

*She Said/She Said Podcast With Laura Cox Kaplan*  
*Guest: Sophia Demirtas, Founder Fanm Mon*  
*Episode 280: How To Weave The Power Of Collaboration Into Your Brand*

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:06](#)):

Hi, I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Welcome to She Said, she Said Podcast. Here on this podcast, we talk about the building blocks and the micro habits that help us create real and lasting influence. What do I mean by that? Well, we're talking about the kind of influence that helps you achieve your goals and whatever it is in life that you want to accomplish, but perhaps most importantly, it's the type of influence that helps you create real impact and that enables you to truly thrive.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:46](#)):

Hey friend, welcome to episode 280. I am so excited to bring you this very special conversation today because while I talked a couple of weeks ago about my word of the year, which is to be lighter or to lighten up, and that's true of my physical body as well as my closets, and also just my overall sort of a focus on work to kind of lighten up the way that I think about work and maybe be a little easier on myself at times, I think we could probably all benefit from remembering to do that. But one of the other concepts that's really driving me this year is this notion of collaboration. Increasingly, I find that collaborations with various folks who are a good match help me bring you even more value from this podcast, and they also really enrich the type of content that I'm able to create here at She Said, she said Media, one of my very favorite groups for sparking thoughtful collaborations and ideas and creative potential is the Southern coterie or the Southern Sea as they're affectionately known.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([02:03](#)):

Now, this year marks the third year in a row that we will have produced a series of conversations together that showcase not only our respective brands, the Southern C as well as she said, she said media, but most importantly key themes that embody what makes our respective brands unique and also why we are great partners. I literally cannot say enough about how much I have gained personally and professionally from my experiences with this group over the past few years. And if you're listening and you're part of this group, you know exactly what I'm talking about. I have talked about in the past episodes about the importance of building a strong network and how one of the most important things that you can do is to be willing to freshen your network with new people and new ideas, and most importantly, to be willing to expose yourself to new ways of thinking.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([03:07](#)):

And that typically comes from folks who aren't necessarily in your same industry or sector and maybe people that are completely new to you. But here's the key, the real value tends to come when we are open to possibilities that we might not otherwise consider. When everyone shows up with the spirit of how you can help, how you can partner, and how you can work together, it is a very, very powerful thing. And in those cases, we are only limited by our own imaginations. One reason why the Southern C is so effective and provides so much value to its attendees, myself included, is actually because of the culture of collaboration, which is inspired by the unique partnership of its founders, my friends, Whitney Long and Cheri Levy. Now, this duo approaches everything with this spirit of collaboration, and as a result, collaboration is literally woven into the fabric and all aspects of the content and activities that are part of the Southern C.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([04:18](#)):

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In some cases, they may come about in ways that are really less obvious. I have been thinking a lot about this topic, as you can probably tell, and it can be very easy, especially in a carefully curated Instagramable kind of world to fall into the comparison trap and to look at what someone else is doing, especially someone who's maybe in a job or a role or growing a business that's similar to yours. You look at her and you feel a sense that maybe you need to compete with her or to beat her or outdo her. But when everyone in the group is sharing and learning together and really tries to embody a mindset of "how can we support each other," it shifts the dynamic into one that actually fuels both of you in a more positive and potentially more fruitful way. Now, here's the thing.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([05:18](#)):

This is learned behavior. I actually think we should think of it as a skill. Learning to collaborate is a skill that you develop and with practice you get better at it. It's a characteristic that I have always appreciated, but also one that I have been thinking so much about how can I do a better job and have more impact as a result of being more effective as a collaborator? So more to come on that because I'm working really hard at it, but I am truly, truly grateful for the countless examples that I've seen and experienced with the Southern C. We are just coming off of the Southern C's 2024 summit, which was entirely amazing. And so this week in this episode, episode 280, we are kicking off our third annual collaboration series, and I am absolutely delighted to share the conversation that we recorded live this week.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([06:18](#)):

It is with fashion designer Sophia Demirtas. Sophia is the founder of Fanm Mon. It is a Turkish based made to order fashion line that is primarily known for its absolutely stunning embroidery as well as its acute attention to detail, both of which are actually a direct extension of Sophia's Haitian heritage. Now, I mentioned a couple of weeks ago my major closet clean out as I work to embody my word of the year to lighten up. And fortunately, or maybe fortuitously, that goal is also helping me make room for things like my new favorite garment, which is from Sophia's collection. It is the jumpsuit, and we talk about that at the beginning of this conversation. Be sure to follow me on Instagram. You'll find me at Laura Cox Kaplan and I share a few photos from my conversation with Sophia. She is wearing a beautiful embroidery dress that is covered in these embroidery butterflies.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([07:21](#)):

It is absolutely stunning, and I am wearing the jumpsuit that is now my favorite outfit. One of the key things that really differentiates the Fanm Mon Fon brand is how Sophia approaches her collaborations as well as how she thinks about her relationship with her employees, the particular life experiences that inspired and influence. Sophia is something that I think you will find incredibly inspiring friend. I think you're going to love this conversation. But before we jump into this episode and in the spirit of collaboration, I want to ask you for a favor. Reviews of podcasts are frankly a pain. I don't like asking, but I really do need your help. Our growth is directly tied to reviews. When you extend me the kindness of sharing a five star review and you also write a few words about maybe what you learned in an episode or why you choose to listen, it makes a big difference. It helps me continue to build credibility in the podcast space and it tells the podcasting algorithm, Hey, push this one up on the list. So friend, if you have an extra minute today, I would be so grateful for you if you would submit a nice review, I would

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really, really appreciate it. For now though, here is episode 280 with the fabulous Sophia Demirtas, founder of Fanm Mon, and our first guest in this year's. She said she podcast + Southern C Collaboration Series. Enjoy.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([09:04](#)):

Sophia Demirtas is the founder and CEO of the fabulous Fanm Mon company, which is inspired by her Haitian heritage. If you've seen her designs, she's wearing one with these gorgeous embroidery butterflies. As I told Sophia, I may never take this jumpsuit off. It is the most comfortable thing, and I've gotten so many compliments. It really is incredible. But I'd love to start the conversation with you both by thanking you for being part of the Southern Sea and our first guest as part of our third annual, she said, she said podcast, Southern Sea Collaboration. So thank you for that. But let's start by talking about Fanm Mon and what makes it unique.

Sophia Demirtas ([09:54](#)):

Hello again, everybody. Well, the brand is very unique because it started out with the focus of having our customers very involved in everything that we produce. After living New York to move into Turkey, I really felt that change. There was really a lack of the stuff that spoke to me in Turkey. So I ventured out into making jewelry, and from that process, I also started looking into the clothing that really spoke closely to my upbringing. Embroidery was becoming very common, very more visible with the whole Ukrainian and Slavic embroidery designed. So upon seeing that, I felt like it was something that was a reminder of growing up in Haiti because my grandmother did a lot of little intricate stuff, whether it was for her tables or whether it was just adding little details to my little dresses. So the first dress that I did, I put it on online and everyone within a week, I think I sold nearly 50 pieces, and I kind of understood pretty much there. There was something to consider as far as turning this into something very serious. And the most out of this experience, the most important part that stood out to me was instantly making customization available to the woman and everyone and really reacted strongly to that. So that was not just really the beginning of the brand itself, but it was also the beginning of understanding that people wanted to be part of the process.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([11:57](#)):

Maybe talk a little bit about how, so the business is a made to order business. Maybe talk a little bit about how that works in practice.

Sophia Demirtas ([12:07](#)):

Well, it's somewhat a little bit complicated than it sounds because you are, when I first started the Made to Order and really wanted that to become a part of how the brand grew, a lot of people didn't understand it to some aspect. They thought it would really confuse the customer to give them so many options, but I begged to differ because I felt if I really wanted to add sentimental value to what it is that I was offering, I really wanted the woman to become a part of this journey. So of course it took more effort to decide the quantity of thread that would be applicable to the style, the amount of fabric that I would offer per style. But the more I received emails of women wanting to have a say into this final piece, the more I understood that that was the way that made sense for me. So I really put, or I learned from all the challenges and really made catering to my customers need a priority.

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Laura Cox Kaplan ([13:26](#)):

Let's go back and talk about where you began because one of the particularly interesting aspects, there's a lot of aspects to Sophia's story that are really fascinating to me, but the one that jumped out at me the most is the fact that she was not trained as a fashion designer. That was not her background. In fact, she has a very different background, and I would love for you to talk about that aspect of your journey because I think it's so relevant to how she's built this business.

Sophia Demirtas ([13:55](#)):

Well, my background, are you referencing to my social worker?

Laura Cox Kaplan ([13:58](#)):

I am.

Sophia Demirtas ([14:00](#)):

Well, I started out as a social worker because I really wanted to make a difference. My last job on my profession, I was the director of a homeless shelter in Midtown, and that was really what I was set out to do. I really wanted to make significant difference in people's lives, and unfortunately, I guess reality struck hard upon realizing there are so many layers and levels and hierarchies that made it felt more of a challenge that I couldn't convey on my own. And luckily around that time, I started dating my now husband who suggested, well, you're in New York City, you have a great sense of style. You're very sensitive to tones and colors. Why not explore this whole fashion thing? And of course, I've had friends who were like, well, you should be a stylist, you should be this, you should be that. But it wasn't really something that I saw myself partake in just because of people were kind of seeing that side of me.

Sophia Demirtas ([15:07](#)):

So upon and leaving my job, my husband again, he suggested that I look into selling online. So I opened the eBay shop, and within that shop, I really started understanding the business side of, I guess fashion. And again, not to be judgmental, but I also understood what was lacking because you would receive something from a high-end designer and you see all the issues, whether it was the fabric quality that I felt that it matched the price point or it was the stitching that was falling apart. So there were just so many things, and I was fortunate to be able to pick on these things and call out on them because my mom is an amazing seamstress, so I didn't necessarily go to school to learn to become a fashion designer, but I felt super blessed to have that sort of creative reference naturally from my mother. And so upon learning and growing the business from a buying and selling standpoint, one day, I think just before the recession, my husband mentioned, it's funny how all the key things comes from him. So he reminds me of it when I,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([16:30](#)):

I'll bet.

Sophia Demirtas ([16:32](#)):

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So he mentioned, well, if you're not someone who's really in control of what it is that you do, you are going to suffer as far as manufacturing and production is concerned. So he just, passingly said it, but it stuck with me moving into Turkey. I really didn't have the plan of getting into fashion or becoming a designer. It just really happened because I left New York to go to Turkey because I really wanted a quiet life. And moving into Turkey with two young children, you're like, okay, am I just really going to become the stay at home mom? So that kind of is how I was thrust into discovering and growing and nurturing the brand. Yeah,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([17:25](#)):

I absolutely love that. Maybe talk a little bit about how you went about that. I also want to talk about though a lot about collaborations because that's really one of the themes that we want to dig into in this conversation. But let's talk first about those first steps in building that brand in Turkey. You were new to the country.

Sophia Demirtas ([17:46](#)):

Yes. Well, I think again, a lot of it was learning, making mistakes and learning what works. And also my approach to the brand, because again, I didn't go to school to become a designer, so there was not really this pan out outline of how I'm going to do things step by step. So it really was beneficial to kind of do this and to not really give myself a lot of pressure or have expectations because I moved to Turkey to kind of take things slow. And then here I was setting up a business that I really didn't have much knowledge of. So the key thing that I did was working with people who were more knowledgeable to some sense. So I told you the story of how I put my dress online, and within a week I sold nearly 50 pieces. But I was also very fortunate within that week with the woman who made that singular dress for me.

Sophia Demirtas ([19:03](#)):

She didn't necessarily have the capacity herself to go into producing that many pieces because these are women who have small little shops. They do little tailoring repairs and things like that. So she didn't necessarily have the base, but again, seeing that opportunity there, I instantly made her a partner, so I instantly collaborated with her. So I guess in all rights, maybe this is my very first collaboration because it was really what helped me understand how to pull together and somehow figure out the missing parts because she's in Ukraine. I started in Ukraine, I had utterly in Ukraine for the first seven years. So she's in Ukraine, and we don't necessarily speak the same language. We don't necessarily share the same values as far as culture and differences are concerned, but we understood that we had a very unique opportunity to make something different and to come together for a common goal. And she was very eager to make this a permanent business thing for her, and I was very eager to learn. So it worked out very well in the end.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([20:19](#)):

Yeah, that's amazing. I'd love for you to talk about how your background in social work and this core empathetic sort of perspective that you have, how that informs the collaborations, both that collaboration that you just talked about as well as others because you are doing a number of

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collaborations currently. Maybe talk about how that experience has informed or maybe provides sort of that guidepost, if you will, for approaching collaborations.

Sophia Demirtas ([20:56](#)):

Well, I think it's very important to keep the human aspect into everything that we do. And for me, I don't necessarily just focus on the numbers as far as how much the sale is going to turn out to be, or even the creativity for that matter, because obviously when you start having the dialogue about partnering with someone, I think it's really first and foremost important to understand the dynamic of both of you, because sometimes you could both have a product that could seemingly pair well together, but you don't pair well together. So I think it's very important to show up as your true self to be very honest with the whole process, but more importantly, to really keep that human component as the core reason why you're coming together. Because anything outside of that, you take the challenges I think, with a different approach because everything becomes even more of a struggle or frustration because at the end, everyone just sees the collaboration, but it's really a process. It's a process that takes hours of communicating hours of maybe misreading into some things or having different sets of values and expectations. So I think when you have the human aspect as the core value into starting that communication, it makes the process a lot easier. Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([22:38](#)):

Maybe let's talk about a few specific collaborations. I know Claire V is one, you're doing collaboration with Dillard's, which you talked about. Maybe give us some specifics on examples of how they work well and sort of how you apply that philosophy as it relates to those collaborations.

Sophia Demirtas ([22:55](#)):

Well, the very first collaboration, I guess, branded to brand I did was with Clave. And it was really a learning process at that point because obviously there are a lot more established, like a better established brand than my brand was at the time. So it was very clear for me to understand this is an opportunity, but not something that I necessarily want to change my brand's identity. So I understood very well as much as this is an opportunity, it's something that really has to convey what my brand represents as much as they're looking to make the details of that final product represent their brand. So again, it's really keeping the conversation very humanly and honest and saying no to the things that you absolutely feel that's not aligned with what it is that you want to convey in that collaboration and saying yes to the things that you feel is not only just going to benefit your brand, but is also going to be something that brand benefits from.

Sophia Demirtas ([24:07](#)):

And it's something that both of you could look at and be extremely proud of. So an example is my conversation with Dillard, for example. They really wanted to have some of our key pieces, but really presented in a way that they know that their customers would be stronger to react to. So of course it would be the easiest thing to say, well, this is what has always worked for me and maybe that's what you need to do. But it's really having that understanding that a collaboration is really that. It's you pairing with someone to take what it is that they're strong at and for you to bring together what you're strong at

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and ultimately turn it into something that both of your customers could really continue to want and respect and appreciate.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([25:03](#)):

Yeah, I love that. Maybe let's take it one step further and talk about how collaborations work or how you think about collaborations with influencers.

Sophia Demirtas ([25:14](#)):

Well, collaboration with influencers is unique in the sense that, again, the human aspect. I think with social media, it's very easy for us to see an influencer and not necessarily not see them as human, but to forget that they're human because you're just really thinking of what it is that they could deliver. So be it more followers, so be it more traffic to your website. But I think once you keep that human component really at the core of even deciding to work with that person, it makes it a true collaboration because it's not just I'm sending you this or I'm gifting you this, or whatever that transactional part of the influencer collaboration may be to just keep it just based off of that. It's really to have a dialogue, and especially when it comes to influencer. I love working with influencers for the fact that both of you can really grow together and understand that there's value to continue to be added with coming together. Yeah, yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([26:28](#)):

You told me an interesting story. We had breakfast together this morning. You told me something that really blew my mind, which was that you provide food for your employees and you actually oftentimes cook yourself for your employees. Talk about that and why that's important, why that's a core value for the business.

Sophia Demirtas ([26:51](#)):

Well, again, it's really about creating a healthy and nurturing environment. I think when we are really looking at people as people, I think it really allows us the opportunity to allow them to be the best version of themselves because everyone thrives in a nourishing environment. Everyone thrives in a healthy environment. So when you add respect and integrity to that component, I think you will definitely end up having the best type of people around you. And that doesn't necessarily mean that they're perfect. There's not going to be drama that you don't necessarily want to deal with from time to time. But I think once you are able to understand you are seeing somebody that comes to work on a day-to-day basis, or somebody who's becoming a part of your business, life has its ups and downs for everyone. And when you're able to have an approach that allows people to feel like they could be themselves in your surrounding and to feel safe in some way, because I think a lot of times too, when you're thinking of production, you're thinking this is someone that's kind of seated in a factory and kind of sweating and is working under all these harsh conditions.

Sophia Demirtas ([28:24](#)):

But I think with technology, with more knowledge and with more empowerment within our communities, we can really shift things. And I would not necessarily feel comfortable or confident to talk about the quality of my product if in some ways I'm not doing my part in uplifting the lives of the people

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who are bringing the quality of the product. So I think it really goes hand in hand. It's not just to think again of just the numbers. Yes, we're in business, we want to be successful, we want to earn and make money, but it's not at the expense of tearing somebody else down. Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([29:06](#)):

Yeah. It's wonderful. If you could sort of go back to the very beginning, is there one sort of data point or piece of information or skillset or something that you wish you had had or known when you first started? As you sort of think back? And I apologize, I didn't ask you this question in advance, but I'm curious, would you change anything if you could go

Sophia Demirtas ([29:32](#)):

Back? Not at all. I think in many ways life has really equipped me, and it takes maturity. It takes going through some challenges to really understand that having been born and raised in Haiti, I think probably that was kind of the first set of lessons to understand the simplicity of life and to really put value on the things that are important. So I was very fortunate to be raised by a wise woman, my grandmother, and to also be raised around women who are very nurturing. So the whole made to order question that you asked about the brand, it also stems from my upbringing in Haiti because I grew up in a culture where people, women, whether it's men, women, children, they had the selection of their best fabric and they would bring it to the tailor to make it for them. And those really became staple pieces to some extent. You would wear it to pieces. And I think somewhat subconsciously when I started the brand, maybe that's why the made to order component made so much sense for me because obviously this is what I was brought around and that was felt, that's what was normal to me from at the very core. So as far as changing anything, I don't think I would've changed anything, wouldn't.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([31:02](#)):

I'm curious if your business advisors have told you made to order. People won't wait for made to order. This is like an on-demand society. Everything is instantaneous. Have people told you you shouldn't approach it that way? And

Sophia Demirtas ([31:18](#)):

Of course, and I think that's why as women, when we know something to be right, and I guess we call it instinct or that gut feeling, we cannot be deterred. We shouldn't be deterred by what someone is not able to see, feel, or visualize the way that we comprehend it. So it's very important to stick to what it is in your core that you feel is right, makes sense, and eventually, hopefully they'll see it and understand that you were right all along. So this whole made to order approach, people, they told me it would be very costly, which it was at the very beginning. It's time consuming, very much so it's tedious because you're dealing with people who are impatient, they're fussy. Everyone has their own sort of stuff, their own construed thoughts that they wanted to kind of impose. And in the end, I kind of felt, well, this makes sense. It absolutely makes sense because we're not like cookie cutters, we're not all shaped the same. We're not all built the same by any means. So it was always really about allowing every woman that wants to wear what I make, or every person that wears what I make to understand that there's a space for them. There's a space that their indifference would be embraced.



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Laura Cox Kaplan ([32:57](#)):

Yeah, I think it can be really hard when you're getting feedback and input from professionals and they're steering you in a direction that is not consistent where you think the business needs to go in your gut. So I'd love for you to offer the audience me any advice for how do you know which advice to listen to and not listen to? How do you stay true to your core while still getting the appropriate feedback and input?

Sophia Demirtas ([33:32](#)):

Well, maybe one of the best things that kind of happened all on its own that happened for me at the start of my business was being broke, literally having no money. That was definitely a blessing in disguise. Of course, when you're struggling, you just think you need all this money to hire this person and to have that person coming and have all this input, but I moved to Turkey with a good amount of money, but you move there without any plan of continuing to earn money. So that money burns out very quickly. So when I was kind of starting, I didn't necessarily have the finances to hire, let's say, a PR right away, or to start dealing with the showroom right away, or to have a website person right away. So it really allowed me the space. And again, even if you have money, I think it's really important to put yourself in a position to learn to teach yourself things.

Sophia Demirtas ([34:41](#)):

And we live in an era where every information is so accessible. So I read a lot of stuff I read, and there are also a lot of people that I knew would be important to work with to take the brand to where I wanted it to go. So I would set up meetings and have interviews with these people to just have an understanding of what was out there. So that was kind of my way of finding information without having someone kind of come in and tell me what needed to be done and what needed not to be done. And of course, all the people who were giving me their opinion, which I didn't ask for, were friends and family, and you don't need to pay for that. So it really helped me to filter out and understood what it is that I really wanted this brand to become before I was in a position to have the experts come in and kind of guide me. And by that time, I learned or went through so many difficulties that I understood that their suggestions was just advice and the choice to make it applicable would be by me, based on what I felt in my core would be the right direction for the brand.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([36:03](#)):

Yeah, that's such good advice. I really love that. Do you want to talk for a minute about some of the future collaborations that you have coming up? We've mentioned Dillard's, but maybe some other opportunities that you're taking advantage of?

Sophia Demirtas ([36:18](#)):

Yeah, I have something coming down the pipeline with OTM that I'm really excited about because this year we've seen such an influx with brides and bridesmaids wear, so we felt like it was time to do something very special with OTM. I think we're launching with them in the coming months. I'm really excited about that. Yeah. I think I'm ready for questions.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([36:48](#)):

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Do you guys have questions? Sophia,

Speaker 3 ([36:54](#)):

I'm going to be in your mentor group. I'm Lark Champion with Lark and Lane, and I grew up going to Haiti and collecting Haitian art, and it's a huge part of how I started my business, how my mom started her business. But other than saying that, I wanted to ask you, and you may have answered this earlier, when you're doing collaborations with say a Dillard's, is that made to order as well, or are they ordering it from you and then you're producing it and they sell it ready to wear in their stores?

Sophia Demirtas ([37:27](#)):

Well, the made to order, well, first of all, I'm very happy that you are very involved in Haiti from your family's background. With the whole Dillard collaboration, it was really special because we obviously work to reimagine a lot of the pieces that we're launching, whether it's in colorways, whether it's embroidery details. So with wholesale, it's very difficult to have a made to order basis because obviously you have details that are kind of decided upon. You have fabrics that are decided upon, so it makes more sense to kind of produce according to what it is that they know that their customer would be most responsive to. So the whole made to order component of the brand really lives on our website because this is where somebody could come and order just a singular dress or order three dresses, and because we're kind of cutting everything as they are being made, it puts us in a position to cater to that specific customer because instead of seeing the dress in the pink and ordering as it is in that pink, well, we have to cut that dress and make it anyway.

Sophia Demirtas ([38:55](#)):

So if she prefers that in a Navy, why not make it for her? The embroidery is not ready on the fabric because it's not print. If she wants the embroidery to be in a different color, why not make it for her? And also it goes down to sizing. This is something I think my web manager is here. That's something that we are really going to focus on launching this year because I think a lot of times people think made to order and customization are the same thing. When it has, it serves two purposes. You could have a made to order dress exactly as the dress is presented on the website or as seen, but it's just the sizing that needs to be adjusted to that customer's fit. And then you also have the home made to order where it's pretty much everything that's being touched. So that's unique to the website. Okay, thank you. You're welcome. Other questions? Oh yeah. Hi.

Speaker 4 ([39:54](#)):

Hi. My business is also hand embroidery. So I was curious how you started out. Were you just doing smaller scale projects and custom orders and then you grew or did you start out big and

Sophia Demirtas ([40:09](#)):

I'm sorry, which part

Speaker 4 ([40:12](#)):

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At the beginning before your business really took off, were you just hand embroidering yourself for smaller customer base, or did you start out with the intention of it being a global company that was taking to order?

Sophia Demirtas ([40:27](#)):

Yes. Well, the brand honestly started out of personal necessity. The dress that I put online that blew at the time, it felt like it was such a major accomplishment to sell so many pieces in a week. It was something that was made just for myself and customers. Well, the Instagram audience really responded well to it, and we made it. So that was really a leverage sort of period because the singular dress that was made for me, that was made by hand completely. But here we are with 50 pieces that needed to be done instantly. So we ended up splitting it. The quantity that could be made completely by hand was made by hand, and the others that could be made by machine were made by machine. So again, that was a learning experience to really understand for how long could we continue to just focus on only made by hand embroidery or for how long do we need to consider having a machine come in and have that a part of the business?

Sophia Demirtas ([41:41](#)):

So when we started, even though we did pretty good for a startup brand, we had kind of far and few and between sales online. So there was this whole team that was only making things by hand. But as the brand gained momentum, we find that it was necessary to have a machine come on board. And I think a lot of times when people hear machine, they just think, oh, it's just a machine you set off, and then it just does all the embroidery work. But in reality, that machine is tied to human's presence because you have so many, especially for me, I like details and intricate colorings and mergings of things. So you have to have humans present to switch these threads to do all the things that it takes to make sure that the machine is operating and flat out not giving damage to that fabric.

Sophia Demirtas ([42:34](#)):

So depending on how you want to grow your business, you definitely have to consider bringing machine on board because obviously if you're just making seldom things here and there hand is a hundred percent the way to go, but if you start having a larger audience, definitely you have to do machines. And I don't think anyone can deliver at wholesale at a large capacity just doing things by hand unless you start doing those hand embroideries at least months in advance. One part of the brand that just only does hand embroideries or cardigans, that's also a very special part of production for us. They're made by women that are stay at home moms that's taking care of either of their elderly parents or disabled children. So all the embroideries on the cardigans are made by hand as far as their knitting itself is completely made by hand. But again, if someone wants to order a large quantity, there is really an early time that this has to be placed because obviously it's made by hand. Okay, great. Thank you. You're welcome. Other questions?

Speaker 5 ([44:00](#)):

In terms of collaborations, I was wondering if you ever had to back out of a collaboration, you realized that something was wrong in your gut or the people weren't working, or if someone came to you and it could be really exciting, but you're like, I have to focus on things A, B, and C, and this is super jazzy and

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exciting, but I just can't do it right now. I think that's hard if people want to say yes all the time or to back out when your gut's telling you no, if that can be tricky.

Sophia Demirtas ([44:28](#)):

Yeah, I think it's really being with yourself. You have to understand the capacity and your bandwidth because it's one thing to consider a collaboration and understand very early on that it's not going to go anywhere. So you don't end up wasting your time or anybody else's time versus delving into something and really starting to give it a part of you and having that person or a team give a part of themselves, and then you pull out last minute. So my process with collabs, the ones that, the brands that I contacted to do collaborations with is because I knew that for sure from my part, from my side, I a hundred percent wanted to act on that and see it through completely. And of course, that team, maybe they would say otherwise. But for me, I understood that I was prepared financial wise, I was prepared in every aspect.

Sophia Demirtas ([45:31](#)):

I was prepared, but you still have to start with an honest dialogue because it's not just about you having that creative aspect or that brand, having that creative aspect. Like I said to Laura earlier on, sometimes it's just you and that team or you and that brand that the dynamic just doesn't sit right. And if you're assess things really truthfully, you'll understand that at the very first meeting you'll understand if this is something that you want to continue to delve in or not. And so I think that's really the first part, is really being honest with yourself to understand, is this something that I want to see through? Is this something that I want to invest my time in? And there has been situations where you start to delve into a collaboration and you kind of felt like, well, maybe this is not really going to be something that I want to go through with. And so for me, what I have done is whenever that thought comes in, I would pull in that team and tell them specifically, this is where I'm at. Because nothing is carved in stones that if you start, you must finish, some concerns will arise. And I find that when you're honest and you make that known, then if they're really be as willing to see this through as you are, then you kind of come to a admitting ground and sort through and make it work or not.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([47:09](#)):

Such great advice. Sophia, thank you very much. Thank

Sophia Demirtas ([47:13](#)):

You so much, Laura

Laura Cox Kaplan ([47:14](#)):

I loved the conversation and loved getting to know you. Let's have a round of applause for Sophia

SOPHIA DEMIRTAS: ([47:21](#)):

Thank you, Very much.

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EPISODE CLOSE:

Laura Cox Kaplan ([47:25](#)):

Hey, friend. To learn a bit more about the Southern Sea and deas and Mond, check out the show notes for this episode. It's episode 280. And be sure to follow me on Instagram for more about what I learned this year at the Southern Sea and how we collaborated at this year's summit. In the meantime, thanks for sharing some quality time with me today. I hope you found it to be a good investment in you. I'll talk to you again next week. And remember she said podcast is a weekly production of She Said, she said Media.