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Power Couples

These design duos prove that mixing marriage and work pays off BY ANGELICA BREM



Adam Talianich and Ashley Menger own design-build firm Hatch Works.

Ashley Menger met Adam Talianich at a party she threw in her Airstream trailer. A New Jersey transplant, Ashley says she wasn't sure about Texas until that night. "I opened the door and saw him and thought, 'I really like Texas now.'"

The couple now owns Hatch Works, a design and build company that specializes in unique structures and homes, and are just one example of many married Austinites who spend more time together than the average couple.

Adam takes care of the building part of the business, while Ashley uses her design background to "edit" his work. They design in a variety of styles—classical Victorian, ultra modern—and have even done tree houses and Quonset huts.

"There's a good ebb and flow to it," says Adam. "We have a solid relationship that makes it work."

The same goes for architects **Rick and Cindy Black**. When they first met, Cindy was still in high school at UT's summer academy and Rick's roommate was her professor. Six years later, they were reintroduced. "I remembered him, he had no memory of our meeting, which was probably good since I was 17," says Cindy.

In business for himself since '96, Rick invited Cindy to join his business in 2001.

"We were afraid that we might not get along, but we did," says Rick.

The parents of 4-year-old son JR say they have balance between family life and their two businesses, Rick & Cindy Black Architects, a residential, classic-modern firm, and Hello Kitchen, Cindy's independent kitchen design company.

"We work together on a lot of things, and don't make decisions without the other person weighing in. We do argue, even in front of clients, but it's not personal. We tell clients, 'We argue so you don't have to!'" says Cindy.

Also bit by the work-marriage bug, **Jill and Daniel Siegel** of California Closets of the Texas Hill Country, a custom storage, cabinetry and furniture store. The duo met at a rock 'n' roll show when Daniel was a musician in the Supersuckers. Both in other careers at the time, they had always talked about working together, so when they saw an opportunity to make

that happen, they went for it. Owners of the first California Closets franchise in Austin, they say working together has its "pluses and minuses. Work never goes away, but it's super cool in the things that we get to create together," says Jill.

Jill is a designer and handles sales and marketing, while Daniel handles operations and finances, but both claim that there's a lot of "gray area, but that's the most fun part," says Jill.

And perhaps no one has more fun together than **Heather and Scott Harkovich**. From their morning coffee to their daily jog and through the day-to-day operations at Heather Scott Home & Design, they love their live-work lifestyle. "It's nice to know the person you spend all your time with can relate to you," says Heather. "It's awesome sharing in each other's gains and losses."

The Harkoviches say their balanced personal and business relationship





Rick and Cindy Black together run their eponymous architecture firm.

works because of the opposites-attract theory. Their strengths put them into different aspects of running their store. Heather focuses on the design and product elements, marketing and interior decorating business, while Scott runs the management and retail side.

Aviary Lounge and Home Decor's Marco Fiorilo and Shanna Eldridge function similarly. The pair wanted to spend more time together and do something more artistic, so they decided to open their store with a wine and beer bar. The concept is simple: Stop in, have a drink, if you like the chair you're sitting on, buy it.

The couple shares their mornings together at home and then divides the work based on their own set of responsibilities. Shanna jokes that she's the "boss," and handles ordering, accounting, cleaning and opens the store. Marco manages the bar, events, public relations, the beer and wine tastings and closes up the shop. "It's not easy, but it's not hard," Shanna says.

They enjoy spending time outside of

work with their 5-year-old son, but say working together is bliss, "as long as you learn to delegate, find your strengths and pick your battles," says Shanna.

Andrea and Tom Wilkinson also found that splitting the work duties helps make things solid at home. After 20 years of marriage, and being in business together

Tom is a designer and sales guru while Andrea takes care of the accounting and managing the showroom. The parents of two girls say working together is seamless, and that it brings them closer as long as they share their patience, strengths and weaknesses.

Also married for 20 years, a bad first meeting didn't stop contemporary furniture store Skandinavia's Shawn and Erika Olsen from falling in love and into business. The Olsens make it work by splitting their days depending on the needs of their family.

They try to separate their work and family lives as much as possible, but chances are, after tucking their kids into bed, you can find them working together on business stuff from home.

Since they've never had it any other way, the couple says they "don't know how spouses work apart from each other." Again, separate roles seem to make things function more smoothly. Shawn primarily handles the marketing

"Learn to delegate, find your strengths and pick your battles." —SHANNA ELDRIDGE

for 12, the high school sweethearts run Arete European Kitchens (formerly Alno Austin). Tom, a former nuclear engineer, says the lifestyle can be "demanding," but that handling things separately helps ease the load. "We are like oil and water," says Tom. "We are both very hands-on, but in our separate domains."

and accounting, while Erika does most of the buying and merchandising.

They've found that the same things that make a marriage successful makes being business partners successful. Shawn adds, "You must have an abundance of patience, trust and understand that your way is not always the best." ■