

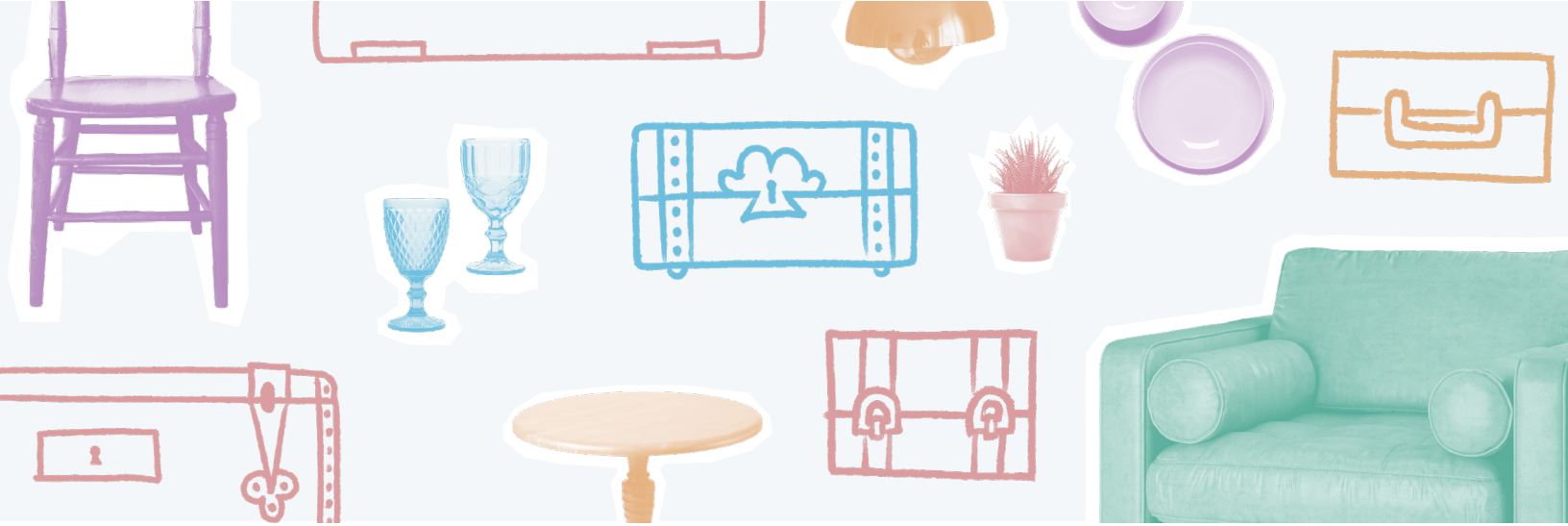
# *The* **TRUNK SHOW**

*With* RW ELEPHANT

SEASON 2 EPISODE 7



**FINDING AND FILLING A GAP IN THE  
MARKET WITH FLOCK EVENTS**



Alice Sip joined the event rentals industry in North America. Then she took her expertise back to her homeland of New Zealand to build Flock Events. Today, it's one of the top rental, styling, and event planning businesses in that country.



### **What's in this episode:**

How Alice discovered a gap in the market... and filled it effectively

What it's like to manage multiple locations under one business

How Flock Events schedules and pays staff in a mutually beneficial way (and avoids seasonal hires)

How Alice is building a brick-and-mortar shop which ties into her larger business



## QUOTES

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- Alice Sip

"I've learnt to be very very specific about every single detail [...] **I think the more specific you can be, the better.**"

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**"I always look at demand before I just buy.** I would never look at a piece of furniture and say 'Oh, that's nice. We'll add that to the collection.' We'll always say, 'Well who have we got that that's going out for?'"

- Alice Sip

"I also **don't believe in money over relationship** in terms of what we take on in our business."

- Alice Sip

**"I've realized the importance of delegating and realized the importance of my time** and that paying someone an hourly wage to do something actually is worth it because it frees up me."

- Alice Sip

## EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

- Allison Howell** Hey, there. I'm Alison Howell, and you're listening to our final episode in Season Two of The Trunk Show, where I talk with the masterminds behind leading event rental companies about their rental adventures. The show is brought to you by R.W. Elephant, mighty inventory management software, designed to help you conquer the chaos in your event rental business and reclaim your creativity--because the world needs more of the beautiful events and environments you create. In this episode, I sit down with Alice Sip to learn how her discovery of a gap in an overseas market grew into a multi-location furniture-hire and styling business.
- Alice Sip** I am Alice, and I own a company called Flock Events alongside my husband, and we specialize in furniture hire, but we also offer services is styling and planning. And we used to offer florals but have dropped that service. And so now we just focus on premium lounge sort of tables and chairs and all that kind of furniture-hire.
- Allison Howell** Wonderful. And in case we can't tell, where are you from?
- Alice Sip** [Laughs] I'm from New Zealand, so I'm born and raised and have spent some time in other countries, but back in New Zealand with my American husband.
- Allison Howell** In what ways is the New Zealand market different?
- Alice Sip** A lot of outdoor weddings--we call them marquees, but tent weddings. A lot of tent weddings.
- Allison Howell** Right.
- Alice Sip** So actually a majority of our furniture goes on grass. I think everything's just a little bit more casual.
- Allison Howell** Were you planning to start a hire business?
- Alice Sip** No, I'm not sure who does. Basically, I met my husband, he was a farmer in Minnesota, and yeah, I had done events--I'd been in the event industry in the past in Toronto, sort of did it on the side, and had started a company in Fargo, basically as something to do alongside farming, because obviously you have



some time off. We were farming but wanted to have a change of lifestyle and Chris had never been to New Zealand. But we actually came out here for three months, just on holiday, and he really, really loved it. And never in my life did I think I would move back to New Zealand because I married a farmer and expected to stay on the land and live in Minnesota.

**Allison Howell** And so when you moved, that's when Flock was born?

**Alice Sip** Yeah, Flock started actually, after this trip. I had another company that I mentioned earlier, which was Christopher and Co. Which did florals and styling--no furniture--it was based in the states. Chris is actually very good at florals, which is quite funny but, I guess, with his big farmer hands can do these massive installations.

**Allison Howell**      Sure.

**Alice Sip** Yeah, so I started that and he could help me. But when we came to New Zealand in those three months, I thought that I would do a styled shoot because it just gave something to our portfolio. [I had] very, very limited furniture. So I had one option of chair, one table. I asked to find a blue Chesterfield Sofa and everyone said, "No, it's not possible." And I thought, well, let's get one in from two hours away, and, "No, it's still not possible." So Chris actually had the idea. He said, "Why could we not get that? Does that not seem strange?" And we sort of looked around and there was no one doing luxury furniture rentals of lounge furniture. A few people doing tables and chairs—I'm talking actually nationwide.

**Allison Howell**      What year is this?

**Alice Sip** This is 2018. The start of 2018.

**Allison Howell** OK.

**Alice Sip** Yes. So, basically, we were looking at some photos and, sure enough, there were no photos, no bar leaners or cocktail tables or anything. So Chris said, "Why don't we try and do it?" So we did.

**Allison Howell** Wow, wow. Well, what an adventure! That's really exciting. Was it scary or were you confident?



**Alice Sip** Definitely not confident. I guess whenever there's a gap in the market, you sort of say, is the gap there because there's no demand? Or is the gap there because the demand is not felt? And I guess, fortunately for us, it was the latter. We ordered furniture back home in the States. When we got back after the three months is when we really sort of looked into suppliers and sourcing furniture. We actually sort of launched it from the States pretending we were in New Zealand.

**Allison Howell** Wow. There's a little bit of "fake it til you make it" in every entrepreneurial story.

**Alice Sip** [Laughs] Yeah, yeah, there was. And yeah, so then we moved back to New Zealand three months later and welcomed in containers of furniture and went from there, really.

**Allison Howell** OK, so tell me what was in those first containers? What was in that shipment that you were planning? What were those pieces that you were really expecting to rent well? Or, sorry, to "hire" well. We should do, like, a little vocabulary lesson right now! So earlier you said, you said "bar leaners."

**Alice Sip**                      Okay. Yeah.

**Allison Howell** In the states, we often call those "cocktail tables."

**Alice Sip** Yes. Yeah.

**Allison Howell** Let's see, you mentioned "marquee" and "tent." I assume you say "hire" rather than "rentals."

**Alice Sip** Yes. Yeah. So, like I said, because I guess I spent most of my adulthood in North America—I left New Zealand when I was twenty two—I didn't understand a lot of the New Zealand trends and didn't actually research them well enough, to be quite honest. So I looked at weddings in the states and purchased based on that. So I bought a lot of Louis Chairs, which are the upholstered dining chairs, and I bought Farmhouse Tables and lots of bright-colored velvets and antique designs.

**Allison Howell** So was that disappointing or did that sort of build your resolve? How did you react when you realized that your collection wasn't quite right?



**Alice Sip** I acted very quickly and I found a supplier in Indonesia and ordered a container of cane and rattan furniture, basically ASAP. And as soon as it landed, it was hired the next day and, to this day, has become our bread and butter, actually.

**Allison Howell** Sure. So are you still mostly doing weddings or are there other kinds of events that you're furnishing as well?

**Alice Sip** So we started--a little history--we started Flock in Hawke's Bay, which is a region in New Zealand. A year later, we launched another location, in Auckland, which is the largest city in New Zealand of 1.5 million.

**Allison Howell** Right.

**Alice Sip** Hawke's Bay is very lifestyle orientated. Very little corporate and corporate money and corporate events. So, we actually sought out another location so we could have corporate events. Auckland, probably now is 75% corporate and 25% weddings. And Hawke's Bay is 90% weddings.

**Allison Howell** Is Hawke's Bay, more seasonal, where Auckland is more year round?

**Alice Sip** Yes, so we could have three months off in Hawke's Bay very easily. And with that we do the maintenance of all furniture and maintenance of both locations and building and all of those things.

**Allison Howell** But you keep your stock separate, correct? You don't you don't trade back and forth for an event this weekend. And then it's, you know, it's in Hawke's Bay one weekend and then in Auckland, the next, correct?

**Alice Sip** Yeah. So Auckland is a five and a half hour drive on a good day. So we have two warehouses and two different teams, and I have admin staff that do Auckland Weddings and Auckland Corporate and the same with Hawke's Bay. So we do keep it separate, but definitely do run a truck back and forth if we have big weddings or we were going to lose a significant order because we didn't have the stock, we would just truck it up to Auckland.

**Allison Howell** So opening a second location a year-in that's, I would say, atypical in this industry. What was the catalyst for that? Was it just wanting to have more events? Help me understand how you made that decision.



**Alice Sip** Yeah, I guess we just did a lot of research as to what was going on in Auckland. Often we were sent emails by people in Auckland that said, you know, would you come here? So I guess because we had these queries, I thought, well, maybe there's demand or maybe there's a gap in the market there. It was a massive push. There's no denying it. I actually had my first baby, Harriet. I should say she's my only baby--Harriet--and Chris left four hours after she was born because Auckland was launching and we had our first event. So it was a really full-on time and it was difficult. But we just emailed a lot of people to say that we were there. Because we had our name known, we went into an area with people knowing who we were. So, I think they were excited, like, Oh! Flock's come to town and, you know, they could hire inventory. I think because we were established, actually, it helped us a lot.

**Allison Howell** So you became the go-to for the kind of furniture that you're offering and the kind of decor that you would provide.

**Alice Sip** Yeah, I mean, we changed what we offered because we could see what we were good at and we stuck to it, essentially. So we had florals in the mix as well, and we were trying to do a lot of planning and we actually stripped that away, to focus on furniture.

**Allison Howell** Sure. Did you do that because it was the most profitable or it was getting the most inquiries? How did you make that decision?

**Alice Sip** Most profitable. Definitely. The cost of the time and effort into furniture versus the time and effort into florals with different. We could just see the potential, I think, in furniture. I guess in non-perishable products as well. It was just safe to push for a while. We've actually still maintained that we don't do florals, however, we've added back into the services, planning and styling, and that is now a really big part of our offering.

**Allison Howell** Yeah. So as you made those decisions, did you buy different pieces for Auckland than you had in Hawke's Bay and vice versa? Or do you sort of have mirror collections in both locations?

**Alice Sip** We have sort of a base. I mentioned the Indonesian furniture, so we have the same collection of Indonesian furniture in both locations, which gives us the ability. If we had a really large corporate event or a festival, for example, we





could put out a lot of lounging furniture because we would just take it from one location. In Auckland, because of the corporate market, we have a lot more velvets. We have a lot of sort of jewel-toned furniture and I guess more modern and sleek things than we do in Hawke's Bay. And I guess, in that same kind of idea, Hawke's Bay, like, I said it being wine country, we have a lot more farmhouse or rustic-ish, you know, leather Chesterfield options, for Hawke's Bay that fit the venues that we service.

**Allison Howell** Take me back a little bit back to those importing days, and I'm sure I know you're continuing to import. How did you get those initial suppliers and what do you look for now when you're looking for new things?

**Alice Sip** So we import everything, really. I don't buy anything local. Mainly based on cost. We can have things paid for in two hires, generally. So, at the start, I had no idea what I was doing and no idea who I was writing to. Actually, we sent a lot of money--about \$50,000 USD--to China, and it bounced. Chris went into a full-fledged panic. I had talked to someone on WhatsApp and we sent it, and something was just slightly wrong and it went. But, yeah, I guess I found my suppliers just online and Instagram and people sometimes cold email you and I actually look at what they've got to offer.

**Allison Howell** But someone can send you a picture and what they actually send you in the container isn't always the same.

**Alice Sip** Correct. And that is just, I guess, I've learned to be very, very specific about every single detail. And I still have things turn up. I think that the more specific you can be, the better. You know, what is the wood color? Can I please see samples of that wood color? I have so many fabric samples, so I at least know what the fabric is going to be.

**Allison Howell** Sure. Sure. Tell me a little bit more about how you make those decisions as you're evolving your collection. If you needed to buy some new pieces tomorrow, where would you start?

**Alice Sip** I basically look at the demand, first of all, and see what of our collection is going out a lot. Indonesian, for example, we've always done teak and white. So it's always been wooden white or rattan and white. And, recently, I've just seen this massive trend of everyone doing white on white. So I thought, "Well, why don't we do white wood and white cane and see if we can do some really fresh

furniture?" So, yeah, I always look at demand before I just buy. Like, I would never look at a piece of furniture and go, "Oh, that's nice. I'll add it to the collection." I will always say, "Well, who have we got that this is going out for?" I used to buy single things. I used to buy a single sofa, two chairs, everything was very, very individual. Now I want at least two of those sofas, maybe four. And if I'm putting it into Auckland as well, then we look at getting eight. But yeah, I've just sort of changed a bit and made sure it's more cohesive, I think.

**Allison Howell** And so when you think about that collection, do you ever feel like your new purchases are kind of cannibalizing on your existing collection? Like if you buy the white on white, do you ever fear that, now, people won't rent the white on teak?

**Alice Sip** No. Yeah, I guess not in that sphere, because it's just so popular. It's when we buy something that's a little bit strange in color and style that, then, it naturally gets put to the back and we sort of on-sell it if it hasn't gone out that season, then it's going, really.

**Allison Howell** So is that the rule? If it doesn't go out in one season, it gets the boot?

**Alice Sip** Yeah, I'm sort of a little bit cutthroat with the inventory.

**Allison Howell** Wow. I often talk about things paying its own rent. You know, if it's in your warehouse and it's sitting there on the shelf, it better be making you money or it's got to get evicted so somebody else can come in and make you some more money.

**Alice Sip** Yes, and we've done things that have removable covers and try and be a little bit more wise in what we buy, that we know it has longevity to it. But, you know, a lot of those original pieces we are still using and the second buy, so 2019--and those containers that came, definitely still are in our collection and will stay in our collection, I guess, because we just purchased correctly.

**Allison Howell** So tell me a little bit more about managing a remote location. You mentioned that you have a staff in Auckland. How do you make sure everyone's all still authentically Flock? What is it that you do to keep everyone on the same page?



- Alice Sip** I'm very fortunate to have the manager that we do. So he actually started in Hawke's Bay and he's been there since day one. He went up and ran it, so we were fortunate there, but with the original manager we just really worked alongside her as much as we could and helped her understand that a big part of what we do is service and that sets us apart.
- Allison Howell** So, as you are managing kind of both locations in Hawke's Bay and trying to keep things going in Auckland, do you ever feel like they're competing for your time or attention? Or do you feel like you've been able to delegate parts of it so that you don't have to sort of hold it all yourself?
- Alice Sip** Yeah. Originally, I was sitting at a computer for 12 hours a day and I had a newborn and I was sort of fielding her like, "Hey, you know, go do this. I'm trying to work" and very, very quickly realized that was not sustainable, and actually not healthy for either one of us. So went about employing another admin girl to the team, and my mother actually applied for the job.
- Allison Howell** [Laughs]
- Alice Sip** So she said, all you know, "Could I apply for the job?" I sort of laughed. But yeah, she was serious. So she came on board actually first of any of our admin staff, she was involved and she started at 25 hours and she now does 40. But I guess I'm unique and also very lucky in that because she obviously doesn't have a job description, she can pick up my child if needed but is also really good at the corporate and admin side. So I was able to delegate Auckland to her and I did Hawke's Bay. I'm actually quite removed from the day to day admin. I do a bit of styling, but I since have a few girls who do different tasks. For example, one does all of the Hawke's Bay hire. One does Hawke's Bay styling. One does Auckland hire, one does Auckland styling, you know, so they've actually got their own domains now that they take charge of. And I just oversee what's going on, really.
- Allison Howell** Wow. Well, it seems like that's a big piece to the puzzle, having family you can trust involved in your business because it seems like they get what you're really trying to accomplish.
- Alice Sip** Yeah, it's been interesting, the staff aspect of the company, because we've only ever hired one person off Seek, which is kind of like our Craigslist or a job forum. Everyone else I've known or I've head-hunted. So I've wanted them to work for us, and so I've asked them to work for us or I've known them, or I think



they possess good qualities. Or, I've had a coffee with them and thought, they've got a good mind and do you want a job? [Laughs] It's been an interesting way to hire, but it's really, really worked out for us. We have a very loyal staff and because we all know each other and when we go into the business together, we've always set the parameters of business-first relationship and we've been able to separate them and understand that it's been good to just set those that foundation from the start.

**Allison Howell** That seems pretty unique. I think there's a lot of crossover in a lot of other, you know, businesses where you hire people you know and then maybe it doesn't work out the way you expected and you're having to give feedback and it feels personal. Yeah. Have you had any of those sticky situations or you feel like you've been able to avoid that somehow?

**Alice Sip** Yeah, we have had to have hard discussions, definitely. But I think, you know, before anyone has come on board, we've always just discussed with them and said, obviously, the situation of relationship and business relationship and how it works.

**Allison Howell** Well, you mentioned that as you sort of think of people or you or you get to know them, you latch on to qualities that they have that would be really beneficial in your business. If you were to name your top three qualities that you're looking for or that spark that idea, "Oh, maybe I should hire them!" What are those top three?

**Alice Sip** Initiative, I think, is a big one. Loyalty and, I'm not sure how to word this, but I guess someone who is not necessarily blunt, but they're not afraid to express how they're feeling. Because I think that is the key when you are hiring people you know, is that you have to have open lines of communication. And if you, for a second, thought that you couldn't and you couldn't say, you know, actually this was done wrong...

**Allison Howell** And we're back with Alice Sip of Flock Events. We're about to dig into a hot topic of late staffing shortages amidst the pandemic. Enjoy!

**Alice Sip** I know there's a massive staff shortage in the world right now, but in New Zealand we operate off travelers. So tourists come here for a year, and they work very hard, actually--a lot of them work 60 hours--which is perfect for events. And actually, I think that's good for any event company anywhere in the world, you know, to link into backpackers who want to work for you for a short

length of time... and want to work really hard and you know, all the hours they can. So the issue right now is with closed borders, we don't have that task force. So had we, you know, in a year's time, ideally the borders are open and it will be perfect because you can have, you know, the staff to do it and everything like that.

**Allison Howell** Yeah. Well, that brings up an interesting point. I know a lot of hire businesses struggle because either their market is very seasonal, so they're constantly hiring and then letting go their staff at the end of the season. So how do you get new staff up and running quickly enough so that they can be useful to you before they leave again?

**Alice Sip** Yeah. You know, for the first year and a half—two years, we operated on that model, and we changed a little bit, actually. So we now try and keep all of our staff year round, which is difficult. I don't deny that it's difficult. But we've done it so that we can have consistency, and so that come wedding season everybody's into it. And it's just you riding the bike. We're back on the bike, and they're going. And Auckland is easier because it has year round work. But in Hawke's Bay, we just made the commitment to do it.

**Allison Howell**      So what do they do during that time?

**Alice Sip** They build, or they will maintain everything. So they will sand all of our bar leanners, or they will do the maintenance. Or, you know, massive cleaning of everything. There's things that we've explored now, obviously in COVID, but we'll continue just things like to... this morning the boys are going and moving furniture for an estate sale. So, you know, there's been ways that we can add and put money in the door in winter... if you can find ways to to monetize the slow season and other areas, or if you can add value to what you're doing in summer. So for example, if the trucks going out, how can I add more money to that truck? You know, then it pays pays for itself over those three months.

**Allison Howell** Right. Well, tell me what you do to add more money to that truck. Give me give me an example of how you make that happen.

**Alice Sip** I guess a lot of things, as well as the smaller things that you can add. There's things like sign holders and arches and, you know, just things that like signing tables, and all of those things... all of those little things that people might DIY it or go somewhere else that you can add to it. We, you know, obviously we have



styling and planning. I think those are, I mean, they are very specialist fields. I'm not going to take away from the skill that's involved in them. But, you know, we charge a fee that our staff could actually go in and set up everything for a bride who didn't have a stylist or a planner. We charge a fee that our staff who are on site already can set up anything else for that client that they need to set up or done.

**Allison Howell** So if they need the table set, or if they need favors put out, or if they need the - whatever other things - or the florist needs additional hands onsite?

**Alice Sip** Yeah. Then we add those services to the truck that sort of going to that event, and maybe they have to stay an extra hour. But we charge a cost that's worth a lot more than the hour. And we've added value to that truck going out.

**Allison Howell** Right. Well, that's really clever. Tell me a little bit more about the process that you use for that staff that's not super busy in the wintertime. Are you paying hourly for them all year round or are they salaried? How do you sort of make that work cashflow-wise for yourself?

**Alice Sip** We use a banked hour system. So in summer often they work over 40 hours, but we pay them for 40. And we always pay them for 40. And then anything over 40 goes into time banked. And because--and then we're actually not paying at the full, you know, staffing costs in summer. And so we're making maximum profit in summer because we don't have those staffing costs, which means we've got extra cashflow in winter. And what they'll do is they'll use their bank dollars. So for example, if they do 20 hours in a week, then they might take 10 from their banked hours or 20 if they're on a 40 hour contract. And some of our staff are on 30 hour contracts, which helps us a little bit.

**Allison Howell** Yeah. And it sounds like a win-win because then your staff gets paid year-round.

**Alice Sip** Yeah, and they get paid 40 hours when they work 20, you know. So, and winter it does work out for them as well because they're getting a consistent paycheck, and they're not having, you know, they in theory get a bit of a break.

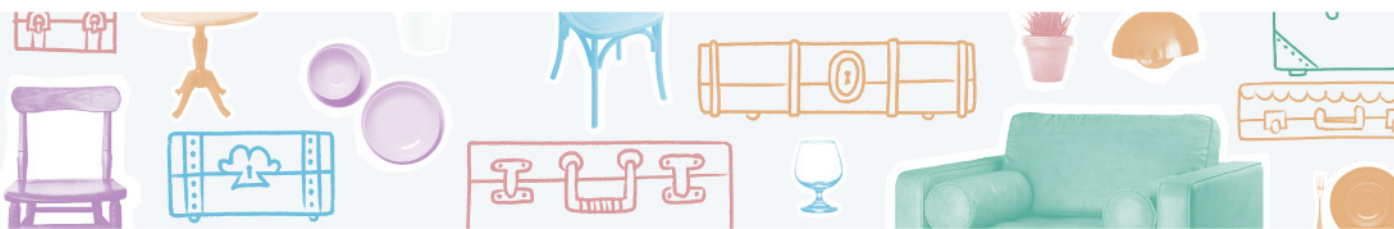
**Allison Howell** It seems to me like if you wait too long to hire, you really risk the possibility of burnout. Do you feel like hiring staff has been what's kept you from burnout?



- Alice Sip** Yeah. Definitely, staff. I also don't believe in money over relationship in terms of what we take on in our business. OK. I have sent emails to clients and said that we won't be working with them.
- Allison Howell** Wow! That takes guts.
- Alice Sip** Yeah, the first time wasn't easy, but I think within our company we've seen it doesn't matter what the bill is. If it's difficult, or if you don't want to spend time on it, or it's eating up your time in a negative way then... yeah. No, we're not doing it.
- Allison Howell** It takes savvy, though, to sort of always see that at the outset. Are there red flags that you're kind of always on the lookout for?
- Alice Sip** I think that you can get a feel for whether someone is respectful. Often you find that on the day, you know. And we've had that, where we've been working and all of a sudden, it's extremely disrespectful. But you can sometimes read it in emails where someone's just being a bit sassy towards you, or you are getting these long lists, and then another long list, and another long list. And there's no deposit. And they're not paying a deposit, and they're finding fault with everything that you do. We've just had no sign that you're actually going to fit for our company.
- Allison Howell** And how do you sort of bolster yourself up now to to have those conversations or to put that out there because it can feel frightening, right?
- Alice Sip** Yeah. The first time I was very worried because it was a very influential family in Hawke's Bay and we'd done a wedding for the family previously, but I was being asked to give a run by one of every single staff member and what they were doing for every single hour of the wedding day. And I just said, "No, I'm not doing it." So that had to be said really to accompany the no. And then I guess from there, it's just, I guess, a matter of self-respect. You know, do I deserve to be talked to like this? Is this eating into time with my family? Am I stressed because of what's being said to me? Of course there are hard clients, and that's natural. But as soon as it's affecting mental health, you know, if the girls on my team have their mental health impacted by a client? No way. We're not doing it. Or we've changed because not every client is a fit for every person. So then we have change between the staff to say, "Look, I'm actually going to pass you on to your colleague--my colleague."



- Allison Howell** Got it. Yeah. You know, I think in this day and age, there's this fear that if we don't bow to every whim of the client, then we're going to get a bad Yelp review.
- Alice Sip** I think that if someone left me... if there was a bad review, and I've had that situation before before you know, I've just maintained that there's the ability to reply on the platform and in a respectful way that just is not... this is our side of the story. And that's it. And if people are seriously reading your reviews, and they can read the reply and see the story. And I think if at the end of the day, if the staff at all happy with what they've done and in how it's ended in your team, you know, or what we create together on it, then it's enough.
- Allison Howell** Is there a rule or a policy that you've put in place in your business that's been a game changer? Some of the answers in the past have been about damage policies or about ways they deal with employees or writing something in their contract that they didn't have before.
- Alice Sip** Yes. We put in minimum spends and have put in higher minimum spends recently.
- Allison Howell** Tell me what that process was like when you started. Did you have no minimums?
- Alice Sip** Yeah, we didn't have a minimum.
- Allison Howell** OK. And so what was happening?
- Alice Sip** Well, especially when we went into Auckland, we didn't have a minimum. And because we wanted to take whatever we could, you know, and we went into this, "Oh, let's take this order. It was \$200 that we're excited to just have the business." And yeah, I think I would start like that again. You know, I wouldn't put a minimum spend in straight off the bat. But when we went further into business... definitely minimum spends. We started at \$600, and we've recently sort of gone even higher depending on time of year, depending on location, and all those kind of things.
- Allison Howell** Well, it seems to me like you got quite an empire growing. I usually like to focus mostly on the hire side of businesses on this podcast, but I would love to hear more about Kindred Road because it seems to me like your furniture and homeware shop really goes hand in hand with your with your hire business.



**Alice Sip**

Yes. So Kindred Road, like you said, is a furniture and homewares store that has a brick and mortar. And a new build on the way for that. So obviously everyone hates talking about COVID, but here we are. New Zealand went--into I don't know what happened in the stats, I just look at the news--but we went into, like I said, the level four lockdown for New Zealand means only supermarkets and pharmacies open. I cannot have events in Auckland, so I looked at it and I just thought, what have I got that I can do? You know, the famous word: pivot. How can I pivot and this industry? And I just thought, Look, I import so much furniture and I have containers coming in, and why can't I sell? Why can't I bring something in to sell? Because I knew that I had, you know, that supply chain available to me. So yeah, I just brought in things that were different. And different to my area and Hawke's Bay. And I did a pop up store is what I did first. I didn't start going into a full lease. Just a pop up. And it happened on Christmas Eve because why not? And yeah, the first first day we had a lot of interest and... I guess, because we have the following with Flock. It actually just worked hand in hand because our target range for Flock really is sort of the wedding scene, as you know, twenty-four to thirty-five, forty. Sure. And those are the same people buying furniture for their first home. We've had previous brides purchased from us or guests at weddings. And we just built off a brand that already existed. Yeah, I definitely actually recommend it, to be honest.

**Allison Howell**

It sounds to me like a lot of work for your own brain.

**Alice Sip**

Yeah, I've just sort of see what needs watering, I guess, and that's where the attention has to go. But I live a very busy life, there's no doubt about it. This is not for everybody. I don't have a massive social scene, and we live and breathe furniture. We've learned a lot about balance, and I'm fortunate because I think if Chris wasn't in the same businesses, you know, that we didn't talk the same language... it would be very, very hard. I guess I've just realized the importance of delegating and realized the importance of my time... and that paying someone, you know, an hourly wage to do something actually, is worth it because it frees up me and putting a price on that. The importance of staff is just, you know, everybody knows it's the hardest part of a business and the best part of a business. But we just wouldn't have a life without staff. You know, that's that's all there is to it.

**Allison Howell**

What challenges are you currently facing at Flock?



## Alice Sip

Lockdown. And we're you know--and we essentially operate over two states, really, is the US equivalent. But you know people, I guess, have navigated this and got shut down for quite a long time, and I think ours has just been extended here. So yeah, that - which everyone understands exactly what that means. And I guess at the moment, probably the cashflow and expansion. I have about 12 containers of furniture that I ordered, which was extreme. And I'm very aware of how extreme it was. And I pushed so hard in the middle of a pandemic because I knew our competitors wouldn't. And they didn't. You know what, what others have added and what we've added, you know, we're just streams ahead and it's set us up, I think, for future. But because of that, our cashflow is not what it would normally be. So yeah, I think that possibly this is the first time where I've pushed to that. But we just wait and then we decide when we get deposits, you know, and push for deposits and all of those kind of things to to cover it. And very high shipping costs. So yeah, I'm excited that I did it because we now have a lot of stock. When we can do events, we will have this stock and be excited. But also because we haven't been able to operate, next year we'll have the stuff that seems new but it wasn't actually new. And I think that what we have learned in these crazy times, is that we've pushed ourselves as much as we can. And I think a lot of people have shied away from it. And not everybody, like you say, has these different level of risks. And not everyone's going to cope in that situation. And so obviously, it's not sound advice for everybody. But we have found with everything, with the store as well, that if we've pushed and we've added new inventory and continued as if we're not in the middle of a pandemic, then actually we've seen our bookings go up or the buying of furniture go up. And all of those things because we're pushing through and we're sort of telling everyone that we're here to stay.

**Allison Howell** Your confidence is contagious.

**Alice Sip** Yeah, yeah. And it's been reflected in bookings, that people are excited, that we're excited... even though there's this underlying panic that's going on.

**Allison Howell** Sure. Well, let's contrast that. What brings you joy right now in your business?

**Alice Sip** I think sort of sitting back and and looking at what we've created. I think just little moments like that where the business is functioning, and you're not actually working. It's just the most amazing feeling.





**Allison Howell** It's such a good feeling. Well, a big thanks to Alice for coming on to share her wisdom and some new vocabulary with us. Check out the show notes to find links to her website and Instagram. And while you're checking out the show notes, look out for the link to join the RW Elephant mailing list. We're always sharing industry resources and opportunities. But for now, keep on listening to hear Alice's answers to my lightning round questions. Three words to describe your collection.

**Alice Sip** Modern, fresh and summery .

**Allison Howell** Ooh, what is one trait you look for when hiring?

**Alice Sip** Loyalty.

**Allison Howell** If you could only have one type of fabric in your entire collection, what would it be?

**Alice Sip** Outdoor canvas.

**Allison Howell** What is something other event pros do that annoys you?

**Alice Sip** Being obnoxious and sort of, you know, just not humble? No humility?

**Allison Howell** OK, do you rent, lease or purchase your delivery vehicle?

**Alice Sip** Purchase.

**Allison Howell** OK, two things outside of work you love to do.

**Alice Sip** Go to the beach and play the viola,

**Allison Howell** A business tool you couldn't live without.

**Alice Sip** RW Elephant.

**Allison Howell** Oh, perfect answer. OK, would you rather pack a delivery truck blindfolded or get a last minute order for a 200 person wedding that's happening tomorrow?

**Alice Sip** Last minute order. Definitely.





## **RESOURCES:**

[The Lend & Gather Conference](#)

The [RW Elephant mailing list](#) features more event industry resources and happenings—including announcements about new Trunk Show episodes!

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## **AND OUR GUEST:**

Alice Sip of Flock Events & Kindred Road

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