



# GIFT WRAPPED



ABOVE CENTRE: Their first foray into concrete, Aroha's puku cast *Tino Rangatiratanga* (left) and their second-ever cast *Te Rangī Aniwaniwa*. RIGHT: Tawa (left) and Aroha with mother-to-be model Angela-Marie Hobson.

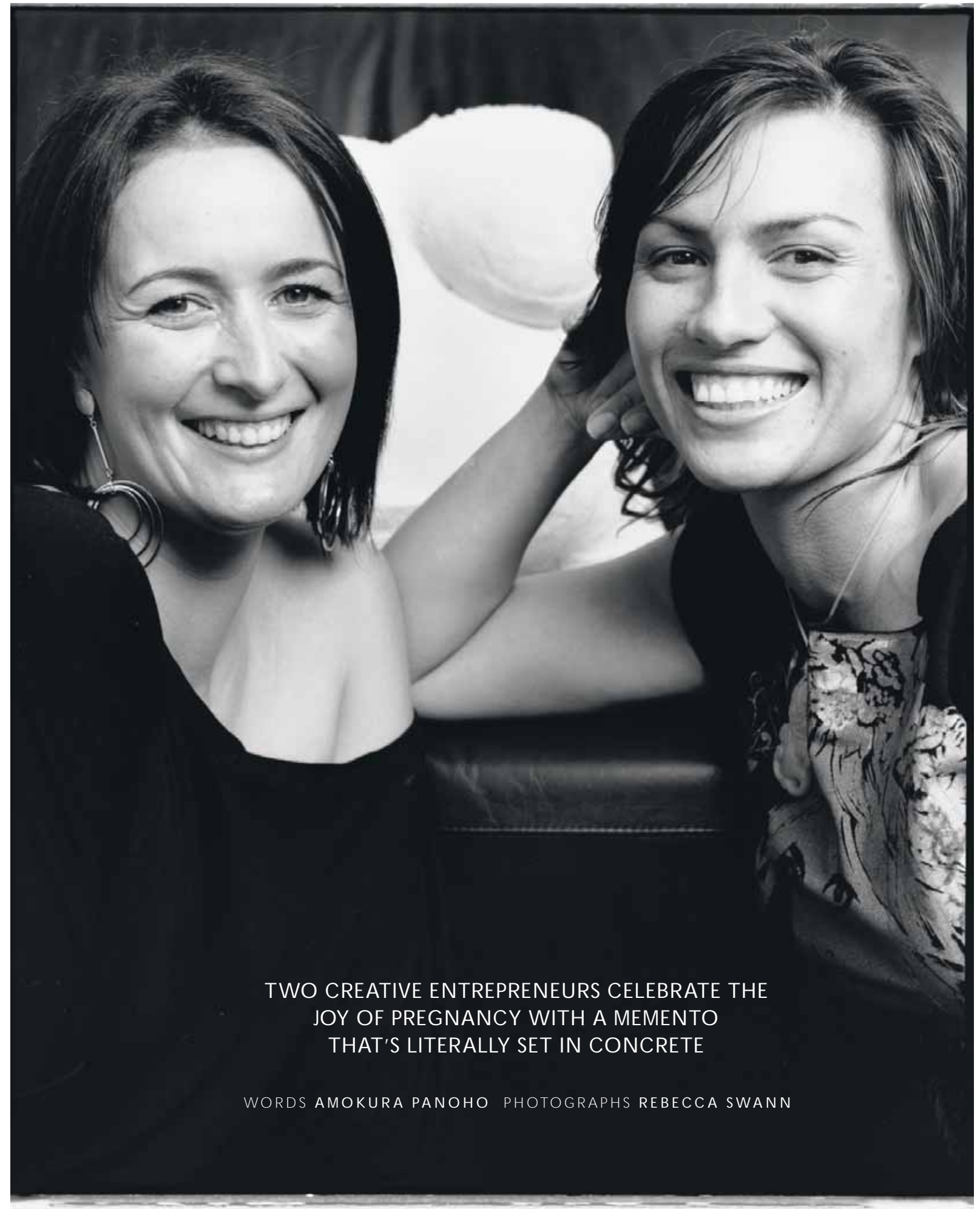
TAKE FIVE KILOS OF PLASTER mixed with water in a bucket, heaps of discarded sports bandages, stand out on the back deck and practise making a piece of art using your own body. That's how Aroha Armstrong and Tawa Hunter thought they would remember their last pregnancies and from that experimental beginning they have started their own business, Yummy Mummy.

As Tawa explains: "Being pregnant at the same time with my third child and Aroha's second, we wanted to do something significant to mark this time of our lives. After lots of practice and some creative thinking we finished our first puku (stomach) art pieces. Then our hapu (pregnant) friends and family members wanted their own versions. It didn't take long to realize that we could develop a viable small business."

For Aroha, who is married to Tawa's brother Moehewa, their close family relationship seemed a natural environment within which to nurture a business. "We knew we had a good concept but we needed to translate that into a marketable opportunity so we completed the Certificate in Small Business with Te Wananga o Aotearoa. This helped us recognize our strengths. With the support of our partners and my mother-in-law and babysitter Ata, we have been developing our idea."

Using their own homes, Aroha and Tawa spend nearly two hours with each client and, on occasion, her partner. Making their clients feel beautiful and enjoy being pregnant is how they promote their business. With infectious smiles and intermittent laughter, they explain the importance of their relationship with their clients.

Tawa says: "We want to let her know how wonderful she is, what a miraculous thing she is doing and how she is at the heart of her family." ▶



TWO CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS CELEBRATE THE JOY OF PREGNANCY WITH A MEMENTO THAT'S LITERALLY SET IN CONCRETE

WORDS AMOKURA PANOHO PHOTOGRAPHS REBECCA SWANN



Father, mother, brother, husband and children – even the baby – take a break from building Tawa and Aroha's studio. Creating the colourful tiki is also a family affair. A concrete cast makes a very personal garden sculpture.



## MAKING THEIR CLIENTS FEEL BEAUTIFUL AND ENJOY BEING PREGNANT IS HOW THEY PROMOTE THEIR BUSINESS

“We pamper her while she is with us and share her story in order to get a sense of who she is. It is really amazing when partners attend as most times they want to be involved with the casting process – sometimes getting even more excited about it than our client. There are times when they have their own design they want us to use or they will decorate the cast themselves. Otherwise we are commissioned to decorate it and then present it to them after the birth of their child.”

“Some of our most popular pieces are cast in concrete,” adds Aroha. “They are usually used as garden features or displayed inside as a sculptural piece. One client’s husband even made theirs into a water feature.”

Contributing to the ritual of burying the whenua (afterbirth) at a place of special significance is an added-value aspect of the business. Aroha explains: “In our whanau we plant native trees to mark the spot. It’s also nice to have our puku there. Our concrete casts symbolize what our business is all about: the connection between whanau, whenua as in the land and whakapapa (genealogy) through contemporary art.”

The women’s combined love of all things bright and beautiful led them to their next product range – resin tiki. Aroha had given a present to Tawa’s husband Shamos using a plastic tiki as part of the wrapping and in a crazy moment they both thought that the tiki would look really cool if it was pink. Foraging around specialist shops in Auckland, they picked up the basics on how to make moulds out of silicone and, using a plastic souvenir tiki, created their first practice mould. Experimenting with powder pigments was the next step.

“It was a long process as there is no manual on how to do this and it takes a long time to learn how to work with resin. Other artists’ knowledge is jealously guarded. We completely understand this as it


has taken us nearly two years to learn what we have.” They have now developed a palette they call their Candy Shop colour range.

“In fact,” says Tawa, “the tiki have become our main product. When we first made them they were literally being bought from our own necks. Each tiki is made to order. They are time-intensive and you will never get the same colour twice but we are developing our own technology to cut down the time and try to build up stock.”

Aroha reflects: “The tiki is a generic symbol for all New Zealanders to identify with. In a way we have reclaimed that symbol from a plastic souvenir and, as Maori, produced something contemporary and available to everyone.”

With a well-established whanau support system, the women sometimes find themselves working until the early hours of the morning to meet the demands of parenting and the business. “We have this dream that one day our business will grow to where we have other people making the products and we are out there searching for new ideas and concepts. We are developing a jewellery range and thinking global but our most exciting venture is a joint exhibition with renowned Maori artist Robyn Kahukiwa.”

“Can you imagine it?” asks Tawa. “She is our idol and a mutual friend brought her around to our house. We became friends and now we are exhibiting jointly in December at the Bowen Gallery in Wellington.” Aroha adds: “We are working on a concept cast in resin that is based on her poem *Here in Me*. This gives us the opportunity to work on large-scale art pieces and it is truly exciting.”

If the concept of excitement could be set in concrete, Aroha and Tawa would have another art piece to add to their collection. 

Orders for Aroha and Tawa’s work can be placed through their website: [www.yummyummy.co.nz](http://www.yummyummy.co.nz)