

BOBBI BROWN

# I'm Ready to Be the Boss Again

THE MAKEUP MASTER OPENS UP ABOUT STEPPING AWAY FROM HER NAMESAKE BRAND AND STARTING OVER: 'IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO REINVENT YOURSELF'  
By KAITLYN FREY



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: BEN RITTER; COURTESY BOBBI BROWN; ILOHA STODRE/JULSTEIN BILD/GETTY IMAGES; ROY HOCHLIN/FILMMAGIC; CINDY ORO/GETTY IMAGES

In 2016, after 30 years of running her eponymous makeup brand, Bobbi Brown decided it was time to walk away. "I'd been so focused on changing things and doing things better, because that's just my personality," she says. But a conversation with her 90-year-old aunt Alice made her stop and rethink. "She said, 'Every time I talk to you, you talk about all the things you have to do, and you're just not getting them done,'" Brown recalls. Still, "it certainly was not an overnight decision."

After tendering her resignation, Brown spent two days moping—"my best friends and neighbors came over with a bottle of tequila," and she had a "really good cry"—and then got ready to move on. "I was like, 'Oh, I feel awful. Well, I don't want to feel awful. So I'm going to drink some water, hydrate and go on a walk and clear my brain,'" she says. "I'm kind of a positive, upbeat person."

About to turn 60, Brown didn't know what to do next. "I don't golf. I don't play tennis. I don't garden. I thought I'd meditate, but I like to move," she says. "Was I scared? I was like, 'Oh my gosh.'"

She started going out for lunches with friends she hadn't seen in 20 years because she'd been so busy. "I felt like a kid out of kindergarten," she says. She walked the mall, finding inspiration in new beauty brands. She went to the Institute for Integrative Nutrition to become a certified health coach, which led to a lifestyle pop-up shop at Lord & Taylor; her ninth book, *Beauty from the Inside Out*; and Evolution\_18, a line of supplements at Walmart.

"I also was back being a makeup artist," she says. But her new passion for wellness led to new questions. "I thought, 'Why would I put things on my face that aren't healthy for me?' I wondered if I could create clean, efficacious products that were as good as anything I'd ever tried," she says. "I just went forward with this kidlike excitement—what if and how?" It was the beginning of her new brand Jones Road—a collection of makeup that adheres to strict clean-ingredient guidelines—which, undeterred by a global pandemic, she debuted last October.

That combination of curiosity and tenacity came naturally to the entrepreneur. Born in 1957 in Wilmette, Ill., to Sandra, a stay-at-home mom, and Joe, a lawyer, Brown got her first job

## The Road to Success



**Early Days**  
Brown says in her 20s she was a "passionate wannabe makeup artist" who honed her skills at fashion shows (like this one) in the 1980s.



**Female Founder**  
Brown (in 1997) launched her line with lipsticks: "I never thought of having a full makeup range, but people kept coming back for more."



**Savvy Executive**

The beauty pro (opening the Bobbi Brown Cosmetics counter at Macy's in N.Y.C. in 2013 with former CEO Terry Lundgren) left her brand after 30 years: "I wanted to be an entrepreneur again," she says.



**Bestselling Author**  
In 2017 Brown released her ninth book, *Beauty from the Inside Out*, about wellness: "I realized that people who took care of themselves looked really good."

**'If I didn't have a positive attitude, I never could have done this'**

—BOBBI BROWN, ON LAUNCHING JONES ROAD DURING THE PANDEMIC

at age 16. "I sold shoes at Carson Pirie Scott, and I had no idea what I was doing," she says. "But I figured it out."

While she began to thrive in the workplace, Brown struggled when it came to her appearance. "I wanted to be pretty," she says, "but I never felt as beautiful as the cheerleaders or models like Cheryl Tiegs." She tried to channel one of her favorite movies. "I remember looking up at the screen and seeing this freckled girl with strong eyebrows and dark lashes," she recalls of star Ali MacGraw in the 1970 film *Love Story*. "I thought, 'I kind of look like that. I could be pretty too.' Her character's look inspired me to do natural makeup. And that led to my career."





## Her Family Life

Brown says her sons Dylan, 30, Cody, 28, and Duke, 22 (bottom in 2018, and below in 2000), and husband, Steven Plofker (left in 2018), keep her grounded. “There’s no such thing as having it all,” she says of balancing work and family. “It was never easy, and it’s still not easy. I do the best I can.”



She earned a degree in theatrical makeup from Emerson College and moved to New York City in 1981 at age 23. There, she hustled as a freelance makeup artist and in 1990 created a collection of 10 easy-to-wear lipsticks and sold them out of her home. A year later, after she had a chance meeting with a cosmetics buyer for Bergdorf Goodman, Bobbi Brown Cosmetics premiered at the famed Manhattan store. Brown’s light-handed technique and user-friendly formulas were a stark contrast to the bolder, heavily made-up trends of the time. She caught the attention of Estée Lauder Companies, which acquired her brand for an undisclosed amount in 1995. For 22 years Brown stayed at the helm. “There are so many good things that come with having a big corporation behind you, but you can’t shift and turn quickly,” she says. “I was ready to do things differently. I was ready to be the boss again.”

After she announced her resignation, her husband of 32 years, Steven Plofker, 64, helped her chart her next course. “He’s such a yin to my yang,” she says. “I’m much more excitable and emotional. He’s like, ‘Okay, calm down. Let’s talk about it.’” Brown also immersed herself in social media, posting makeup classes on Instagram Live and sharing her favorite smoothie recipes. “There’s nothing I don’t love about technology—except when I can’t get on Zoom!” she says.

Technology also helped her reconnect. “I rekindled my friendship with Katie Couric on Instagram,” says Brown, who is now the lifestyle and beauty editor of the former *Today* anchor’s



## Her Wellness Routine

The makeup guru became a certified health coach in 2018. She works out daily—Peloton’s yoga and strength classes are favorites—drinks plenty of water and follows a gluten-free diet. “I don’t consider exercising and [watching] what I put in my body self-care; I consider it maintenance. It’s what I do,” she says. “For me, self-care is leaving the dishes and things that need to be done and getting in a bath with Epsom salts, then hopping in my bed with my iPad or a book and having time to do nothing. I’m usually asleep in a half hour!”

lawyer and became a children’s book author. He’s written more than 10 books, is working on a screenplay and just hired a social media manager. He’s happier than he’s ever been in his life,” she says. “It’s never too late.”

Right now she’s enjoying being an entrepreneur again. “It’s so much easier, because I know what to do,” she says, comparing this launch to her first. “I’m as excited as ever—different excited because the rules are different.” She has more freedom; instead of lining up orders six months to a year in advance, she can respond to customers’ needs almost instantly (like when her line’s Dusty Rose all-over balm sold out in an hour). But she won’t compare the success of Jones Road to that of Bobbi Brown Cosmetics. What she wants now is to empower people to be healthy inside and out—and to continue to feel challenged. “I just follow my heart and my gut,” Brown says. “What’s most interesting to me is doing things that I have no idea how to do. I’m not afraid to look stupid. You learn along the way.” ●

‘I hope my legacy will be that I helped people feel good in their skin’

—BOBBI BROWN

newsletter *Wake-Up Call*. And she found social media was a great way to support other entrepreneurs and beauty founders. “I honestly love having a social life on Instagram. But does my husband like that I’m always on it? No,” she says with a laugh.

Brown maintains that more than anything, a “fearless” mindset is what keeps her feeling motivated and creative. “I realized that if I didn’t have an upbeat, positive attitude and I weren’t open to change, I never could have done this,” she says of launching Jones Road in the middle of the pandemic. Quarantine, she adds, “teaches you that you have to really reinvent everything. Every single thing.”

She has new appreciation for all she has accomplished. “When I first left [Bobbi Brown Cosmetics], it was hard to think about how they’d continue without me,” she says. “But as I got busy in new things, I could look back and just feel so good about what I created and what I did for women and their self-esteem and empowering them to feel comfortable in their skin.” And she’s learned to focus on what’s ahead. “I let go of the things that don’t make me happy,” she says. “Then you have more room for the things that do.”

Her role model for finding what you love, regardless of your age, is close to home. “Fifteen years ago, at 70, my father retired from being a



“I used to expect to have everything lined up perfectly. But now I am able to shift,” says Brown (at the George, the luxury boutique hotel in Montclair, N.J., that she co-owns with her husband).

## Bobbi’s Best Makeup Secrets

After more than four decades in the business, the pro—who is renowned for creating a natural look—swears by these tips

### Prep Your Skin

“The secret to a flawless face starts with hydration. If you drink enough water and use a good moisturizer, you won’t need as much coverage.”

### Apply Foundation Strategically

“Most people think they should apply foundation everywhere. Instead, focus on spot-correcting redness around the nose, under-eye circles and any other blemishes to create a more natural, even skin tone.”

Jones Road The Face Pencil, \$25; jonesroadbeauty.com

### Blend Your Bronzer

“Since your neck is usually lighter than the rest of your face, apply bronzer to give the area a subtle tint. Use a brush to sweep bronzer up and down until you’ve blended it into the skin evenly.”

### Embrace a Little Glow

“The key to my no-makeup makeup look is using a nourishing, light-reflecting sheer balm. You can wear it alone to enhance skin or layer it over foundation. It can also go on eyelids, lips and your hair. I use it to fix my flyaways!”

Jones Road Miracle Balm, \$38; jonesroadbeauty.com



### Open Up Your Eyes

“Women often tell me that their eyes ‘disappear’ as they get older. To make them stand out, apply brown eyeliner along the top lash lines and faintly underneath, then add a few coats of a mascara.”

COURTESY BOBBI BROWN (3)

BOTTOM RIGHT: LESLEY UNRUH