

PERSPECTIVE





THE DNA OF SUCCESS

The strong gravitational pull of a parent means a professional passion is often passed on to the child.

Story Brook Turner

Two years ago the Sydney art dealer Ray Hughes and his son Evan went into business together as God – or Ray – had always intended. Evan not only grew up with art but had deepened his experience with an art history degree at Cambridge and a stint in the London gallery scene.

Yet perched above the father ship in Sydney's Surry Hills, the Evan Hughes Gallery sailed into trouble almost immediately, opening in the global credit crisis of October 2008.

That only amplified some pretty tangled motivations, however. The project foundered. Tempers frayed. Father and son didn't speak for months.

"I think we both felt pressured to do it, that it was time," Evan says.

"Part of it was just pent-up frustration and I took it out on Ray. I hated the rest of the art world and I was kind of angered that it wasn't like what he had got to do when he was 22 and opened his first gallery in Brisbane. There was an innocence then, a vigour and excitement, and a lot of young collectors with open eyes. And you didn't have seven art magazines telling you what to like and who was most fashionable."

Like any red-blooded kid, Evan rebelled, hitting on the one course of action his father couldn't accept: law at Sydney University.

At 25, Evan Hughes is headed to the bar, though a very different one from the all-you-can-drink version his father ran for 40 years at his famous Thursday lunches.

Then again when your father is

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the most Rabelaisian figure in a Rabelaisian art world, what's left but rules and precedents. "A judge said to me 'you must be the only boy whose father is dismally ashamed he's studying law'," Evan says, sitting in the gallery the week before Christmas dressed in a grey pin-striped suit and parrot-coloured tie, his socks – mismatched, pale pink – a riff on his father's candy-coloured pair.

Not that he's as sure he will end up in the law as he was when he first slammed the upstairs door. These days he is back working with his father as an associate while he studies. "The minute Ray accepted I was going to study law and started asking questions and listening to me rabbit on about jurisprudence, I got far more interested in art

Ray Hughes and son Evan at the Ray Hughes Gallery in Sydney.
Photo Andrew Quilty

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From previous page again," Evan says. "A couple of months ago my fiancée turned to me and said 'don't tell anyone but you look like you're enjoying art dealing again'."

"Sometimes you think you've been too soft," Ray says, eyeing his only child adoringly. "I don't know what he'll end up doing. I wouldn't say I'm holding out, I just won't be surprised."

Evan: "That's absolutely right: if I think art dealers are nasty colleagues, I'm sure a couple of years on Phillip Street will sort me out. But you either have the fire burning constantly or you don't. My fire burns somewhat ... it's never going to be like Ray's."

Ray nods. "I remember [the late Australian painter] Sam Fullbrook saying 'you're like a priest, you've had the calling'," he says. "If you're going to be any good at anything, you've got to have a calling."

And as Evan Hughes spends his 20s sorting his calling from what is just his father's calling, he will be following a time-honoured tradition. From medicine and law to politics, architecture and the arts, there is an established rite of passage when a child follows an illustrious parent into the profession in which they have become illustrious.

children have followed him into architecture. But no one was more nonplussed than him – except maybe them. "I was surprised when they enrolled, neither had ever spoken to me about it," says the co-founder of the star Melbourne firm Fender Katsalidis. "I never coerced or tried to direct them, quite the contrary. But architecture's a consuming profession. If there's an architect in the family it's easy for the family to be subsumed. Somehow that has an influence on children, it becomes part of their psyche."

"It came as quite a shock to my father," Lucien, 38, says of his decision to enrol. To him too. Lucien had turned up at Melbourne's RMIT in 1990 intending to become an accountant ("it meant money to me"). Then he saw his classmates.

The architecture faculty on the other hand looked and felt right, he says. So he compensated by taking 20 years to get his degree, dipping into DJ'ing and building structures for music festivals.

"I resisted even when I was working in architecture," he says. "As a child, architecture was something that took my father away from me rather than showing me anything. But I've since realised it was probably the opposite: I wouldn't have travelled the world if Karl hadn't been an architect."

Former High Court judge Michael McHugh still regrets the price exacted by his stellar legal career. "Sir Garfield Barwick was said to have regretted the time he spent

