



“Being shafted by all these other people, you’re always out there swimming with sharks, so that’s where the brand name came from”

Taking

It’s a stretch of the imagination to go from selling motorbikes to designing shoes but Townsville-raised Alan Smith and his partner have made Swimming With Sharks a world-wide brand.

Story by SHARI TAGLIABUE



AS someone who regularly trawls through the thousands of ladies shoes that can be found throughout Australia, I was staggered to find that my beloved, trusty, go-anywhere pair of Swimming With Sharks Mary-Jane flats were the brainchild of a local bloke, Alan Smith.

Not that there was any inkling early on that shoes would be his vocation – although he was born in Home Hill, Alan grew up in Townsville from the age of four, so we can probably claim him as a local without too much argument.

Alan raced bikes and worked at Rising Sun Honda in Townsville from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties, but didn’t see a future there, so he got a job as a sales rep for a footwear company in north Queensland.

“I met my partner Janine Granger, a Melbourne girl, who’s now my business partner at a shoe conference. We got together, you know how it goes!” he laughed.

Alan moved to Melbourne in 2000, and he and Janine developed and designed footwear for shoe companies.

“We’d built up a lot of other people’s brands for them, and every time that we built it up into a really nice business for them, they’d say ‘thanks very much we’ll take it from here,’ as they do!

“We did that for three different brands that belonged to other people, but it was a good catalyst then for us to develop our own labels and our own product,” Alan said.

“We said, ‘well, we could keep doing this or we can do our own thing, we control our own destiny from there. That’s what we’ve done, and we haven’t looked back.’”

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