

# Businesswomen of the Arabian Industry: Despina Mitrakas

To quote Sophocles, "success is dependent on effort". In few young women would you find such a degree of effort, passion and dedication as in Despina Mitrakas, owner and operator of Show Pony Graphics and Skyline Park Stud.

Despina's love of design began when she was a child – she was always drawing and being creative, and this carried into high school, where she won the Victorian Certificate of Education awards for both Graphic and Studio Design. She was also interested in computers and, fresh out of high school, decided that her career would lie in web and graphic design.

Show Pony Graphics started as a freelance business in 2004, while Despina was undertaking her Bachelor of Multimedia (majoring in Applications) at University. In 2006, when Despina turned 21, the business went full time. She discovered that many horse industry businesses were seeking a professional design studio that could cater to their needs, but which also understood the horse industry.

Though she came from a non-horsey background, Despina's parents will tell you that she has loved horses for as long as they can remember. As a keen 14-year-old, Despina was lucky enough to be taken under the wing of Nicole Viney, who taught her to ride properly and allowed Despina to compete up to Royal level on her Australian Pony mare Naringa Mariah. Despina comments that she owes a lot to Nicole – "she taught me a lot and gave me opportunities many may not have had, especially growing up with no equine support". Of course, Despina's parents were also happy to help out as much as they could, but they really had "no idea" about horses. When Despina was 17 she bought her first horse, Lady Adeste, via Nicole. This Thoroughbred mare was Despina's show and saddle horse for several years, and would become the foundation broodmare of Skyline Park.

ABOVE: Despina receiving her Business Services award from the Honourable Joe Helper MP.



In the period between 2006 and 2008, when the business was just getting established, Show Pony Graphics (SPG) won a number of awards for websites from the Australian Web Designers Network, judged on graphics, artwork, layout, navigation, functionality and originality. In 2007, SPG was a finalist in the Australian Home Based Business awards in the Business Services category, run in conjunction with the Victorian Small Business Expo, and Despina's award was presented to her by the Victorian Minister for Small Business, the Honourable Joe Helper, MP. In 2008 she started promoting the business via trade stands, attending Equitana in 2008 and 2010, the Adelaide International 3DE, Dressage and Jumping with the Stars, and more. In the years since, Despina has designed everything from horse feed bags to auction catalogues to major websites (including full membership and ecommerce systems). High profile clients include the Riding Pony Stud Book, Barastoc Horse, Horseforce, Statene Park (Mary Hanna), Pegasus and Campbell's Floats and countless others.

She has designed websites for vets, studs, clothing businesses, associations, horse health, and almost everything else in between across all equine disciplines. Despina is very grateful to those clients who have supported her with their ongoing business, particularly when SPG was first started. In turn, she regularly supports Arabian shows, the Stock Horse Nationals and Polocrosse events, amongst others. She also sponsors long-term clients Abule Moon Arabian Ponies, and this year designed the catalogues for the 2015 Arabian Extravaganza and the logo, program and catalogue for the 2015 Arabian Championships Victoria. In 2015, she also started sponsoring CARABI (the Central Arabian Riders and Breeders Inc.) with a full website and advertisement design.

The year 2008 also saw the arrival of the first foal to carry the Skyline Park prefix. Arabian Riding Pony gelding Skyline Park Summer Storm (Falconhurst Four Seasons x Lady Adeste) is a multi-Champion in hand and, in his first season under saddle, won the Grade 4 Combined Training, Open Show Hunter,

Open Working Hunter, Ridden Arabian Riding Pony and the Chippawood Versatile Arabian Award at CARABI Pre-Royal (A class). His half-brother Skyline Park Mavro (by Karlana Say Farewell) was born in 2011, and Despina says that she knew the imposing black colt was destined to be a performance horse. At the 2013 ACE Group Assessment Tour, under the renowned Gerd Kust, a yearling 'Mav' was awarded Premium status with an impressive score of 78.25%, receiving an outstanding 80.50% for conformation. His scores saw him ranked above Warmbloods and numerous other horses with expensive, highly favoured breeding.

In 2010, Despina purchased a vacant block in Darraweit Guim, and has since developed it into an equine property with specialised horse fencing, shelters, a four-box barn, post and rail poundyard, arena (underway) and foaling yards. In February 2014, the farm was hit by the Michelham fire, destroying everything except the sheds, which were saved through the incredible efforts of the NSW Firefighters, who also saved the horses that Despina was forced to leave behind. Within eight months, this hardworking and committed woman had single-handedly (except for post-driving) brought the farm back to what it was, including clearing all the burnt material and fencing herself.

After a heart-breaking and equally back-breaking year, December 2014 saw a change of fortune with the arrival of Lady Adeste's foal by Opening Night, her last foal and first filly. The tall, elegant black was named Skyline Park Legacy in honour of her dam, and represents the next chapter in Despina's breeding programme, alongside Despina's most recent purchase, the typey Multi-Champion Ablue Moon's Starlet O'Hara (Ablue Moon Rising x La Vie En Rose). Together with established broodmare Naruni Park Windchime, who is currently carrying Mavro's first foal, they form the nucleus of the future Skyline Park broodmare band.

Show Pony Graphics and Skyline Park are testament to Despina's vision and work ethic. Her professionalism and dedication ensure that, like the SPG motto, she 'stands out in the crowd' in every respect. \*



TOP: Show Pony Graphics at Equitana.

BOTTOM: Despina and Skyline Park Mavro. Photo: ACE Group.