

*The*  
**TRUNK  
SHOW**

*With* RW ELEPHANT

SEASON 3 EPISODE 5



**"CREATIVELY CONSISTENT WITH  
ENGLAND'S VENUE STYLIST OF THE YEAR"  
HOLLY AND CHARLIE FOUNDERS OF  
LOCATE TO CREATE**



## WELCOME TO THE TRUNK SHOW,

hosted by Allison Howell and brought to you by RW  
Elephant. Episode **5** features **Holly and Charlie**, founders of  
**Locate to Create in England.**

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Holly and Charlie are owner/operators of Locate to Create. Their mission is to “Locate” items to “Create” bespoke events and experiences. They use props, furniture and styling to tell people’s stories with an underlying theme of sustainability. Their diverse portfolio features an eclectic array of items and furniture pieces curated to cater to various personalities and styles.

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### What's in this Episode:

How Holly got started right out of Uni with the help of mentors  
Charlie joins the business and roles are defined  
Using Instagram and styled shoots to increase social media reach  
Winning Venue Stylist of the Year Award and leveraging it for growth  
Sourcing inspiration and finding creative options for storage  
Can you believe this is our job?



## QUOTES:

“We would get money, we would pour it back in. We would get money, we would pour it back in. **We were very passionate about not going into some crazy debt for this business where we couldn't walk away.** So we would load, unload the trucks. We were everything. We were marketing. We were labor. We did that as a company.”

– Holly

“One of the benefits and beauties of working with your partner, business partner, romantic partner. **She's at one end of the desk. I'm at the other one.** It's not a particularly difficult task for me to say, “Oh, Holly, I think she might want styling.”

– Charlie

“We know now that actually seeing couples on our Instagram page, for example, real couples is fantastic, but actually **styled shoot couples like models doesn't work as well. People just want to really see our products.** So we don't post that much of our couples as much as we love them. But it's the products that we're trying to sell and the service.” – Holly

“Sometimes when we get an award or we achieve something in our business, we say, okay, check that off onto the next thing. But it can be so valuable for us to say, okay, I got this thing, or I achieved this thing or I have this thing in front of me, **how can I squeeze more out of it so that I can get all of the benefit or value out of this thing that I already have before I move on to the next marketing opportunity or before I move on to the next thing or before I invest in the next phase, right?**”

– Allison Howell

“We never want to be the sort of company where we're doing thousands of events every year. So **it's very important to us to identify very strategic venues to try and penetrate into a high proportion of their yearly total events.** And as you say, having that leverage to get in there and actually capture those for us, that's a far more valuable way of doing business and expanding business.” – Charlie

## Episode Transcription

**Intro:** Hello and welcome to the Trunk Show. I'm your host, Allison 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 Holly and Charlie, owner-operators of Locate to Create, the 2024 National Venue Stylist of the Year award-winning company. Their design expertise is complimented by an eclectic portfolio of timeless pieces powered by a model of reclaiming and reuse.

Holly and Charlie are partners in business and partners in life! You'll hear about the dynamics of building a successful business and a whole bunch of interesting insight from our friends across the pond. Alright, let's dive right in!

**Holly:** Yeah, so we are Charlie and Holly and we run and own Locate to Create, which is a prop hire, furniture hire, and event styling business.

We do specialize in vintage, rustic, boho items, but we also like to introduce more modern items so that we can mix items from all eras, creating timeless looks for our clients.

**Allison Howell:** Wonderful. And where are you located and what area do you serve?

**Charlie:** So we're located in the southeast of England, but unlike the US, England's relatively small.

So we do travel quite far. I mean, predominantly, we do sort of cover Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Essex, London, mainly. And that's a pretty big sort of industry and market, the sort of target. So there's plenty of local opportunities. It's not like we're being spread far and wide.



And we do travel further afield. We have been to Manchester and down to Devon, that sort of location. It's just dependent on clients, budget, and time of year, and bandwidth, and capacity.

**Allison Howell:** So Holly, you originally started Locate to Create while you were in your final year at university, right? Tell us about that experience. How did it all come about?

**Holly:** Yeah, so I started it back, I think it was 2017, during my final year of university. I was studying Event and Marketing at university, and as part of that degree, I had to do a one year placement. So I was doing a one year event placement, for creative corporate events in London.

Which I was absolutely loving, but I just thought there was something missing within it. So they were all talking to massive companies, which if they didn't have what you were looking for on their inventory, then you weren't going to get it. Basically you had to just keep looking. And at the same time, my mum had a vintage interior shop and, basically I was at the event's company and we were trying to source items, which I knew my mum could get very easily, or she already had.

**Charlie:** I think she already had them. It was sort of 10 vintage gold picture frames. And they were saying, you know, "We need to get these hired in somewhere." And Holly said, "Well my mum can sell them to you. So do you want to buy them off her?" And they said, "Well we'll pay her the purchase price. Just, she's got to get them there and get them back. And then she can retain the asset at the end."

So then it was a bit like, hang on a moment. We're selling 10 picture frames and then we keep the assets at the end of it. And we can keep rinsing and repeating that sort of model.

**Holly:** That's kind of how the idea came about. And then I went to do my final year at uni and I just thought, do I want to go back into that corporate quick nonstop working so many hours for someone else? Or do I want to just try and take the leap now and work for myself? And I just felt like the timing, although a bit scary at uni, but you don't have massive financial commitments as you would potentially 10 years down the line.













**Holly:** (Laughs) But no, normally we're all good kind of trying to leave work at work.

**Charlie:** I'd say we're pretty good like that. We don't have many big riffs or arguments, but likewise, when I pack the van. Every events person will appreciate that maybe their eyes are bigger than the van potentially, especially, and then I see Holly, how she's packing it and it's making me wince, I will tell her that she's not doing particularly well. Likewise, when it comes to styling, if I ever helped with that, I let your creative license reign over mine. That's fine. Roles and responsibilities.

**Allison Howell:** Okay. Tell me about your role separations. Who does what and how do you define.. where's the water's edge there?

**Holly:** Yeah. So basically Charlie, as you said, does a lot of the logistics plans for how the events are going to happen basically. And does a lot of the finance, but he also deals with all the inquiries that come in.

So any of our dry hire. So I probably should have explained at the beginning, we either offer a dry hire service where clients collect, or we deliver items and then it's down to the clients to get creative with, and then we'll collect them at the prearranged time.

**Charlie:** It's very simple.

**Holly:** Or we've got our full styling packages or on the day styling packages. So we've got the styling side of the business, which I take full responsibility of and take care of all the clients for that side. And then on the other side, the dry hire side, Charlie also deals with all the inquiries that initially come in and does them through RW. And that's usually a quicker process than the styling anyway.

**Charlie:** But it's a higher turnover. Obviously we have a lot more dry hire inquiries coming in and jobs throughout the entire year. Naturally that fills up more of my time and then you've got a more concentrated list of styling clients for the year of which you then have a lot of correspondence with over the day.

**Holly:** A lot of mood board time.



**Charlie:** I outnumber it ten to one in terms of workload in terms of if you look at individual clients, but the amount of emails you send compared to me would probably be a lot more.

**Allison Howell:** And do those people self identify?

**Charlie:** So it's quite a distinct process. When a client comes to us, they're either inquiring for styling, of which they'll go straight to Holly, or they're simply wanting items. And if they did switch from X to A to B or whatever, Then it's quite an easy process.

Again, one of the benefits and beauties of working with your partner, business partner, romantic partner, she's at one end of the desk. I'm at the other one. It's not a particularly difficult task for me to say, "Oh, Holly, I think she might want styling." Or likewise, you have a styling call, introduction call, and there's, you know, you might say, "No, they're just going to want the items put in the correct areas." And that's that.

So yeah, there's quite a sort of a natural partition. And then there's a few jobs in between, you are definitely the creative, the driving force behind the company. And it will always be that way. But, often I need to build things or get stuff made or things like that. You're constantly trying to change with the times and whatever the taste and fashion are and then you know, I'm the sort of I suppose pragmatist.

**Holly:** Yeah, I'm like, "I've got an idea. Please, can we make it happen?" And Charlie's like right.

**Charlie:** That's gonna be difficult.

**Allison Howell:** Tell me a little bit about how the company has grown. What do you think has driven your growth over the years?

**Holly:** Styled shoots and getting the content because once we've got the content to put it out on Instagram and TikTok that for us is key. We get a lot of our business through Instagram, so that really helps the growth and just making sure that we've got the content that we want to share and we want to be proud to share.



I would scroll back to the start of my Instagram and really cringe, but that's probably been a massive part of our growth, like with our Instagram page.

**Allison Howell:** Break that down for me. Like when you say we get the content. So say you do a styled shoot, do you have a goal of, okay, I want ten photos from a styled shoot and I'm going to post them in a carousel?

Or do you think I want a hundred photos from a styled shoot and I want this to be something I'm posting over two weeks?

**Holly:** We know now that actually seeing couples on our Instagram page, for example, real couples is fantastic, but actually modeled, styled shoot couples like models doesn't work as well. Whereas people just want to really see our products. So we don't post that much of our couples as much as we love them. But it's the products that we're trying to sell and the service.

So we found from the styled shoots we've organized, we've not always had models going around the styled shoot. So the pictures that we end up getting are very much product based and the design based, which we find works really well. And what we've also worked out and it's only taken so many styled shoots for us to realize that we're not getting what we need out of them. But now if we're providing items for someone else who's organizing a styled shoot, we give them a list and basically say we need pictures with and without models.

And we're just a bit more picky in the nicest of ways, but just so that we get something out of it as well. We get a lot through word of mouth, which is lovely because it means we're doing something right. And it's not just us having to pay for Instagram ads and all of that jazz.

**Charlie:** We did actually win Venue Stylist Of The Year 2024, which I was going to come on to in a moment, but we've been to so many events where you sit down on the chairs they have and then you're moving around a bit and the amount of slop and play in the chairs is like ginormous.

**Allison Howell:** What have been some of your most successful investments that you've made in your collection over the years?



**Charlie:** Oh my gosh. Well, there's one example of which was Holly and I were actually taking a break into the Isle of Wight, weren't we? Holly's mum was out buying for us and she found a pink sofa set.

It's our Rachel and Rosie sofa set, "Pretty In Pink" on our website. And she took a photo, didn't she? I think she was in the car. I don't think she was in the van.

**Holly:** She was leaving.

**Charlie:** She was leaving and she said, "Oh, I've just seen the sofa set. Someone literally wants to get rid of it." I think it was for like £20 or something.

**Holly:** Something crazy.

**Charlie:** So then you were like, you need to go back. You need to get that. That is amazing. It looks beautiful. She ended up going back to get it. And now that's probably been out like 50 or times probably as a package, £200 a package. So return on investment for £20 pound investment, 50 times £200 isn't too bad.

**Holly:** If only they were all like that, but that is probably our best product buy.

Another funny story is probably about our Maria: Double Peacock Chair. I was searching—this was very much at the start of the company and I was searching high and low for an original double peacock chair. I could not find it anywhere and it was literally months of searching. I finally found one online.

And she was like, "Sorry, someone might come collect it, but I'll let you know if they don't." And I said, "Oh, I will buy everything," because they were selling like a collection of stuff. I was like, "I'll buy everything if I could have that chair." She sold it to us and I had to then go collect all the other stuff that she was selling that I had no idea that I wanted.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, sometimes you've got to take the good with the bad in order to get that diamond in the rough, right?

**Charlie:** That is it. No, that is literally it. And we took a lot of bad.

**Holly:** Yeah, we did take the bad.



**Allison Howell:** Wow. Well, so in addition to offering hire items, you also offer styling services. Tell us a little bit about what that entails, because that's a whole separate entity, right? It's the same business, but it's really a separate service in and of itself.

**Holly:** We send our couples a questionnaire for our full gold styling package and we really try and identify what seasonal personality they are, so that way we can really create an intentional design for them. So it's not just, oh, look at Pinterest, find some pictures and make a one page mood board. We go into so much depth and it's just trying to explain to our couples how much depth and how intentional our mood boards are for them as a couple and how personalized we try to make it.

**Charlie:** And it's very much led from the client towards us. As Holly said, it's an interview process. You've got the questionnaire, you're trying to identify what makes them tick essentially.

**Holly:** And the process that I follow is more like an interior process—interior design process rather than a wedding process.

But actually we found that kind of makes us stand out from the crowd a bit because we're not just looking at it from trends. We're trying to work out what brands they like, what textures they like. And kind of go into way more detail that they probably think, why does this girl need to know this?

But actually it really helps create a super intentional design for the couple. And has helped us become Venue Stylist Of The Year.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah tell me about that award. You won that award this year, National Venue Stylist Of The Year for 2024. Tell us about getting that award. Was that a surprise?

Was that something you've been longing for years? Was this a goal you were going after or how did it come about?

**Charlie:** It was a bit like, yes, you're shocked to get the award at the end of it, but at the same time you put in so much effort, we speak to our clients pre, during and post events and they're all absolutely over the moon.





So it's when people say, are you really shocked? And we were really shocked to win, but at the same time, we know we offer a good service, and the clients are extremely happy. So yeah, to break down how the process works, you need to enter into the competition, don't you?

A lot of it is client feedback based. So we say how many events we've done, those clients, they need to populate and provide feedback on our services.

**Holly:** We submitted some videos and pictures and the regional ones, they were very good fun, but it's more that you know who's around, so you know the competitors you're against.

So it's a bit more awkward. We were like, we really want to win this kind of thing. But when we went to the national one, like we were already over the moon that we'd won regional South East Wedding Stylist of the Year. So for us to go to the national one, we had no idea really who we were against because yes, they're competitors, but because of the radius they're not really that local to us. So it was just a lovely surprise. The lovely thing is that you get all the client feedback as well. So everyone that's voted, gives you all the feedback and yeah, it's really, really nice. So even if you didn't win, you still get all this lovely feedback, which is really nice.

**Allison Howell:** So what has the recognition done for the business? Do you feel like it's helped grow the brand?

**Holly:** Yeah, so it's definitely helped grow the brand. What I would say is it's not like we haven't got hundreds and hundreds of new clients from winning National Venue Stylist Of The Year, but what we have done is it's definitely given us something to be able to contact new venues with.

So some venues are very strict with who they add on their venue supplier list, not too keen on adding new people, even though they'd, they just don't do the research. And I think some venues get stuck in their way. Same supplier list. So you're trying to contact venues and they're like, no, sorry, we've got our supplier list or we're not doing it until next year.

And there seems to always be a battle. Whereas because we've won Venue Stylist Of The Year, it just seems to be a really nice openness for us to contact new venues. For us to say, "Look, this is the recognition we've got. Please, can we





**Charlie:** I totally agree with that. And that was something we've learned over the years. It's being quite strategic with what venues we contact and what venues we would like to work at.

We never want to be the sort of company where we're doing thousands of events every year. So it's very important to us to identify very strategic venues to try and penetrate into a high proportion of their yearly total events. And as you say, having that leverage to get in there and actually capture those for us, that's a far more valuable way of doing business and expanding business.

It obviously is great to have lots more inquiries for styling nationwide. But if somebody wants it in Aberdeen, a styling job, there's a very small chance we can do it in Aberdeen. Whereas if we contact, and get our foot in the door with venues within an hour of us, that creates really, really good operational efficiencies.

**Allison Howell:** To shift gears just a little bit whether on the styling side or when it comes to adding to your collection, where do you look for creative inspiration?

**Charlie:** I mean this is totally... not my question, Allison. I don't want to shock you.

**Holly:** I try my best not to take too much of our inspiration from weddings themselves.

Pinterest is an amazing tool, and I say this to all our clients, but it really is a rabbit hole, and you can end up just trying to copy pictures and that is not what we want to do. We want to stay original. I really try and even from looking at shop windows, take inspiration from that.

Looking at fashion, looking at home interior designs. Interior design is definitely one of my passions. And going to antique fairs and taking the time to, say I might not need anything specific that I can get at this antique fair, but me going really helps inspire me to come up with new ideas and looking at a vintage item thinking how else could we use that? And so that is where I take a lot of inspiration.

**Charlie:** We've got things like an old fashioned bike that we've turned into a bar. Actually we bought that, didn't we? Just quirky, semi industrial farm based products that can be reconditioned and slightly tweaked and altered to become an actual functional item within the wedding day. Drinks reception is a great idea









**Holly:** Yeah, a hundred percent. They have been. I wouldn't have probably started this. I couldn't have done it because I couldn't have lived at home. So they have a hundred percent been massively influential on the growth of it.

Good question! I think there's just so many people, even suppliers within the industry, although they've not known our whole journey, the fact that they've been there and they've been supportive has been like, massive.

**Charlie:** Because we're together all the time, a lot of that encouragement comes from each other which sounds a bit cheesy.

**Allison Howell:** No, there's some real camaraderie in this industry and people. Just the fact that people refer you is such a boost, right? I mean, we could never do it alone. And then the fact that people refer you over and over. I mean, it's fun to get to work with your friends, right?

But also there's this confidence that you gain from knowing that other people believe in you and continue to refer you. Well, tell us about some of the milestones or moments in your business that you've truly celebrated. What are you most proud of?

**Charlie:** I think one of the big ones early on is the units, obviously like massive milestones going from unit to unit to unit.

And as Holly said, the price, if you were going to go to a general industrial estate you're going to be paying a particularly high premium to get the sort of square footage that you want. So we are always looking for slightly more interesting sort of setups in terms of storage, whether it be on a farm or something related to a family friend or something like that. So when we found storage units that fit the bill over the years.

**Holly:** Oh, it felt so good.

**Allison Howell:** You feel like you beat the system.

**Charlie:** There was one that I took you to, didn't I? We were really up against it in terms of, I think we were coming into the season or something was about to happen and we were buying more chairs or something.





work with because we don't only do weddings. We do corporate events as well. And when you get an inquiry from this brand that you've been using or listening to, or I've been seeing for years and just think they're massive. And then they inquire to use your props.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, that's wonderful. Okay, so what brings you joy right now in your business?

**Charlie:** The new warehouse is so much more efficient.

**Holly:** Yeah.

**Charlie:** We used to do midnight collections and turnarounds where we would arrive at the unit and we'd have to get through several gates manually.

Whereas now, electronic gates straight up to the shutter. Electric shutter.

**Allison Howell:** The electric shutter brings you joy right now.

**Charlie:** It does, so much joy. Straight into location, straight into the racking, and it's oh, we're just so much more efficient. But if you want a quick answer, electric shutter.

**Allison Howell:** What about you, Holly?

**Holly:** Even things like our trolleys, we've named them because they bring us so much joy, because they help us out so much. So every event, and now we're in our peak wedding season, right? So we are constantly in vans unloading, loading. So anything like that, that can help us speed up our delivery process or make it less stressful on your back, like it's the smallest things make us happy.

**Allison Howell:** When you started this, you thought, man, I'm going to be able to create beautiful events. And now, you really just run a glorified moving company, right?

**Charlie:** No, you are absolutely right. People contact us saying, "Oh, we want to work for you. We want to create all these amazing events, we can do X and Y."



And then they'll say at the end of it, "I could only work between these hours. Can't lift heavy boxes. Can't drive large vehicles. You know what I mean? And not willing to work for X."

**Holly:** I don't think we're the right fit, really.

**Allison Howell:** Oh yeah. Sometimes what it is very different than what you imagined it would be.

**Charlie:** Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Allison Howell:** Okay. We're going to go into our lightning round here. So I'm going to ask you questions and these are real quick fire questions. What piece in your collection would you most like to take home today?

**Holly:** Cleo Seating Area.

**Allison Howell:** Okay. Charlie, think of your best team member and describe them to me in three words or less.

**Charlie:** It would be Linda, which is Holly's mother. Yup. She's going to be up there. The three words would be dependable, resourceful, and caring.

**Allison Howell:** Oh, lovely. Activity you do to spark creativity when you're worn out?

**Holly:** Go for a nice walk, a dog walk.

**Allison Howell:** A business book you'd recommend?

**Holly:** I listen to a lot of podcasts rather than books.

**Charlie:** You listen to the Karren Brady one.

**Holly:** Karren Brady's book, I loved it. I read that so quickly. So yeah, that's probably my answer.

**Allison Howell:** Okay, what's the book called?

**Holly:** Strong Woman, The Truth About Getting To The Top.









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