Manly location a year ago, her parents have been behind her all the way and regularly lend a helping hand.

Based at the former School of Artillery on North Head, Cate's 'office' is appropriately tranquil; she has swapped city traffic and concrete high-rises for a lush green outlook, a fresh sea breeze and the sweet sound of birdsong.

Melting down large slabs of honey-scented beeswax in a rustic, exposed-brick building with open rafters, Cate couldn't be further from the corporate world she left behind. But despite the tranquil surrounds she's still bursting with energy and enthusiasm for her rapidly



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expanding business, and clearly relishes the opportunity to be queen of her own domain. "I've always known I would be self-employed one day, so this just feels right. I haven't achieved all my goals yet, but I know I'm on the right path."

### The road to success

Cate may have been set on the 'right path' by circumstances beyond her control, but her gut instinct and a whole lot of gumption have kept her on the road to success. For example, her stunning studio, which now houses row upon row of beautiful honey-scented candles, was in a state of disrepair when Cate found it. Unused for over a decade, the quaint sandstone building was shrouded in thick cobwebs, had holes in the floor and was overrun by rats and possums. Cate recalls it took a lot of imagination – and elbow grease – to bring it to its present state. But cleaning up and rehousing nocturnal residents was just the beginning – the bigger tests were yet to come.

While Cate already had her hands full individually rolling her beeswax candles and handpainting them with custom-made paints, her enterprise became more complicated when she decided to expand her product range. To create 'dinner sticks' (long, thin beeswax candles, which are poured into moulds rather than hand-rolled), Cate had to buy an expensive 17-year-old German machine and learn a whole new candle-making process. Meanwhile, finding wicks for her tea light candles proved to be a technical minefield – one she was only too familiar with.

Because most candles are made from paraffin wax, Cate had already had trouble finding wicks for beeswax. Trial and error had led to previous success, but because tea light candles are so small and the wick has to provide just the right-size flame (big enough to heat an oil burner, but not so big that it sets the wax on fire), Cate knew it was going to be a challenge. "Had I known what a heartache it was going to be, I might have reconsidered," she laughs.

Over five months, the determined

small-business owner tested 120 wicks in batches of 10. Each wick was labelled and photographed every hour to determine how well it burned – some would start out well then die out, while others would light up like flamethrowers and burn through the candle at three times the required speed. After taking hundreds of photographs and sending the results back to the wick-maker's lab, Cate's persistence paid off and she eventually found a winner. "Even if they're only paying \$2 for a candle, the customer wants it to be perfect," she says, "so I have to get it just right. My focus is on creating a product that will have a positive impact on people's lives."

### The royal treatment

Cate's continual quest for excellence is paying off in several ways – she was nominated for a Telstra Small Business Award and her candles were selected to be used in the lanterns for a new Australian-made carriage for Queen Elizabeth. There are also more personal rewards for Cate – her panic attacks have become rare since she started pouring her creativity into the company.

"Looking back, I can see I was suffering from work stress and information overload," she says. "That's why I love doing something that's all about 'switching off'. Candles are always used on special occasions – in moments when you're nurturing who you are, whether it be in the bath, at a wedding or over a romantic dinner. I love that."

Few of us can foresee what fate has in store, but looking back over the ups and downs of the last decade, Cate can't help but express her bemusement at how Queen B came to be. "I used to be called 'B' at school, because of my surname. Isn't it ironic I wound up making beeswax candles for a living? I do wonder if there's some serendipity to that." ■

*Queen B holds beeswax candle-making classes on one Sunday each month at North Head, Manly. The cost is \$80 for two hours, including \$50 worth of candles. For details, or to make a booking, visit [www.queenb.com.au](http://www.queenb.com.au).*

## Did you know?

- Candles were originally made from tallow (animal fat) in early Roman times, then beeswax became popular in the Middle Ages. In the 18th century, whale fat was used, until paraffin, a by-product of petroleum, was discovered in the 1800s. Most candles today are still made of paraffin, which has been bleached, coloured and scented.
- To produce half a kilogram of beeswax, a worker bee eats about 5 kilograms of honey, flies 240,000 kilometres and visits 33 million flower blossoms.
- Beeswax candles are said to help purify the air. Dust, pollens, germs and bacteria float in the air because they are charged by positive ions. Negative ions emitted from the burning beeswax candles bind with the positive ones, creating atoms. Because these atoms are heavier than air, they fall to the ground (and you don't breathe them in).
- When buying candles, make sure the label says it's 100 per cent beeswax. Beeswax is expensive, so if you're paying a higher price you should be getting a pure product.

## Candle burning tips

- Never place a candle in a draughty area – it will burn too quickly and be more prone to smoking.
- To stop it burning too fast, refrigerate the candle one hour prior to burning.
- If the candle is smoking, trim the wick (ideally it should be between 5-7 millimetres).
- Never straighten the wick when the candle is cold – you should use a non-flammable implement to adjust the wick while the candle is burning.
- Never blow out a candle – use a non-flammable item to dip the wick into the pool of liquid wax.