



publications such as *Vogue Entertaining* + *Travel*, *Gourmet Traveller* and several supermarket magazines.

Sensing her star power, David Jones agreed to develop tablecloths, serving bowls, even nougat for her in 2004 if she would lend them her name. Neither party would discuss how much the licensing agreement is worth. “We spotted Donna Hay early on in her career,” McInnes says. “Donna is real, she’s talented, and she’s insanely creative.”

Her secret, Hay says, is “extreme attention to detail”. At her Surry Hills studio in Sydney – close to the News Ltd offices – she attempts the finishing touches on a beehive-shaped cake before a photo shoot for a collection of recipes for children.

The cake is set on a piano stool and rotated slowly for Hay, who has emerged into the test kitchen from her office dressed stunningly – if incongruously – in black: jacket, knee-length skirt, fishnet stockings and heels.

She swirls thick ropes of the honey-coloured icing like an upside-down Mr Whippy cone, starting from the base, while half a dozen kitchen, photography and art staffers gather to watch the miniature feat of engineering. “There’s too much air,” Hay frowns. “We need to redo the recipe.”

The test kitchen and dedicated food studio are rare in a publishing world ever mindful of costs. They are testament to Hay’s pull at News Ltd. That’s because the Donna Hay brand sells.

Targeted at women aged between 25 and 54, the bimonthly *Donna Hay Magazine* rose in circulation during the 12 months to December by 13 per cent, to more than 90,000, according to Audit Bureau of Circulation figures. Readership rose 7 per cent in the year to March 2008 from the previous 12-month period to 347,000, according to Roy Morgan research.

Average monthly sales in the six months to December 2007 of *Donna Hay Magazine*’s nearest rival *Delicious*, also published by News Magazines (a division of News Ltd), climbed 5 per cent to 125,300 a month compared with the same period a year earlier.

“She’s the consummate stylist,” *Delicious* editor Trudi Jenkins says. “She takes simple, achievable food and makes it look gorgeous. That’s her skill.”

Hay’s first book with HarperCollins, *Off The Shelf*, published in 2001, has sold 265,000 copies in Australia and New Zealand, where the average print run for non-fiction is about 10,000. The book has sold 433,000 copies in English worldwide. Hay’s next book with HarperCollins, *No Time to Cook*, is scheduled

DONNA HAY

AGE: 38

LIVES: Sydney

WORKING LIFE:

Hay started out as a freelance food writer and stylist at the age of 19. By 25, she was food editor for the Australian edition of *Marie Claire* magazine. Her bimonthly *Donna Hay Magazine*, which has a readership of about 347,000 in Australia, is the top-selling international food magazine in Barnes & Noble bookstores as well as Borders in the United States, where circulation

jumped 17 per cent during the six months to December last year.

KEY TO SUCCESS:

Hay credits her success to “extreme attention to detail”, although that minute control has cost her staff and friends.

INSPIRATION:

Hay says her publications tap an inner need in people to look after themselves and others. “Cooking is about nurturing and caring,” she says. “There’s something very basic about cooking and looking after yourself.”

guests included Westpac Banking Corporation chief executive Gail Kelly, Qantas executive manager John Borghetti, NRMA chief executive Tony Stuart and David Jones’s McInnes.

The meal included twice-cooked chicken simmered in broth, tossed in rice flour then deep fried and served with lemon. After their individual cheese plates, Hay roped all guests except Kelly into a soufflé-making competition. The winner? Qantas’s Borghetti.

“I took my heels off and I was right in there with them. McInnes was rubbish,” Hay joked.

There have been bumps along the way. In the early years, the marathon hours and Hay’s tight control burned out staff. Turnover was high. Hay developed a reputation as a control freak and she lost friends. “She worked incredibly long hours and there was the expectation that everyone else would,” says Lucy Tumanow-West, who was a copy editor with Hay and is now deputy editor of *Practical Parenting*, published monthly by Pacific Magazines.

Hay had trouble co-ordinating creative direction among the team and folding in differing views when they arose. “Everyone thinks they are on the same page but then they realise they are reading different books,” Tumanow-West says. “They were heady times.”

Hay insists that she has developed a nurturing environment in which staff members can offer recipe and photography ideas.

After having two children, Hay works shorter hours, getting home to take over from the nanny by 6pm. No one needs to stay in the office after six and staff are entitled to “mental health” days. “The office is set up for creative people,” she says. “If you’re tired, you’re miserable.”

Animosity among creative team members can quickly develop if there is a perception that the star is taking credit for someone else’s work, Granger says. Hay may also come in for special flak because she is a woman who knows what she wants. “Donna Hay’s work has a look and feel and you know it’s Donna Hay,” he says. “That’s because Donna is over it all. She hasn’t achieved her position by letting her opinion go unheard.”

Back in the studio, photographers prepare the beehive cake on a light-green surface. One artist is carefully reflecting light onto the creation while another fixes two toy bees with long flexible metal pins at odd angles so that they appear to hover.

“If you don’t have extreme attention to detail, who are you going to blame if the recipe doesn’t work?” Hay asks. “If it wasn’t called *Donna Hay [Magazine]*, there would be fewer decisions for me to fall on my sword for.” **BRW**

for publication in October, with an initial print run of 80,000 copies.

Hay is also planning branded gift sets for David Jones and the luxury food distributor Simon Johnson. She aims to build on the success of her “couture cupcake” baking set, designed for United Kingdom supermarket chain Sainsbury’s at Christmas, that included stitched cupcake papers and chocolate buttons.

A television show is also in the works, and premium tableware maker Royal Doulton this month agreed to participate in the homewares brand.

For News Ltd, having Donna Hay next door concocting recipes has other benefits. Two months ago, News Ltd chairman and chief executive John Hartigan asked Hay to make dinner for eight visiting board members. The

SHE TAKES SIMPLE, ACHIEVABLE FOOD AND MAKES IT LOOK GORGEOUS. THAT’S HER SKILL

TRUDI JENKINS, EDITOR, DELICIOUS

