

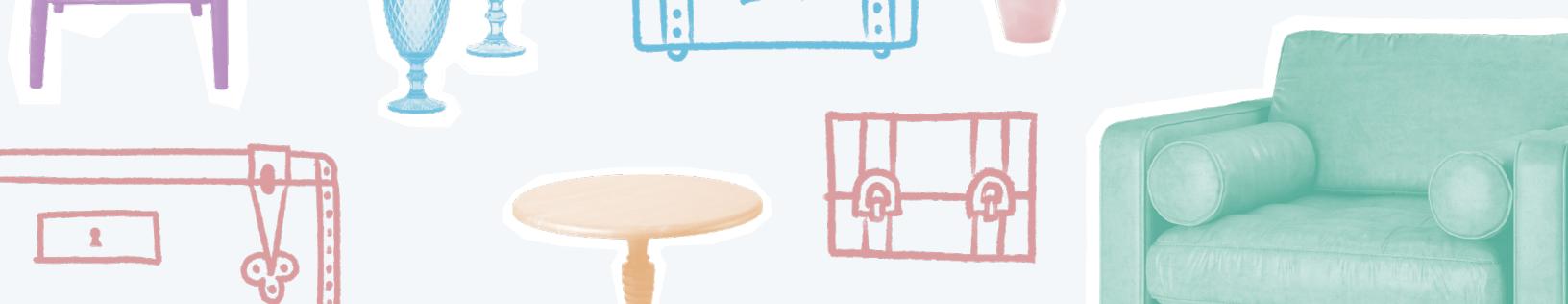
# *The* **TRUNK SHOW**

*With RW ELEPHANT*

**SEASON 4 EPISODE 3**



**INTENTIONAL GROWTH AND  
OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES WITH  
JENNA MACKANICH AND JILLIAN  
MACKEY OF LILAC AND LACE CO. AND  
COURNEY INGHRAM OF THE  
COLLECTION**



## **WELCOME BACK TO THE TRUNK SHOW,**

hosted by Allison Howell and brought to you by RW Elephant. This episode discusses the importance of strategic growth, intentionality and operational efficiency with 2 different rental companies.

First is **Jenna Mackanich and Jillian Mackey, owners of Lilac and Lace Co.** located just outside Philadelphia, PA.

The second is with **Courtney Inghram, founder of The Collection by Courtney Inghram** which services Virginia and North Carolina



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

Strategically Staying Small

Creating Operational Efficiencies

Defining Success Through Intentionality

The Power of Sisterly Partnership

Tricks for Managing Tabletop Rentals



## QUOTES:

"I think that that has become ingrained in a lot of us, the more options you offer people, that's positive... I have found that the less options I offer, but that are **more geared towards a specific kind of client** that has **allowed me to find success** in this small niche." - Courtney Inghram

"We were hungry because this was our first couple years in business. So we just took on everything... but **we were creating a lifestyle that really wasn't sustainable for our home life.**" - Jillian Mackey

"**I think we as women just want to make sure that we're talking to people in the right way** and we don't want to offend anyone. You kind of almost shoot yourself in the foot a little bit... when you don't send those emails and make those calls and just put yourself out there." - Courtney Inghram

"**So we've really streamlined our processes...** and that's really, really helped us this year to the point where, I don't know if it's okay to say this but we owe way too much in taxes now because we're too efficient."

- Jenna Mackanich

"It's very fulfilling to see the finished product. This is creating memories. People are sitting around a table together, **having this once in a lifetime moment**. That makes me feel good and like what we're doing is important and it's not just all frivolous." - Courtney Inghram

"**The more instruction you can give people, the better.** Because the person who rented it is almost certainly not the person who's going to be packing it." - Allison Howell

"If you're the type of person who needs help right now, send an email to a handful of people, because it might be that they can't get back to you today but they can get back to you in the future. **It's not personal sometimes when they don't respond.**" - Allison Howell

"We have a very small space for storage, which has **caused me to be very intentional both about the pieces that I buy and make an investment in** and...sell off the pieces that aren't doing their job anymore."

- Courtney Inghram

## Episode Transcription

**Intro:** Hello, and welcome back to the Trunk Show. I'm your host, Allison Howell. 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.

Last time on the Trunk Show, I spoke with Raul from Lavish Event Rentals about scaling his rental business to focus on volume and large quantities. At this time, we'll be hearing from the other side of that coin, intentionally limiting operations.

We have two fabulous rental businesses with us today, sharing their perspectives on staying at a strategically small size. First, we'll hear from Jillian and Jenna, the sister duo behind the decor rental company, Lilac and Lace.

Join us as we chat about how they got started. I'm so excited to have you both here.

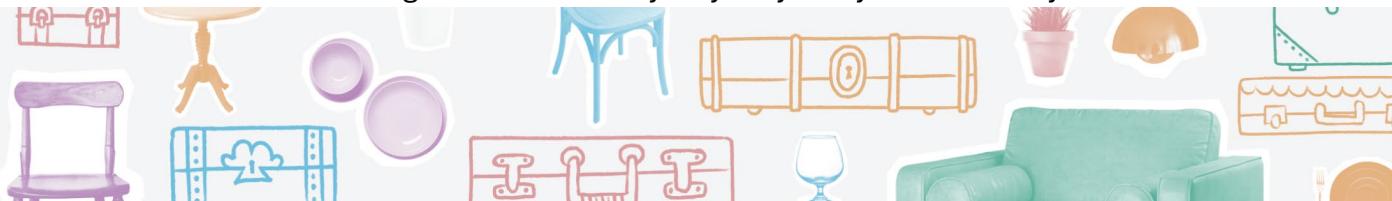
Before we dive in, why don't you each go ahead and introduce yourselves and tell us who you are and what you do in the world of rentals?

**Jenna Mackanich:** So I'm Jenna. We own Lilac and Lace Co. We're outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And we're a small family owned, I like to call us an upscale rental company. We do a lot of weddings and special events.

**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah, so I'm Jillian, Jenna and I are sisters. The company started in 2017 by a different owner. Her name was Dina. I graduated college in 2020 in like the height of...

## **Jenna Mackanich: The lockdowns.**

**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah, which I think a lot of wedding vendors were trying to kind of navigate that, like nobody really knew what to do. So Dina is a close family friend of ours that has known us our entire lives. And she was really just looking for somebody to help with lanterns and cleaning rugs and prepping weddings, small stuff like that. I just got out of college. I couldn't really get a job because nobody was hiring. So I just said like, hey, I'm free, we'd love to help you. And then like one thing led to another. Then I started going on wedding deliveries with her and I just like absorbed it all right away. Like I absolutely loved it. I was actually living with Jenna at the time. I was living in her house and I would come home and I remember I would just tell Jenna, like, this is where we went. We went into this venue, we did this stuff. I was just so blown away by the events industry. Just seeing how elaborate things were, seeing how different each wedding was from one to the next. I remember I came home from like the very first wedding I did with her and I was telling Jenna, I was like, I just couldn't believe it. The family just like, they didn't help us clean up. Like that's so bizarre. Not realizing like that's literally why they hire you is that they don't



have to do that. Yeah. So looking back on that, I just think that's so funny. But yeah, I was a entrepreneurship major in college. So like my mind just naturally kind of goes that direction of like, okay, how can we expand the business? How can we grow? And working with Dina, I would, I mean, be in the truck for hours, on deliveries and stuff. So I would be like, oh, like you should take on more weddings. Like I could get friends to help and all that sort of stuff. So we recruited Jenna probably six months later, I would say. And then Dina was kind of reaching a point where she was kind of ready to just retire from the event industry, but she didn't want to let the business go. So then one day she approached us. It was the day before my 22nd birthday, I remember. She approached us and asked if we wanted to purchase it. And I remember I ran home, freaked Jenna and my, well, he was my boyfriend at the time, completely freaked them out, didn't tell them why I needed to talk to them. But I was like, I need you all to meet at Jenna's house. I need to talk to you about something. They had no idea.

**Jenna Mackanich:** Yeah, we're like, what did we do? Are we in trouble? Like, why does she want to talk to us? Like, she knows we hate, like, hey, like, I got to talk to you. And then nothing. It's like, just tell me.

**Jillian Mackey:** But I was like, this is like such a big moment. Yeah. So I remember I set up the camera and it is like the worst quality video ever. And I was so nervous. I couldn't even like get it out.

**Allison Howell:** But you knew you wanted to capture their reactions. Is that why you set up a camera?

**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah, I wanted to see their reactions. Cause like Jenna and I had always, we would come home from working a wedding and we would always say, why didn't we think of this idea first? This is so fun. And Jenna and I's work ethic is very similar. Like we just love to grind. We love to just work ourselves into the ground, honestly. So we were like, if we had a business like this, like we could really like take off and we just never knew it was a possibility.

**Allison Howell:** What had you been doing before, Jenna?

**Jenna Mackanich:** So I'm actually a registered nurse. So I was in full-time nursing and coming out of COVID, I was kind of like, I don't know if I want to keep doing this. Like I'm really burnt out. I wasn't happy going into work. It was really hard. I mean, COVID was really hard on a lot of us nurses or all of us nurses.

**Allison Howell:** My husband's A physician, so I saw that from this side too.



**Jenna Mackanich:** Yeah, so you get it. It's hard. I mean, I worked through COVID pregnant. My husband got laid off, so he was home with our one-year-old at the time. And it was just a really stressful time. So when she presented that, I was like, I would love to do this. And I always love design. But when I graduated high school in 2007, if you told someone you were going for interior design, they're like, they don't make any money. So I chose the safer route, which was nursing, because I knew that God forbid, if I stayed single the rest of my life or I had a family and something happened to my spouse, like I would always have a job that I could provide. And I did enjoy it, but COVID kind of put a little bit of a damper on that. So when she presented this possibility that I'm like, wow, like I could kind of work from home during the week, be with my kids, because I had two then at that time, and then just be per diem at the hospital. I was like, this could be great. So we started over, taking over the business in November of 2021. And I stayed full-time at the hospital for about another six months, and then I went per diem. So our first busy season, I was navigating working full-time, two kids at home. and running the business with Jillian.

**Allison Howell:** So that sounds really easy.

**Jenna Mackanich:** Yeah, it was great. But then going per diem was really great and having that more flexibility to dive into the business more. Yeah, so that's kind of the backstory.

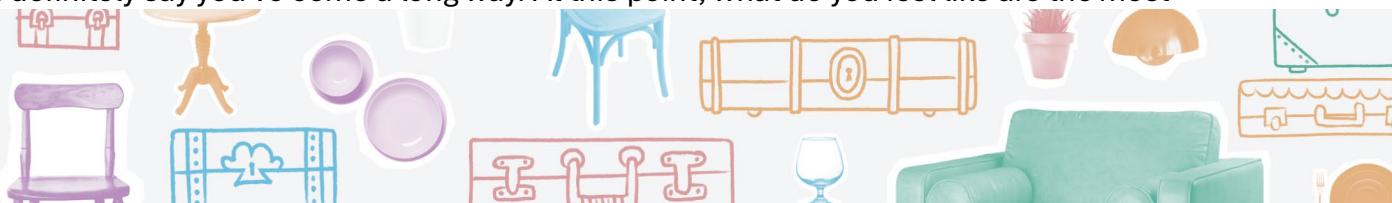
**Allison Howell:** Yeah, well, okay, so you guys kind of started in a challenging time and really hit the ground running. Obviously, you studied entrepreneurship, Jillian, but I mean, did you kind of know what to do or was it sort of learn as you go?

**Jillian Mackey:** I felt like Jenna and I kind of, a lot of it was obviously trial and error, but I felt like we both kind of just like fell right into it. I graduated, I didn't have a job for a little bit, and then I ended up getting a job. So I actually was working full-time as well as an office manager. While Jenna was full-time at the hospital, I was full-time working in an office. And that taught me a lot of accounting and stuff, but to the point that I didn't want to do that for the business. Sure, you learned what you don't want to do. Exactly. Yeah. So Jenna kind of took that role on, but I was able to kind of dive deep into like the marketing side, social media side, which that I felt like kind of came naturally to me just because of the marketing classes and all of that was so fresh in my mind from college. But a lot of it, I would say, just came naturally. Like we learned what works for us, what didn't work. We're still kind of figuring that out, but I feel like we have like a really good groove now.

**Jenna Mackanich:** We've come a long way.

**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah.

**Allison Howell:** If you've been able to sustain a business through COVID and beyond, you can definitely say you've come a long way. At this point, what do you feel like are the most



effective marketing tools you have in your belt. You mentioned social media. Is that where most of your clients are coming from? Or are you spending a lot of time developing referral relationships? Or where are you finding that your marketing effort is paying off?

**Jillian Mackey:** So it's largely social media and referrals. We have a great referral rating, I guess, if that's what you would call it. Also, I would say like a big part of it is being on preferred vendor lists. has been huge for us. There's several venues in our area that we're very blessed in being on their list and being a part of their open houses. Posting them on social media is definitely the best because I'll post like everything that we do every single weekend on our stories. And then I'll tag like the venue if there was a florist, all that, and then they repost it and then the brides see it from there. So thankfully, we haven't really had to like invest too much money into like outsourcing marketing because social media venues, referrals have kind of really filled up our books that way.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, that's great. Well, tell me about a challenge that you've faced lately. Are there any hiccups along the way or things that you've experienced now that you're You're solidly about five years in yourselves. What barriers are you seeing to the growth of your business?

**Jenna Mackanich:** We came in obviously right after COVID and a lot of, there's a lot of COVID, I feel like there's almost like a backlog of weddings. So you not only had your like 2022 people who were already getting married, but then you had your 2020s and your 2021s that were getting rescheduled. So we came in a really like hot time, but it also, we were working a lot to the point where we were like, we don't really feel like we have a life. And then we saw kind of, we've seen kind of a little bit of a dip. We've kind of had to reevaluate. We've also gotten really good at keeping our costs down. So we're a little bit pickier about who we take. Like if you're close to another venue that we're at, you know, like that saves us time and money because we're not going the opposite direction. And I think we've had to be a little bit more flexible in just, what we're taking, what we're not. We've had to do just a little bit of marketing. We, for the first time ever, we did a sale. It was if you booked in the month of, or like within this, I think it was like a two week window, you got 15% off of your order.

**Allison Howell:** And was that effective?

**Jenna Mackanich:** It was, yeah.

**Allison Howell:** Okay, so it got people who were kind of on the fence to actually pull the trigger.

**Jenna Mackanich:** Yeah. because they realized they were going to get a discount. And we actually found some people still put, were talking to us, didn't even use the code. So like, I



guess they either didn't see it or, but some people did. They were very like, hey, I saw this on Instagram. I want a book. I want to lock this in. Do you have this available? And it kind of got people, because we find in December, it's a little bit slower. Everybody's, their budgets are going towards Christmas. And then we really pick up in the new year. But we were kind of like, what? We are a small business. We want to promote it. I think we also asked people to share it. They had to share the sale and there was like a few different things they had to do, which is like free marketing.

**Jillian Mackey:** Keeping our overhead down, but also being flexible in terms of not being so much of a stickler when it comes to like delivery minimums, especially if it's an off season date. Being a little bit more particular though, in that if your venue is 2 hours away, it's not going to be a good fit for us because now we have that spot available for a wedding that's 30 minutes away. So being a little bit pickier about our schedule and kind of puzzle piecing it together, we have found to be much more effective because those first two years, obviously we had the COVID relapse is not the right word, but like the spillover, the recovery weddings. Yes, yeah, So we had like the COVID spillover. Then, I mean, that we also, we were hungry because this was our first couple years in business. So we just took on everything and we would be all over the planet, 17 hour days, like, you know how it goes. And it was a miracle how we didn't overbook each other. I don't know how we didn't make any major mistakes. We were so eager and excited to have the business and to grow it, but it wasn't, we were creating a lifestyle that really wasn't sustainable for our home life. So I feel like now, because we are being a little bit pickier with, where our travel radius is and we're being, we have our overhead under control that now I feel like I feel like this summer, I would say, and I think Jenna would agree, is like our first true summer. We're actually getting to spend time with family, like plan trips, go down the shore to the beach.

**Allison Howell:** So you feel like you're running your business. It's not running you.

**Jillian Mackey:** Correct. Yes. We're definitely Jenna.

**Jenna Mackanich:** In the first few years too, I mean, we inquiry forms would come in and it was just kind of like, I think Jenna got the last one. Jillian will take this one. And we were booking sometimes the same dates. And then it was a miracle that we didn't overbook something. And we realized kind of like, oh my word, we have, there was like one day in October where we had like 6 weddings. And we were like, I didn't know you were talking to someone. I didn't know you like, and it was like, oh my word. And then we would have like a knot in our stomach. So we decided to kind of streamline the process. And so the next year we did, she booked odd months, I booked even months. But then that meant I had June and October. And June that year was insane. I joke all the time, I barely survived. And October was kind of crazy. So then the next year, we did Jillian books the first half of May, the first



half of June, the first half of September, and the first half of October. Oh wow, okay, So we have a whole process down now. So we know like if it comes in this date, it's automatically my booking. That way we're both not talking to people about the same lounge package. And then it's like, oh, they booked, first technically, even though I just told this couple it was available. So we've really streamlined our processes. Like our days in the shop are much more effective. Like when we're in there prepping, sometimes it would take us like a few days a week to get everything prepped. Now we can do it in about half a day. So that has allowed us to, we don't have to have as much help come in. It's kind of been about cutting costs, trying to be as efficient as possible. And that's really, really helped us this year to the point where, I don't know if it's okay to say this, Sheila, you could tell me, but we owe way too much in taxes now because we're too efficient.

**Jillian Mackey:** Oh, it's painful.

**Jenna Mackanich:** So it's like, yeah, so it's kind of like, they're like, you need to spend more money. And I'm like, but the whole point is to try to.

**Jillian Mackey:** I want the money.

**Jenna Mackanich:** Yeah. So it's been, it's a balance. It's like every year I feel like there's a new challenge we have to overcome, but when you figure it out, it's a really good feeling.

**Allison Howell:** For sure, for sure. Well, so looking forward, do you feel like there are challenges that are coming up or barriers that are coming up that you feel like, oh, how are we going to solve that one? Or we need some resources to attack that next challenge.

**Jenna Mackanich:** So our next challenge is October 1st because.

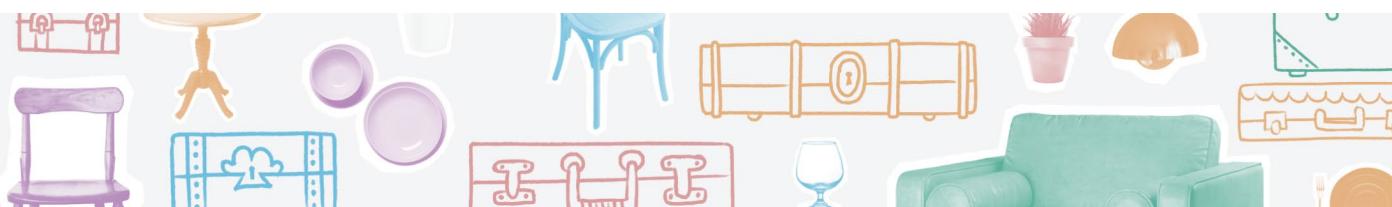
**Jillian Mackey:** Jillian is so stressed.

**Allison Howell:** Oh, congratulations.

**Jenna Mackanich:** And she's doing October 1st. So that's not a busy month. I know.

**Jillian Mackey:** I could have planned better. Okay. It is what it is.

**Jenna Mackanich:** So that is kind of how I see that's our next challenge is going to be running a busy half of a busy season. without my sidekick or my, not sidekick, but my equal. So that's, I think, going to be the next challenge of trying. We have to be ultra organized. Mallory is our right-hand woman. She's awesome. She's also our cousin. But it's going to be relying on other people because there's going to have to be a few different teams on being able to trust and let go that they can do it and one of us won't be there. So that's kind of our upcoming challenge.



**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah, and it's unpredictable because anybody who has a kid knows that like you never know when you're gonna go. So like it could be September, it could be October. So really it's like the last two weeks of September, first two weeks of October are kind of like a little scary for us. But, and also like something that if you're not in the wedding industry, people don't think about is we had the first weekend of October, pretty much it was fully booked. before I even found out I was pregnant. So, and it's also probably our craziest weekend in October. So a lot of it is just making sure that we have all of our ducks in a row. I know, I mean, we have a great team. So like I have full faith in everybody. Jenna, I have full faith in Jenna. It's more just like the uneasiness of like, Is my water going to break at a wedding or like what's going to happen?

**Jenna Mackanich:** And I want to be there. So I'm a little stressed that I'm going to be in Philly at a wedding and she's going to be like, I'm in labor.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, of course. Well, it's kind of navigating all that. Yeah, there's this double-edged sword of having all your family involved in the business, right? Because on the one hand, there's this way in which you can rest easy knowing that like, okay, everyone has more invested here than just a job, right? But the other side is like, oh, well, then when we all want to be together, the whole business has to shut down. And so when you're in a situation like this where the business can't shut down, you really do have to rely on people outside that family circle. You're not necessarily set up for that ahead of time. So I'm excited to see how it all goes. I'm sure it will be an adventure. Is this your first, Jillian?

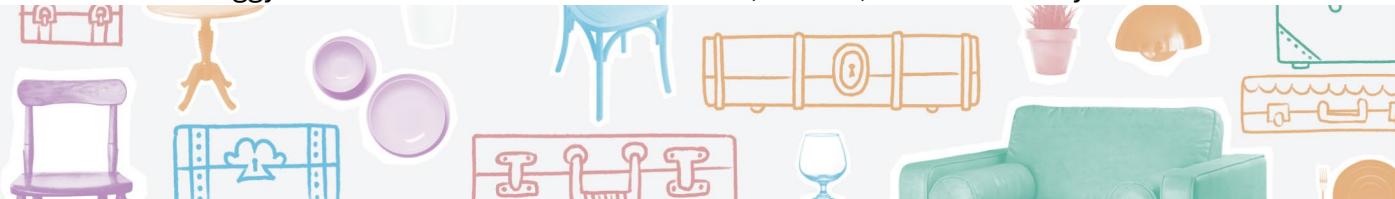
**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah, it's my first. Yeah. Jenna actually was, she, so we got the business in November of 2021. March of 2022, Jenna found out she was pregnant with her third. So she went through our first true busy season and full year pregnant. And she did great. So I'm just trying to keep up with that because it's getting hot in Philly.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah, you need one of those neck fan things. And You gotta make sure that you, point a lot instead of actually doing the movie, right.

**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah, and that's the thing about Jenna and I is when she was pregnant, I mean, you could not tell her she couldn't pick something up. I now understand that. I understand, like, I don't like being told I can't do something because in my head, I can do it. And so it's, that's been like the hardest part. We actually didn't even share the news with like the public. or like any wedding vendors until 2 weeks ago, because I was like, I just don't want people to really know because I wouldn't be able to work.

**Allison Howell:** You weren't showing enough to be able to do that. That's amazing.

**Jillian Mackey:** I could hide it. I could hide it with wearing black is very forgiving. So like I would wear like a baggy black lilac shirt for deliveries. Plus, I mean, we're a delivery team.



So like, we're not really, we could easily be in and out with interacting with very few people. I'm sure people probably were like, is she, but I'm not going to ask her. It's like people probably were like figuring it out, but very, very few people knew.

**Allison Howell:** Wow, very exciting. Okay, so you mentioned that you were able to create a lot more efficiency this year and that it takes a lot less time to prep your orders. Was there a secret sauce there or what do you think the difference is that allowed you to create that efficiency, particularly in your prep time?

**Jillian Mackey:** So we actually changed warehouses this past year. So we were in a 5,000 square foot warehouse for the first three years of our business. And then Jenna, her family purchased a home that had a warehouse on the property. So we then ended up moving there in, I guess it was like the new year. And that warehouse is a little bit smaller, but we did a huge Instagram sale. We cleaned out a lot of inventory that honestly, like some of it we didn't even know we had because yeah, it would just get lost up on a shelf or like somebody would give it to us and it never made it on the website or something. So we really like decluttered our inventory. And then by having the warehouse for three years at our old location, we were able to kind of learn like what works best where. So we were able, with it being now a warehouse that Jenna owns, we had a little bit more flexibility with kind of customizing it to exactly how we thought would work best. And also it's a little bit smaller, so there's not as much like walking and walking back and forth from one end to the other. So I think that really helped. We also just like are much more efficient at the end of events now with how we package things.

**Allison Howell:** And before that wasn't the case.

**Jillian Mackey:** Some things had a home.

**Jenna Mackanich:** They had an area, but it wasn't like the Kendra sofa goes here. And we, the one winter when we were slower, I mean, we like basically went through almost everything and everything had a home, so it fit perfectly and it was very clean. And we, Jillian went around and like put tape and like, this is the Millie sofa, this is where it goes. So, because like we would get back from deliveries and our team would just put everything inside the door. just everything would go in this area. And then Mondays, we would clean it all up. And then it was just like, we're spending half of Monday putting things back where it's like, they could have, instead of putting it down, they could have walked, 20 feet that way and put it back in its spot. So then everybody kind of knew like, all right, you don't have to unpack all the lanterns, but take the bin to the back and put it where they're going to go. Because like, we don't expect people at midnight to be, you know, putting candles back on a shelf. But it's like just, if you're carrying the sofa, take it, put it back in its spot, put the



chairs back, that kind of thing. And that made a huge difference. So then Monday morning when we came in, you're not coming into a huge mess.

**Allison Howell:** Well, and even just having things labeled, I think creates that expectation that this is the home, this is where this belongs. And if people don't know where it belongs, then sometimes they either feel like, well, I don't know, I shouldn't do it, or they feel like, well, it's not my job, right? Whereas if it's labeled, then, hey, you're a lot more accountable, right? Because that spot on the floor isn't labeled.

**Jenna Mackanich:** Right, exactly. And I mean, there'd be times where we're walking around like, where's this chair? I can't find it anywhere. And it's like tucked in the back. So now it's really easy. You know exactly where you're going. That cuts down time. And it's just cleaner and neater.

**Allison Howell:** How many square feet do you have now?

**Jillian Mackey:** Do we know the official number?

**Jenna Mackanich:** I think it's probably a little less than 3,000.

**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah.

**Jenna Mackanich:** Maybe. Yeah. It's a lot smaller, but it's taller. So we gained a whole top shelf that we never had before.

**Allison Howell:** Great. Well, it's interesting how even a smaller space can create that efficiency for you because you're more intentional, right? Well, that's fantastic. Well, thank you so much for sharing all of this wisdom with us. It seems like you guys have learned a lot in your rental adventures, and I'm so glad to share that with our audience. I know it's really fun to see where you've been and where you are now. I don't know if you've had a lot of time to reflect on that, but I always love kind of moments like this to look back and see all the triumphs you've had.

**Jenna Mackanich:** Yeah, I feel like every November we kind of like reminisce back and it's crazy.

**Allison Howell:** You have a lot to be proud of.

**Jillian Mackey:** Yeah, I'm very happy with the direction that we're heading. I feel like those first two years, we kind of just like put our heads down and got to work. And then I feel like year three, we both were kind of looking at each other like, can we keep doing this? Because like, this is like, starting to kind of affect like our personal goals, our family lives and stuff. And so we were trying to kind of navigate that. And honestly, I think even though the events industry, and really I feel like almost every business in America has kind of taken



a little bit of a, hit a little bit of a slump, like with the election and the recession and that sort of thing. Honestly, like I feel like it's kind of been a blessing for us in a way, because we have gotten our summers back. We've been able to, I think I said it earlier, but just like do so many things that we missed doing. in those first couple years. And I think we're really happy with how efficient the business has been and how it's now like the business is running itself. It's not running us anymore.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, that's fantastic. Well, congratulations. Well, thank you so much. I have one final question for you. What do you enjoy most about your rental adventures?

**Jillian Mackey:** It's given us an opportunity as a family to get really close. Our brother also is in the wedding industry. He's A videographer. So he has like a similar schedule and he has a similar understanding. And it's nice because sometimes on like a random Tuesday afternoon, we'll be like, hey, like, do you all just want to like get together and do something? That is not normal in like a traditional work setting. So I do love that the rental business, even though it does kind of consume your weekends, It has given us a really strong family dynamic, which I really appreciate.

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**Transition:** It's great to hear how Lilac and Lace has given Jenna and Jillian the time to focus on what matters most to them. Now we'll catch Courtney Ingram's story about keeping her rental business at the size she thrives in. Courtney is the namesake of the collection by Courtney Ingram, elevated tabletop rentals servicing Virginia and surrounding states. She found her start in the event world as a florist and still enjoys designing florals alongside her tabletop rentals. She'll share about that process of starting a tabletop rental company, the journey that is networking, and what success can look like in a smaller rental biz.

**Courtney Inghram:** So my name is Courtney Ingram. I am involved in the wedding world of rentals primarily, and we have a tabletop rental business in Virginia Beach, Virginia. So we specialize in chargers, flatware, place settings, napkin rings, glassware, all those fun things.

**Allison Howell:** Well, I wouldn't say that there's a traditional path to starting a boutique event rental business, but yours is a little circuitous, I would say, in that you had another business in the event industry first. Tell us about that.

**Courtney Inghram:** Yes, so I also am a wedding floral designer. So I have been in the wedding industry now for a decade. So that was my beginnings in the wedding world, doing flowers. And since I have started the tabletop rental business, I still also design flowers. So some events I do both, like we do flowers and we bring rentals to coordinate with the



couple's design. We have a background in floral design and then also we still are regularly sending out rentals as well. And sometimes the clients are obviously separate, and then obviously sometimes the clients happen to be joint.

**Allison Howell:** But the collection kind of came out of a need you saw with your floral clients, correct?

**Courtney Inghram:** Yes. So I was setting up these weddings, doing florals, and noticing that some of the place settings, it just seemed to all look the same. The same gold chargers that you have seen at Michael's before. Not that there's anything wrong with those, but it just seemed like I was seeing the same things over and over again. And I started to wonder what it could look like to offer some different, more niche, beautiful, high-end options to my area specifically.

**Allison Howell:** Right. So the collection was actually a way to address one of the challenges you were facing in your floral business.

**Courtney Inghram:** Sure. Yeah, that's a good way of putting it. I was noticing that the kinds of weddings we were designing florals for didn't seem to have a super high-end, detailed finish with table settings or even linens, things like that. But we were providing these beautiful flowers, which obviously we felt very proud of, and we wanted them to feel enhanced by the tables and by the overall feel of the event. And oftentimes, in that time, it felt that the flowers were kind of the big wow moment, and then the rest of the tables and the reception was a little more dialed back. So we were hoping if we provided some of these options to our local area, then people would start taking advantage of that.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, and obviously that's worked.

**Courtney Inghram:** It's been very successful, you know, considering, which I'm sure we'll get into, like our setup and our humble beginnings and humble operation, just a small, small family operation. It has done very well, and I've been very grateful for the reception and the continued support from our area.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, well, but I know you face some challenges. So let's talk about some of those, particularly cleaning. Get into this business thinking, oh man, I'm going to get to buy pretty things and set beautiful tables. And you don't always think about the fact that wow. I'm actually going to have to wash dishes all day, every day. Talk to me about how cleaning has been a barrier to the growth of your business.

**Courtney Inghram:** That's a great question. And it's funny, exactly as you described it is how it began. I bought these beautiful pieces from designers and, lovely dinnerware from different collections. And I start sending it out to events and it comes back with like a hunk



of chicken on it. And I'm horrified. I'm, oh my gosh, like this is a \$26 plate and it's got chicken crusted on it. Like, I cannot believe this. is wild.

**Allison Howell:** You're almost offended, right?

**Courtney Inghram:** That they used it. for the purpose that I was renting it for now, but I was. I actually, not offended, but I was very taken aback. Oh my, oh my heavens. I mean, what are we going to do about this? cannot go on. So because of our setup, we store all the rentals in our home studio. We have a fully finished space and we have a home dishwasher that we use to clean all of these items. And so I realized that this sending items back dirty cannot work for us. So we started a variety of tactics to solve that problem. I started charging up front a refundable security deposit, which the client receives back after the items are received back, rinsed and cleaned, however I specify it per event to the best of their abilities. I also have a sticker, which I'm locally known for. And also sometimes I think I get the side eye, but I have a sticker that goes on each crate with like cleaning instructions. Hey, you know, thank you so much for renting from us. This is what we need from you before you break open this bag. acknowledge what you're saying here. So we've got that. And then we also have a few different options for people that maybe don't have access to a kitchen for their event. The plate scrape, we send that out for events that maybe are.

**Allison Howell:** Okay, let's talk about this plate scrape because I think there are so many people in the industry who don't know it. They were actually a sponsor of one of our London Gather events. I think it's a genius invention. Talk about it for a minute.

**Courtney Inghram:** So it's basically it's a It seems relatively simple.

**Allison Howell:** I mean, when you look at it, but it's kind of like a trash can with brushes in it, right?

**Courtney Inghram:** Correct. It's genius. So it's perfect for like end of night dumping with soapy and basically these built-in brushes and this large bucket basically strip the plate, you know, of all the debris and things like that. I think they say for each bucket, I think it can accommodate up to like 200 dunks or something before you need to like reset it with soap. So it's great for like a full event where there's 100 people, they ate salad and dinner, you can just dunk the plates and go. So typically what we do is rent these out for people that are having like a tented wedding or don't have access to like a full kitchen. And then that way we're receiving the items back in a manageable condition so we can sanitize and clean at our own rate without worrying about chicken on the plate.

**Allison Howell:** Right, Well, it's so interesting because I actually had a very small dinner party this last weekend for my parents' 50th anniversary. It was just eight of us, our little family, and I had rented pieces. Shout out to Folklore and Catalog, our clients here in



California. And my husband was so nervous about using our clients' pieces, because he just didn't want to break anything and he wanted to, leave it, get, send it to them exactly how they wanted it sent. And even using our own kitchen, it just, it's tricky getting things back to people and putting in the crates right and making sure, you pack it all consistently. And we were very conscientious, but I think it's so wise of you to have stickers to tell people. And they had like a laminated label zip tied to one of their crates. like to describe exactly how to pack their chargers because, hey, chargers need to be packed a certain way. And I just thought, the more instruction you can give people, the better. Because the person who rented it is almost certainly not the person who's going to be packing it, you know, or the person who's going to be, you know, unpacking it or putting it back or whatever. Like, you got to think that the person who's touching it is not the person who signed your terms and conditions, right?

**Courtney Inghram:** Totally. They have no idea. So we actually have that same thing. A friend of mine that owns a tabletop rental company in Florida shared her template with me for having each item labeled in the crate. So we have like the quantity that gets packed in each crate. So that way, a crate that we sent out with 20 chargers isn't being overloaded with 40 and no one can lift it up. We've got little dividers that we send out depending on the fragility of the different items. So we'll say like this item needs to be sent back with dividers versus not all on those laminated tags as well. So yeah, different different strategies really help educate, you know, for the people that are pulling them out of the crates.

**Allison Howell:** Courtney, I got to say, this episode is going to be gold for so many people because there are people out there who are like, how do people accomplish this? I don't know how people are getting their stuff back without it being broken. And just knowing what other people doing is so helpful sometimes. You think you're in the dark, you know?

Well, you're not just thinking you're in the dark. You're in the dark. You're in the dark. You don't know what to do. And if you don't have a community of people who do what you do, it's really tricky to figure it out on your own. to start from scratch. So you said you have a friend in Florida. How do you make friends in this industry?

**Courtney Inghram:** I know. So shout out to Emily with Treasury Rentals in Florida.

**Allison Howell:** Isn't she amazing?

**Courtney Inghram:** She's A gem. You know, I think I actually first connected with her years ago, just maybe inquiring about like a sub rental or something. I had just found that she had a piece that maybe I was short on or I needed for an upcoming event. And just since then, she's just such a gem. Anytime I've got a question over the years, she's always so happy to share with me. And she's got a huge, very impressive operation in Florida with warehouses

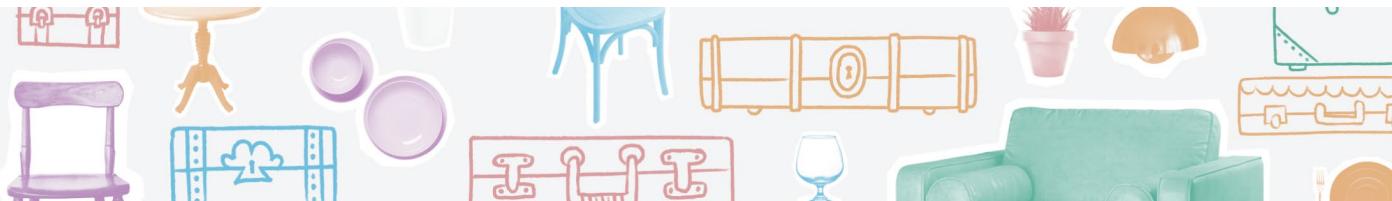


and staff and beautiful pieces, like a large inventory. So she has a wealth of knowledge about this industry. And She has definitely helped little old me here throughout the years, just with little tidbits of knowledge and, me bringing a problem to her, like people send things back dirty. How do you do that? Or, even tips about sourcing items and things like that. So yes, when you find a friend like that, you become super grateful to them for all the help they've offered you. So shout out to her for sure. She's definitely a role model in the industry for her sharing and also just the way she set up her business is very impressive.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, and it's really remarkable. I think some people are super close to the vest with the things that they've learned. But then there are other people in the industry who are really happy to share. And sometimes it's also when you catch them, right? Like if you send an e-mail to a random person across the country and it's their busy season, they might not get back to you. But sometimes if you catch them on the right day, they're like happy to have a conversation with you for an hour. So sometimes it's just about reaching out to people multiple times. So if you're the kind of person who needs help right now, send an e-mail to a handful of people because it might be that they can't get back to you today, but they can get back to you in the future or they can get back to you another time. Like it's not personal sometimes when they don't respond.

**Courtney Inghram:** Totally. And I think that's so important to remember because I think, especially, you know, in the wedding industry specifically, I'll say it is a more women dominated industry. And I think we as women just want to make sure that we're talking to people in the right way and we don't want to offend anyone and we want to make sure that we don't step on any toes like as we build a business. And that is a tricky, that can be tricky. Like you kind of almost shoot yourself in the foot a little bit, you know, when you don't send those emails and make those calls and just put yourself out there.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah. But if people don't want to tell you, they won't tell you. I mean, the worst they can say is no. Right? Or they could be offended by you, but then you'll never see them again. Right? Like the thing is, I feel like there are people out there who won't want to share with you or who won't want to tell you. And obviously there's stuff like, that's kind of offensive to ask, like how much money do you make every year? You know? But there's other questions that you can ask to say like, okay, hey, I'm starting this business and I'm thinking that I can, you know, shoot for this range. Is that realistic? And people can say like, probably not. your first year, other people are totally open books or other people will say, think about this or, hey, I know the competition in that region and you're going to have a hard time making those numbers. So like you're just going to find different people are willing to share different things and that's okay. Before we go much further, let's talk a little bit more about your definition of success because I know that both you and your husband



work full-time in your business, both of you care for your young children, and you run your floral business and your rental business out of your home. Tell us a little bit about the very deliberate decisions you've made about the kinds of events you take on and what kinds of inventory you purchase based on the intentional life you're really creating for you and your family.

**Courtney Inghram:** It's a balance. It's a juggling act every day with a one-year-old and a two-year-old. I think part of it has been born out of just the necessity of not having the bandwidth to take on 40 floral weddings a year and doing 100 rental orders of \$200 a piece. Like it's just not, it's not sustainable for our family. So what we have done specifically for rentals is we have a very small space for storage, which has caused me to be very intentional, both about the pieces that I buy and make an investment in, and then also the pieces that as years go on, I'm looking at like, you haven't moved much recently. Like you might have to vacate the premises, trying to bring in new pieces very intentionally and then also sell off pieces that are not doing their job anymore. whether that's just like a change in trend or I miss the mark on thinking like, oh, this will be super popular and it just sat, which totally has happened before. I just try to be very intentional about the storage because we do not have a storage unit, we do not have a warehouse, so everything has to fit and be packed. And we have a very intentional like packing strategy and organizing strategy for how everything fits in a small space. So again, with that being said, choosing items that I don't see other companies in the area carrying, or I try to purchase items that are, for lack of a better term, expensive enough that another larger rental company may not see the value in, but I would see the value in because they don't see the value in it. So I don't have to compete with them. They have so many so many offerings and that is part of the value of being a large rental company is that you can carry 30 different lines of plates if you want to. You have the space, you have the staff, you have the cleaning ability. But what I'm looking for is like a expensive, more high-end piece that you may not, big rental company, see that the value in investing in because you've got your \$1.25 plates like flying out the door, which is great. Like that's just, it's a totally different business strategy. So we've chosen to source things from different designers, different high-end plate companies, glassware companies. We've chosen to kind of specifically focus on these higher end niche pieces that not everyone will want or afford. But the people that do obviously really, really appreciate that we have those offerings. So.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, no, it's interesting because in this season of the Trunk Show, we're really focusing on barriers to growth. But in your case, those barriers are really kind of flipped on their head. And actually, you're seeing those constraints, not as things preventing you from growing, but as things that are actually helping you be really intentional about achieving your goals, right? Because you have this limited space. And so you're being



very thoughtful about what you do to fill that space, right? Like you're thinking, is this worthy of being in my space, right? Does it meet the criteria? Is it high-end enough so that my competitors won't be offering it? Is it moving enough that it's worth the shelf space, right? So instead of you thinking of space as a, like a barrier, you're thinking of it as a like constraint be a criteria to say like, does this piece have enough worth to get to be part of the collection? And I think that's really interesting to think in those terms.

**Courtney Inghram:** When you think rental company, you think big warehouse and like you have a lot of options. Like that's part of the value that you offer customers as a rental company. I think that that has become ingrained in a lot of us, the more options you offer people, that's positive. That's good. And it is. I'm not discounting that at all. I'm just saying that, you know, I have found that the less options I offer, but that are more geared towards a specific kind of client that has allowed me to find success in this small niche. And Again, I am serving a small niche of people. Not everyone wants to spend \$10 renting a charger. That's just not for everyone. And that's okay. I just try to focus my marketing efforts and my collection and my vendor outreach and my partnerships in the area to those specific kinds of clients.

**Allison Howell:** Right. Yeah. And if any one of our listeners has read much of what I've written or listened to me speak at Lending Gather or in webinars or any other places in the industry, You've probably heard me say that volume is the key to success in rentals. Rentals is a numbers game. And focus on utilization, and you shouldn't have more inventory than your operations can service, and you should have an empty warehouse every weekend. And some of that's true for you, Courtney, but I find I don't have to stand on that soapbox here as much. This is a rare moment where I don't feel compelled to beat that drum because you've been so intentional about keeping your expenses in check. You don't have a crew, you aren't paying for storage, you don't have an out of control buying habit. So in a way, the constraints of your business give you freedom to let it be the size you want it to be. So because you've kept it limited, you don't have to keep feeding the beast just to make it bigger, just to keep feeding the beast just to make it bigger. But that didn't happen accidentally. It seems like you've had to keep a lot of things in check in order for that to be the case.

**Courtney Inghram:** Yes, yeah. I mean, it's so easy as the years go on. Like I said, this is my 10th year in the wedding industry. So it's very easy to look at competitors around me and think, wow, like they have this beautiful space. And like, wow, like all the things I could do with 5,000 square feet. Like I can't even imagine like all the beautiful, everything would be beautiful. You just think, oh, like I'm in an industry of beauty and I'm inspired by other people's beautiful spaces and how they set up their inventory and all the different options



they have. But in the season of life, I just find a lot of peace with the way that we have set up the business. I mean, every decision has been very intentional throughout the whole process. I mean, even to the extent of We have two old Dodge Grand Caravan minivans that we use to transport all the items.

**Allison Howell:** Please tell me they have wood paneling on the side.

**Courtney Inghram:** No, they don't. I wish they did. I know that would be like such a.

**Allison Howell:** The one I had, the one I had growing up had fake wood paneling on the side.

**Courtney Inghram:** Both are completely paid off, obviously, and just All they do is just drive around these plates and then flowers to our local area. And when we do a large floral event or rental order that we need more space for, we will rent a U-Haul sprinter van. And even that decision, I'm like, gosh, like, That would be so nice to just have that sprinter van parked in the driveway. And anytime we need it, it's right there. But when we run the numbers and we think about how many times we're actually using the sprinter van per year versus buying it, just the numbers don't make sense. For the amount of effort it involves to go and rent one is it's 20 minutes away and it's It's just so simple and so affordable.

**Allison Howell:** Well, it seems like you have recognized that every yes you say is a no to something else. And in your season of life, the yeses you've decided to say are to your family and to your kids. And so that means you're saying some no's in your business to bigger warehouse, more inventory, more of the beautiful things in the kind of space or conveniences in your business that you could imagine. But it's allowing you to have the peace in your daily life that you're really looking for. And so I try to hold in mind those trade-offs because Even when we don't think about it, every yes we say is a no to something else. And that's hard to hold in mind, you know?

**Courtney Inghram:** Yeah, it's very easy to look around again and see the setups that others have, which again are so inspiring. I mean, I have wonderful relationships with lots of different, florists and rental companies in my area. And we frequently sub rent from each other or work together and collaborate. So the vibes are all great, but it is very easy to look and think, wow, like they have such a, such an impressive setup. And I'm sure clients are wowed by their setup. And I just, I'm very honest and upfront with clients, vendors, like, hey, this is our setup. take it or leave it, and no hard feelings either way.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, Well, because the rentals have been a secondary business rather than your main source of income, do you ever feel freedom to take risks that you wouldn't on the floral side?



**Courtney Inghram:** Yes, having this rental business has really allowed my husband and I more financial freedom to make choices that work best for us as a family, whether that's a business decision for the rentals or the florals. Not having to rely solely on the rentals has allowed me to focus on buying these higher end pieces that I maybe wouldn't have been able to afford if this, if rentals were like my only gig. And, every weekend, like you said, everything has to leave the warehouse. Like it's a big deal. things have to be constantly moving versus the approach we've taken now is we do maybe a little more than a dozen very high-end floral weddings every year. So those cover, that's our bread and butter. And then the rental business is just kind of extra. So if things move, that's great. And obviously we want things to move. And if they're not moving after a certain period of time, we, they got, they get the boot. But yeah, we're, we don't feel that same pressure that our other rental company friends do because we have this other, source of income with the florals.

**Allison Howell:** Right. And it seems like cash flow has not been a problem for you in the rental business, right? So you've.

**Courtney Inghram:** No, but I think that's because of the choices that like we have no overhead. I mean, we have our mortgage and that's it. We, the vans are paid off, the inventory's all been paid off. It was paid for as soon as it was purchased. I tried to make purchasing decisions to purchase, especially in the beginning, I would try to purchase things as I had clients commit to them. So I didn't start the business saying, hello everyone, we are now offering 8 sets of plates and I have 300 of each. It was like, hey, we have these plates, we have small quantities, enough to do like a dinner party or like a small elopement. And if you want more, contact me and we'll buy them for you. And so that's kind of how we slowly built up the quantities over the years to now what they are, which is roughly about 200 per item, you know, for each set.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah. and I know you've had multiple other rental companies in your area approach you with an interest in buying your business. They really recognize what you've developed is a unique collection and something special. What other factors do you think have been impactful as you've created this collection that's really set you apart?

**Courtney Inghram:** That's a good question. I think having the background in weddings and design has allowed me, it's kind of a unique approach that not everyone has that background. Like when you go to a lot of these larger rental companies in the area, they maybe have like sales specialists or people that specialize in marketing, but they maybe don't have this design background or wedding background, which again, I know I'm not speaking only to people that service weddings, but that's just what we do. But I know there's a whole other segment rentals for parties and events and just even like monthly, weekly events, or rentals. So I understand that's not everyone's situation, but for us, I think



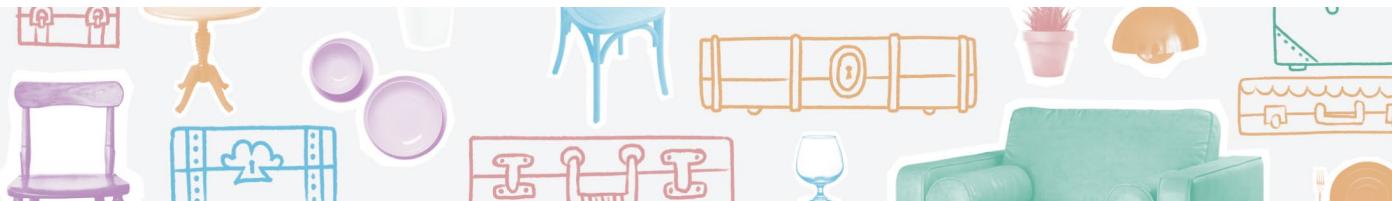
me being established enough in my industry allowed this business to kind of take off without having to gain trust and having to put in all those frankly, unpaid hours that I did with the florals and kind of beginning that process, starting a business, learning everything from scratch. I think I put in so much of that time on the floral side that then when this started, and I also intentionally kept my name in both of the businesses, and that way there was the brand recognition of, oh, This is another Courtney Ingram offering. We trust her. You know, like we know her in this area. She's regarded well. I didn't need to kind of pick up steam in that way, which I think is a barrier for a lot of people when you start a business. Any business is just getting that initial momentum and picking up steam.

**Allison Howell:** It's so interesting to see the different paths that people take to get to the places they want to be in rentals. Like I said, there's no quote traditional path to get here, but I think that the business that you've ended up with is unique in that it seems like you run it, doesn't run you. That's unusual in this industry, to be honest, because A lot of times rental businesses kind of take over people's lives. And so it's refreshing to see that you've built something that's successful, that's profitable, that's bringing you benefit, that also hasn't taken over your life insanity. So kudos to you for that. And I wish you continued success. But I have one final question for you. What do you enjoy most about your rental adventures?

**Courtney Inghram:** That's fun. I would say the thing I enjoy most is seeing everything come together, like having my pieces involved in all these different events. It's very fulfilling to see kind of the finished product, whether that's images or if I happen to get to be on site when everything's like coming together. I really just being in the event and wedding industry, it's really fun to kind of see that finished product for me. That's very fulfilling and it makes me feel good about the work that we're doing. Like this is creating memories. People are sitting around a table together, having this once in a lifetime moment. That makes me feel good and like what we're doing is important and it's not just all, it's not all frivolous. It's not all just for a photo op. It feels good to see, to see people gathered around enjoying, you know, special, special memories and special family time with these pieces. So. That feels good. That's a highlight for me, for sure.

**Allison Howell:** Well, that's wonderful. Well, thank you so much for sharing your journey with us. I am so grateful that you were willing to talk about all of the things you've done to craft this intentional business and this intentional life and some of the challenges that have come up as you've done that. Yeah, thank you so much. And we'll be excited to hear what our listeners think of your experiences as well.

**Courtney Inghram:** Thank you so much, Allison. It's been such an honor. So thank you so much for asking me to be a part of this. As a longtime fan, it's exciting to be here and a part



of this. So thank you. And I'm really excited to hopefully connect with some of your listeners and continue to keep up the conversation. So thank you.

**Outro:** Lilac and Lace and the collection by Courtney Ingram are two very different boutique event rental companies. One, furniture and decor, the big wow factors of an event. The other, tabletop rentals, curated for perfection in even the smallest detail. And one thing they have in common, though, is the intentionality of their size and scope. Wherever you are on the spectrum of rental business size options, it's important to remember that your business is your business. And the right size for you is not going to be the right size for someone else. I hope that you'll be encouraged to be intentional as you grow and think about what matters most for you as you create your own rental adventures. Thank you to our guests, Jenna, Jillian, and Courtney. And thank you for listening to The Trunk Show with RW. As always, I'm your host, Allison Howell. Happy renting.



## RESOURCES:

- Never overbook or double-book your rental inventory again with [RW Elephant](#).
- Organize your warehouse with:
  - [Item Labels](#) for your Event Rental Warehouse
  - [5S Event Rental Warehouse Guide](#)
- [Platescrape Dishwashing Kit](#) for onsite scullery

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