

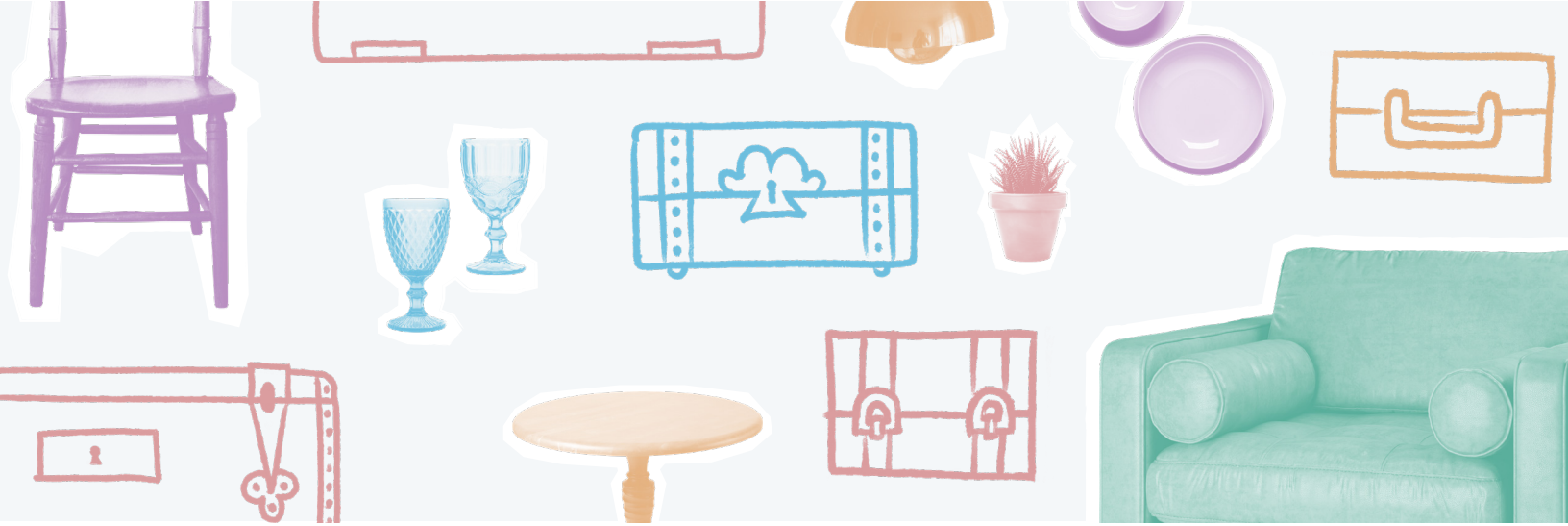
The **TRUNK SHOW**

With RW ELEPHANT

SEASON 2 EPISODE 1



**DESIGNING A CREATIVE LIFE
WITH DANG FINE RENTALS**



WELCOME BACK TO THE TRUNK SHOW,

hosted by Allison Howell and brought to you by RW Elephant. We're kicking off our second season with **Matiana Gregory of Dang! Fine Rentals & Designs**, talking about building and maintaining a creative life (in Phoenix, AZ!).



QUOTES:

*"I just thought, let's bring a **little bit of LA** to the desert."*

- Matiana Gregory

*"It's always better to be on the same page especially when it comes to budget. **Price is a tough topic.**"*

- Allison Howell

*"From day one, even when I started this business in my garage, I wasn't the cheapest provider. **I was always at a good price point because I knew I wanted it to grow.**"*

- Matiana Gregory

*"If I'm giving you a discount, you're going to have an **entire contract** of what you owe me."*

- Matiana Gregory

*"I think whether you start your business first or you have a family first, **that juggling act is real.**"*

- Allison Howell

*"I was alone for so long building this dream, and so now that I look around and I'm just surrounded by people... it's just like the best. This is better than anything it could have been because **now I like literally am people's job.** And that's pretty special to be able to have been able to have created something that makes enough money to invest in people."*

- Matiana Gregory

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

Allison Howell Hello, and welcome back to The Trunk Show. This is the official start of Season Two. I'm your host, Alison Howell, here to talk with leading professionals about their event rental businesses, hard earned wisdom and ongoing adventures in the industry. The show is brought to you by RW 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, you'll hear my conversation with Mariana Gregory, founder and mastermind behind one of Phoenix's top specialty rental and production design companies. We chat about how she got her start, but her collection and where she's headed next.

Matiana Gregory I am Matiana Gregory, I own Dang! Fine Rentals and Designs. We are based out of Phoenix, Arizona, and we are pretty much specialty event rentals, but, as well, production designers. So we're doing everything from your rentals to creating your brand or your esthetic in every custom way that it can be done. It's definitely evolved a lot since I started this business almost seven years ago. And yeah, I would say that we are we're in the production side as well as the rental side, and I merge the two.

Allison Howell Got it. Got it. So where are you from originally?

Matiana Gregory So I was born and raised in Los Angeles.

Allison Howell Ok.

Matiana Gregory And so I moved here in 2015 to start this company. After being – I had previously been a planner and I just noticed a really big gap in this market. Nothing in Arizona was, you know, up to speed with where L.A. was, and I just thought, let's bring a little bit of LA to the desert.

Allison Howell Yeah. So what else drew you to the desert? Was it just like, Oh, there's an opportunity in Phoenix or do you have other family and connection there?

Matiana Gregory Honestly, it was just an opportunity. I loved events. I loved the design part of events. I didn't really care what people ate for their main course or their appetizers. I really didn't care about a sparkle exit. And I realized that planning was just not where I was supposed to be. And in discovering that I was trying to



lean more into design. And if I'm being honest, in Los Angeles, I was just not willing to be a small fish in a big pond. And I saw an opportunity in Arizona and just said, I'm going to be the big fish in that small pond, and that's what I came and did.

Allison Howell Wow, that takes a lot of guts.

Matiana Gregory It was very sudden. Honestly, the idea kind of struck me in the October of 2014, when I was doing an event out here and just realizing how limited my options were.

Allison Howell Sure.

Matiana Gregory So I started doing some digging and it actually was one of the top destination -- top 20 destination wedding places is the desert, which is something people don't really realize or maybe didn't. And this is also a huge destination for corporate retreats. So I knew that people are coming to the desert and all these big hotels are putting on huge corporate programs, and those corporate programs need custom elements. And the second we started bringing Dang! Fine to the market, the second we started showing bars that were custom -- no one had made a bar that wasn't a wood bar before us. Like everyone just had -- either the wood bar was exciting or maybe a white bar, but no one had been doing custom designed bars, not anyone I had ever seen.

Allison Howell Right.

Matiana Gregory And everyone here was like, What is this? What? Who is this? And immediately every DMC was calling me. Every wedding planner was, you know, reaching out, and it just snowballed. But reality is, is I was kind of all in and I, you know. Yeah, there is a part of it that was a little fearful, but once we started the brand, once the esthetic was there once. The momentum in the vibe was there, I knew everyone got it. And everyone's always like, Oh, Dang's here. I mean, our shirts say Dang! with a huge exclamation. Like everyone always is very much excited when they see us. Yeah, because we just kind of bring that fun. We're vibrant, we're wild. Everyone's cool on the team is just nice and approachable.

Allison Howell Well, describe your collection for us. Tell us what pieces you have and what style it is.

Matiana Gregory We kind of have a little bit of everything. I mean, I'm pretty, pretty great at knowing our brand. And yes, I could see a sofa that's like French country, but like, yeah, that's pretty. But that's not my brand, so I stay in my lane. I'm very good at that. But we have anything from glam funk to, you know, I would say, like Moroccan and boho. And so we have anything in between. We have a lot of equipable Mexican leather that we will throw in with like velvet sofas. We love the funk, we love combinations. We love changing it up. And I would say that we just portray ourselves as making comfortable, esthetically fun and pleasing lounge spaces, bars, backdrops, etcetera.

Allison Howell So you have lounge spaces -- lounge furniture -- you have backdrops, you have bars...

Matiana Gregory We have tables and chairs. We have a fleet of tables and chairs, multiple styles of chairs and two fleets of tables. We have, you know, well over 200 different styles of walls out there. And we just—.

Allison Howell *Wow.*

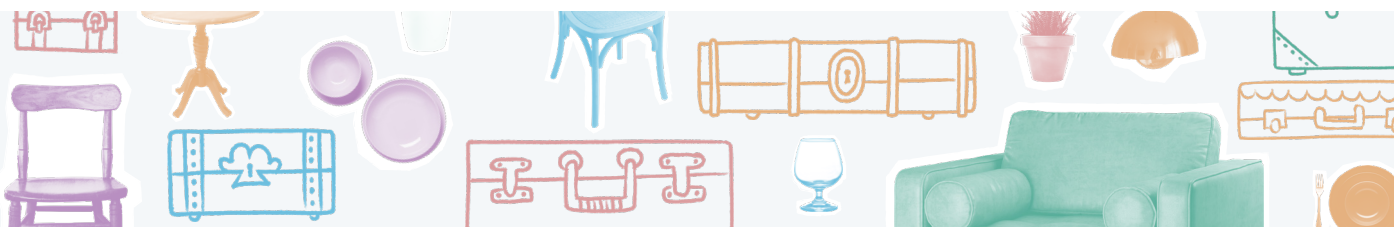
Matiana Gregory Yeah, it's insane, I really should try to get a video going. Make our social girl do all of our walls because people really don't realize how many backdrops we really own.

Allison Howell Let me go back for a minute to the to the building you do. When you are thinking about building a new bar, obviously, there's a creative vision, but do you have any other kind of parameters or rules that are here's what Dang! does for a bar. It always folds, or it's always six feet long or like--.

Matiana Gregory So every bar is at least six feet long, that's for sure. We try to keep it under seven feet long. However, no, we do not do the fold. I tried the fold. And you know what? We just things go out too much here and water and moisture gets involved in bars.

Allison Howell Yeah.

Matiana Gregory And I've done the fold and the fold does not last. So we have full structured bars that are built. And so they definitely take up like a, you know, a good footprint. We do have brand new acrylic bars, though, that are in pieces that get assembled on site that are going out this month. We do have one set of bars that cleat in the front so you can change their fronts.



Matiana Gregory Honestly, I don't even know what we don't do at this point. So here's the deal. I am a "Say yes" person. I know that I am the type of person who was born to like, design and create and constantly be evolving. That's half the reason I always liked events because events are always different, right?

Allison Howell Yeah.

Matiana Gregory Not one bride is having necessarily the identical. However, I got burnt out on the lounges. I have girls who are phenomenal with lounges. Me personally, I don't want to sling only furniture anymore, so I come in to sling the custom design.

Allison Howell Sure.

Matiana Gregory And that's what just like keeps me always fired up. Always fresh, always ready. So I work with corporate or bride or anyone, and my team also does custom as well. So we do everything from your custom builds to we can laser cut all your signage. We can do all those things because we own all of our machines at this point.

Allison Howell **Wow.**

Matiana Gregory And we could custom build pretty much anything as long as we have the time these days. And yeah, we we have a custom printer next door who's right next to our warehouse. So he does all my vinyls, all my wraps, all my different things.

Allison Howell So convenient!

Matiana Gregory Oh my gosh, it's amazing.

Allison Howell Well, ok, so you have these big creative visions. How do you pitch it to a client so that they understand what is in your head?

Matiana Gregory So we have Design Decks, so everything gets created into a Design Deck. So you have like multiple like pages of design. So we walk a client through, OK, this is the vision of your brand, this is the colors of your brand. This is what we envision for your stage. Sometimes there's stage options: A, B, and C.

Sometimes it's one stage or this is where your deck is that we're thinking for your photo op. This is your interactive experience. And so we pretty much pitch people, You see a visual of everything you're going to do.

Matiana Gregory And we also do send videos to explain our decks. So when we pitch, we pitch in a video form, if not in person, depending on the client. And yeah, everyone will be able to see it and they can go to their RW. They could see exactly their invoicing. And so we try to make people get their invoice, their price, their everything in one pitch so that everyone can see what they're getting.

Allison Howell That's a lot of work up front. Do you feel like you ever have to like balance? Like how do you gauge when somebody is ready for a pitch vs., Oh, they're still shopping?

Matiana Gregory I can gauge if someone's shopping. If they're shopping, they will get a quick pitch. Quick pitch is totally something that, we have beams, we have so many things, like, we have tons of, tons of, tons of decks full of themed visual. Do you want a glam lounge? We've got it. You want a backdrop. We got it. So we have quick pitches so we can throw a quick pitch together in about 15 minutes and send it off.

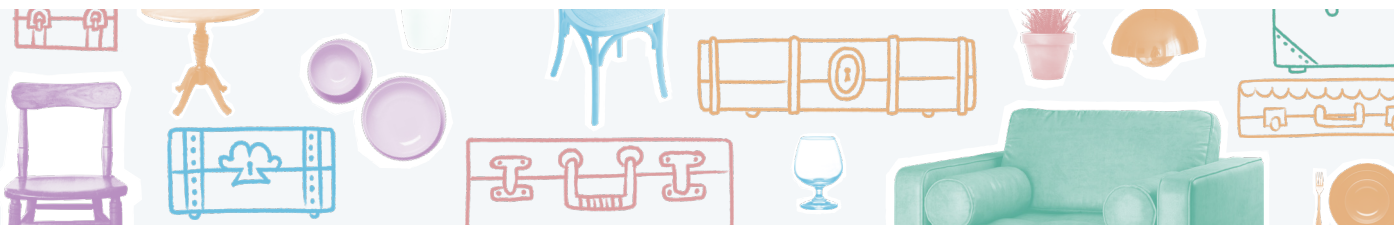
Allison Howell Yeah.

Matiana Gregory However, when you are like our client, you're coming to us, you're paying a design fee, you're locked in. So you're wanting something from us, but you have skin in the game because that's the other thing is, we're not going to take all that work unless we're it.

Allison Howell Yeah, because that is, I mean, that's a huge commitment on your end. But OK, so they've given you money, you've given them the pitch. Well, maybe this happens earlier too, but, what do you think it is about you or your brand or your process that gets those clients to trust you?

Matiana Gregory At this point, it's a word of mouth thing, and ninety nine percent of the people that are coming to us have seen us at an event or have seen on Instagram or have seen what we're doing, and it just speaks for itself at this point.

Allison Howell So tell me a little bit more about pricing and profitability. How do you price your rentals? Do you have a formula? Do you have a process? Is it gut feeling?



Matiana Gregory No, I mean, we have a pretty good system, so I make sure that in our rentals, we're making our money back in three rentals. Custom things, that's a custom price every time. But we have a formula. We know what certain walls cost, and this and that, and then I could go from there. But yeah, that's how we pretty much quote on the rental side.

Allison Howell So I know in my own creative endeavors, you know, sometimes I find that a budget makes me more creative.

Matiana Gregory Oh, absolutely.

Allison Howell And other times I feel like, oh, a budget just like kills my creativity because I feel like I have to sacrifice so much. Like, how do you kind of endure that balance? When a client comes to you with a budget, are you telling them, Hey, this is what it's going to cost?

Matiana Gregory So we have rental minimums. We do not do anything for less than a \$500 rental minimum plus labor and delivery. So rental wise, we always know that like, we're not leaving the door unless it's this much money because it takes trucks and teams and all these things.

Allison Howell Right.

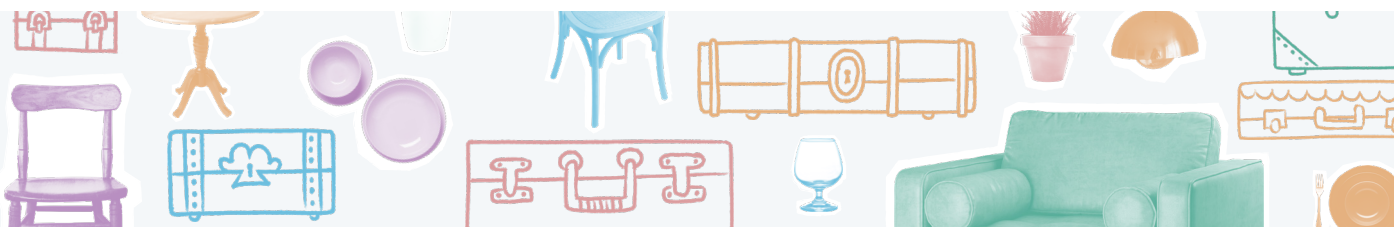
Matiana Gregory However, when it comes to budgets, I love a budget. I think it's very, very important that a client, especially who wants anything, a bride, it doesn't matter who you are, you need to have a frame of what you're willing to spend because it is no fun to be sold an idea you can't afford. That is not fun for us. That's not fun for you.

Allison Howell Right.

Matiana Gregory No one likes to be shown things and dangled that they can't afford.

Allison Howell Right.

Matiana Gregory So I prefer a budget right off the bat because if you give me a budget 10 out of 10 times, we're going to make sure we stretch it to be the best version of that budget. But if you give us a budget range, but reality is you're not willing to go to five thousand, you're really at three and I'm starting to sell you five thousand dollar backdrops, and then you can't afford it, that is so unfun for you.



Allison Howell Right.

Matiana Gregory So I think it's always important for people to kind of come in with a budget.

Allison Howell Yeah.

Matiana Gregory And then that just makes the experience for everyone better. And then you get to see things that are super possible for you.

Allison Howell That makes sense. It's always better to be on the same page, especially when it comes to budget. Price is a tough topic.

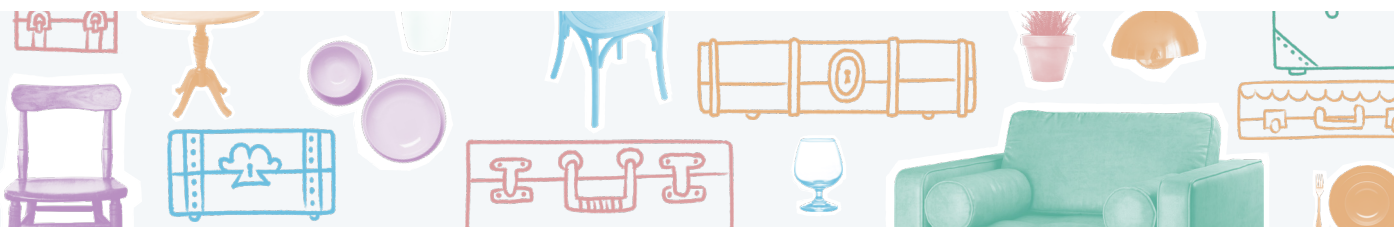
Matiana Gregory Absolutely. And seriously, some of my best clients literally just give us a deck. I have one client. Everyone will see her on my Instagram. Powerhouse woman. Lindsay gives me a budget. The branding, if it's changed and she says, I need a photo op and a stage, and then she does not see anything till the do not one thing.

Allison Howell **Wow.**

Matiana Gregory And every single time she walks in that room and almost cries. I've seen her cry a few times. She is always blown away because I'm like, OK, well, I'm going to take it to the next level because she backed off and I could do my best work. And so, yes, her events are not necessarily my most profitable because I like to spend on her, but she's letting me show my best work within her brand and it's always so out of control and amazing. And so that's my favorite part, you know.

Allison Howell That outlet for creativity sounds like such a gift. I think a lot of people in this industry would love that client. Now, let's transition a little more toward the practical side of things. Let's talk storage. Tell us about your rack. Tell us about your warehouse. What do you love about your warehouse? What things really work for you?

Matiana Gregory We have a decent organization system. Our rugs are pretty much in a good place. Everyone in this industry knows rugs are just a headache to stack and organize. But we've got a pretty good system on how everything goes. We also have a lot of racks that roll around, which is nice, and I'm constantly—



Matiana Gregory So during COVID, one of the things that I did was I decided that, when all my employees were still on, and I decided that we would take the time to change the things about the warehouse we absolutely hated, like specific ways that racks were made, or whatever. I was like, we will tear them down and rebuild them. As much of a headache, like no one wants to do that on the planet, like, nothing is worse in the world. But I was like, with this time, we can flip it, so we'll put all this – like we can make it work for us.

Matiana Gregory And so, like, there are some things we still want to do, but for the most part, we did a lot of changes. We got a second warehouse. We facilitated all the things that we don't want. Like, the pretty stuff's still in ours, but the more, like, bulk items are down the way. And I think that's just really helpful is to just like make sure that you spend some time and some investment back into like making your space organized and work for you.

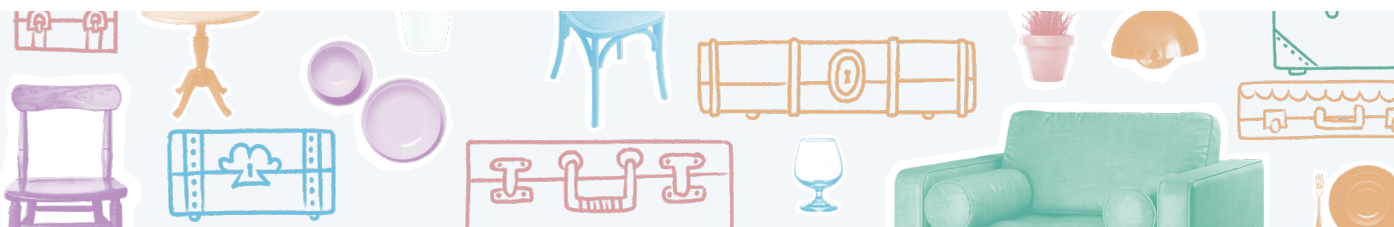
Allison Howell I want to transition a little bit to kind of a different facet of the business. I'm wondering if there's any scenarios or situations you can share with us where something went wrong or you were disappointed in how something turned out and, kind of, either what you learned from that or where you went from there?

Matiana Gregory I mean, it's definitely been a long time since I've felt that way. In the past, any time that I've ever felt like things didn't go the right way was just being understaffed. That's a big thing for me. Everyone knows I over staff everything. I over staff and I spend on the high end for labor because there's no point on us breaking our backs to make everything happen. I really just think that if you wear down the team, you don't have a team. And I do find that that's the biggest downfall of every company around me.

Allison Howell Right. Well, I know there are people who feel like they want to pay more or they want to have more people on site. But they get a lot of pushback from their clients when it comes to like delivery fees or labor. How do you overcome those objections when people come back to you and say, really, it's going to be that much for for the installation?

Matiana Gregory Honestly, I just from day one was like, This is the price. And I think that the one reason that it's been easier for me is I'm the only one who does it. So it's either me or you're not getting half of this. You're not getting a custom stage and install. This is, I'm it.

Allison Howell Right.



Matiana Gregory There has been people that came out of the woodworks that are doing cheaper and whatnot of certain photo ops or something for baby showers, and I'm like, definitely book them. Like if they've got that entire eight by eight backdrop with six walls for one hundred and fifty delivered, you need to jump all that. Like, that's craziness.

Allison Howell Yeah.

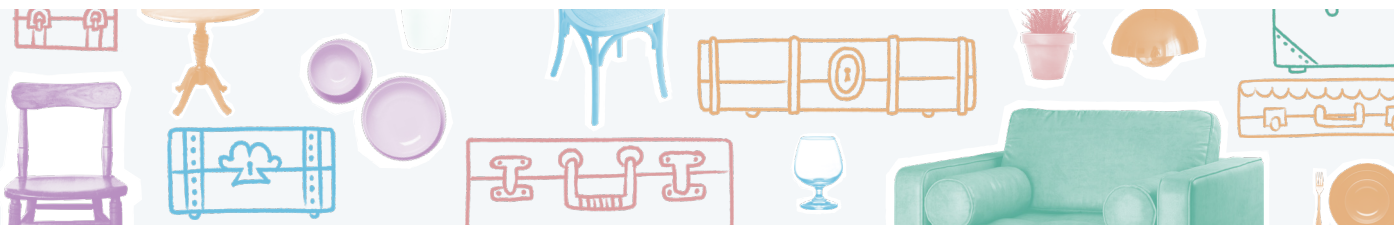
Matiana Gregory But I, you know what? I just, I can't go home to my baby at night not making any money and paying people on a hundred fifty dollars. So like, I have to charge what it's worth. And from day one, even when I started this business in my garage, I wasn't the cheapest provider. I was always a good price point because I knew I wanted it to grow. I also have a contract thick as thieves. If you I'm giving you a discount, you're going to have an entire contract of what you owe me. And if it's not delivered, I charge day after. Because a lot of times people like, I'll post you on the social media, I'll do this, and then they don't. And I'm like, That wasn't part of the deal. There was a contract, so I actually, I hired a lawyer to make a contract for that.

Allison Howell Seems like you have some thick skin there because they know a lot of times people feel like, Oh, they didn't. They didn't post. Maybe I shouldn't say anything.

Matiana Gregory No, it's a horrible feeling. It's a horrible feeling to feel like someone, like, was so nice and kind and amazing and promised you all these things, only to turn around and not give them to you. But you feel like they're not approachable. I just -- I am a very confrontational person. Not in a bad way. But like, I have no problem having a conversation. I have no -- nothing.

Allison Howell Yeah. Well, and honestly, if more people acted the way you did, the expectations would be reframed here. Whereas right now, people who are starting out or who feel like I'm desperate for the business are sort of willing to to take these chances. And really, it makes it hard for anyone to hold that line.

Matiana Gregory So and truthfully, I get it. Sometimes it's just not going to be like --. I'm not saying you, in the beginning, can't do anything for free, but you need to pick and choose. And if I --. My biggest thing would be is choose a dollar amount. I am willing to invest X amount of dollars into my advertising. That's what you would call it.



Matiana Gregory I scaled it 100 percent every single year, and I always kept the money in the business.

Allison Howell That's amazing. OK, now I want to hear a little bit more about how work life balance works for you. Tell me a little bit about the experience of becoming a mama. What has that -- ? How has that influenced your business or how has that changed you as a person in relationship to your business?

Matiana Gregory I just had a baby and she's 10 months, and I mean, she's my complete spitting image. She's the most driven baby I've ever met. I've never seen a 10 month old so determined to get something that she wants and fight you for it.

Allison Howell Yes, she's probably just crushing all those milestones, right? Like, she's ahead of the curve. She's ready to ace all the baby tests, huh?

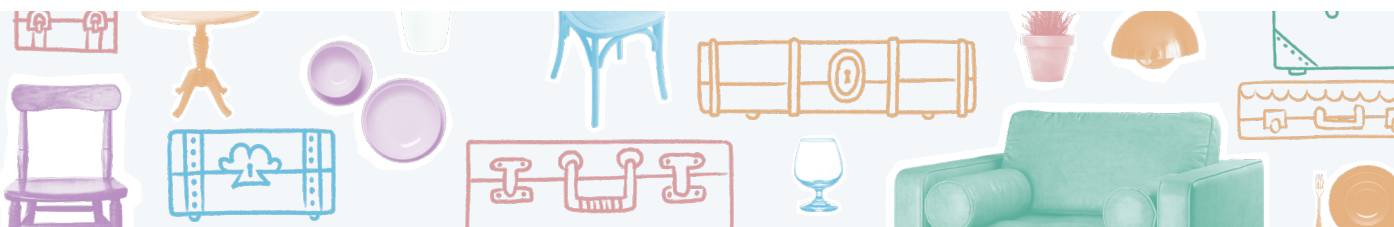
Matiana Gregory Yes, she's wild.

Allison Howell I mean, well, she has a track suit, so she has the the gear she needs to do all the training. It sounds like.

Matiana Gregory Oh yeah. Oh yeah, she's got a Dang! Fine track suit. She's got a few of them. So, I'm so excited it's getting cold here because she could wear them. Well, now I have to be a mom and I have to check into an entire different job, or I have to start feeling like I can't work 80 hours and I can't like not go home and I can't like have a baby sitter at my house twenty four seven, like the woman can't be there forever. So I, you know, it's definitely been a hard, hard, hard, hard adjustment.

Matiana Gregory This has been a very difficult adjustment for me, just because I also have, like all that guilt of like, OK, she's like about to walk any day now. Am I going to miss that because I'm always here? Or am I -- you know? And it's definitely been a big adjustment. I am not necessarily -- I wouldn't say I'm really successful at it yet, just because I'm like, I'm just constantly juggling act, trying to figure out that five seconds that I don't have to be here so I could just be at home.

Allison Howell Yeah.



Matiana Gregory Or be at home and not be on my phone and be at home and not answering an email. Because that's the other thing is like, I find my phone go off a lot when I'm with her and I'm just like the poor girl is, like, always seeing me on my phone. So I try to leave my phone somewhere else, and then I go back, there's six months phone calls and like, they're freaking out. I'm like, I can't be on my phone all the time, like, I have to just be here.

Allison Howell Yeah, you know, I think whether you start your business first or you have a family first, that juggling act is real. I feel that personally with my own family, you know, when I'm not with my kids and I'm trying to focus on work, sometimes I'm thinking in the back of my head, Oh, but they're doing this thing, or I should be there for them, or I should be able to be part of this. And then when I'm with them, I can't turn off the work brain, sometimes, you know?

Matiana Gregory Yes. Totally.

Allison Howell It's difficult to have both things happening at the same time, for sure.

Matiana Gregory Extremely difficult. It's not easy at all, but it's slowly getting better. I'm slowly working it out. After this season we'll definitely, kind of, readjust, like, what I need to do as far as, like, hiring and whatnot.

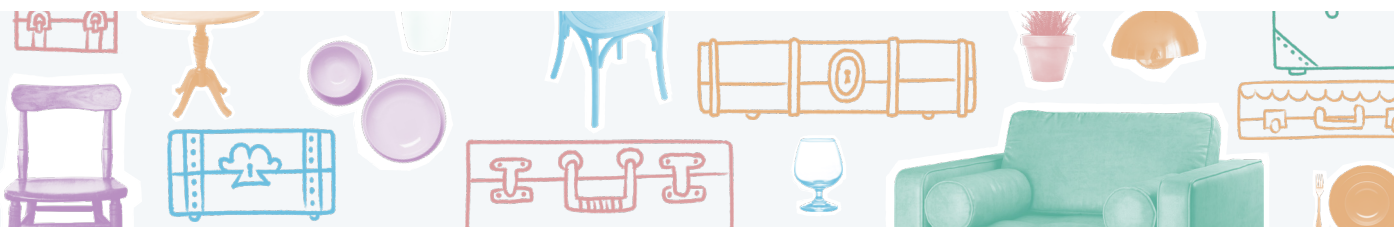
Allison Howell Yeah.

Matiana Gregory But it's hard because, like, you know, people say like, Oh, would you ever sell your business. I'm, like, I am my business. I don't know how that would happen.

Allison Howell Yeah. Well, you definitely -- for being someone who can delegate so well and not have to be the only voice in the room, you're definitely a force. You're definitely a force there. And it seems like it's difficult to imagine what Dang! Fine could be without your presence there as often as you are.

Matiana Gregory Totally. It's not easy, but we're we're taking it day by day.

Allison Howell Well, tell us about some of the milestones or moments in your business that you have truly celebrated. What are some of those things that you're really proud of?



Matiana Gregory Hmm. So I remember the first time I ever did an event at a venue that's very sought after here. It's a little bit of a cliquey venue. I got a wedding there. It was a big wedding and I was really excited. And we pulled it off and I rolled into bed at 4:30 in the morning. And I just remember that was the first time that I was like, well, can I cuss on here, I feel bad to say that, but--.

Allison Howell Yeah, that's fine.

Matiana Gregory I was like, I always say I'm exhausted as fuck, but happy as hell. That's how I felt in that morning and I was like, It's 4:30 in the morning, but like, I'm doing exactly what I want to be doing, and I just crushed that big event. And before that, that venue was kind of wary about me being like, Who are these new people? There was definitely a little bit of that. And then all of a sudden now it's like, Oh, Dang! Fine's here! Dang! Fine's here! You know?

Allison Howell That's got to feel amazing to have that kind of brand recognition in your city. Well, I'm going to start winding us down here. If you're listening in and you'd like to hear more from Matiana, you can find her Instagram handles and website in the show notes. And be on the lookout in those show notes for the link to join the RW Elephant mailing list. Stay tuned for just a few more minutes to hear Matiana's lightning round Q&A.

Allison Howell Three words that describe your collection.

Matiana Gregory Dang, fine, amazing.

Allison Howell Perfect. What is one trait you look for when hiring?

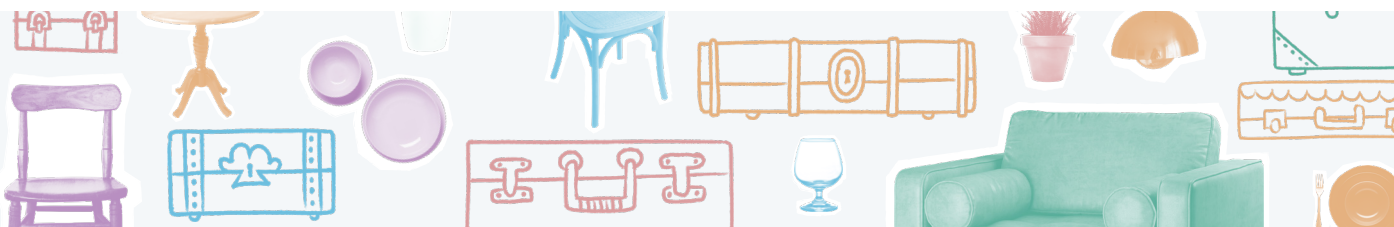
Matiana Gregory Someone willing to just get into the trenches and give it a try.

Allison Howell Do you rent, lease, or purchase your delivery vehicles?

Matiana Gregory Well, we rent them right now. We rent them, but we own some of them and now we --. We purchased a truck and a van, and now we rent some, too. But my goal is all purchases.

Allison Howell Two things outside of work you love to do.

- Matiana Gregory** I love to go to the farmer's market. If I have a Saturday morning off, I hit the farmer's market, hands down, every single time. And I guess just hanging out with my family at this point. This way, it's family and adventures.
- Allison Howell** Would you rather pack a delivery truck blindfolded or get a last minute order for a 200 person event that's happening tomorrow?
- Matiana Gregory** I get my team if I do that one, so I would probably want the 200 person event the next day. We could pull it off. I know we could.
- Allison Howell** So here's the final question. What do you enjoy most about your rental adventures?
- Matiana Gregory** My team. I love my employees, and I, truthfully, the adventures we've had lately, I mean, we've been to Santa Fe, we've been to Los Angeles, we've been all over the board and we go to all these fun events and to see how invested and how truly fun everyone makes it. And I was alone for so long building this dream, and so now that I look around, I'm just surrounded by people. It's like the best. This is better than anything it could have been because now I like literally am people's job, and that's pretty special to be able to have created something that makes enough money to invest in people.
- Allison Howell** A big thank you to Martina and Dang! Fine Rentals. And thank you for listening to The Trunk Show brought to you by RW Elephant. Season Two has just begun and we have so much to share. We'll be releasing episodes each week, so be sure to listen in. As always, I'm your host, Allison Howell. Happy renting!



RESOURCES:

[The Lend & Gather Conference](#)

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

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSOR:

RW Elephant: Mighty inventory management software designed to help you conquer chaos and reclaim your creativity!

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AND OUR GUEST:

Matiana Gregory of Dang! Fine Rentals & Designs

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[Matiana's Personal Instagram](#)

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