

## *“Every day, you wake up and go, ‘OK, right. What’s today going to hold?’”*

grandmother of two and a self-made businesswoman reportedly worth \$66 million.

“I’m addicted to busy. And I thought, oh my god, what am I going to do all day? You do the fire, you cook the beans, you do a challenge: what do you do the rest of the day?”

It turns out Allis had no trouble occupying herself, making it deep into the series before being voted off the island on day 44.

But, of course, Allis was no stranger to reality television. She began her on-screen career in 2010 with *Undercover Boss* and then followed up with four seasons as a shark investor on *Shark Tank*. Now, Allis is once again busy on TV, this time appearing as an adviser on Nine’s *Celebrity Apprentice Australia*.

Is it possible this veteran of four reality shows might just be addicted to the medium?

Allis concedes that early appearances helped with brand recognition or sated her curiosity as an entrepreneur, but recently she is being driven by something else.

“I think in life, if you just say yes, really interesting things happen,” laughs Allis, pointing to friendships she has made, including her latest with fellow *Apprentice* adviser, fashion designer Lorna Jane Clarkson. “So, in so many ways, why wouldn’t you? And you know what? TV’s fun. It’s just fun.”

And, given the economic challenges thrown up over the past year through the pandemic, you could hardly blame her for seeking out a bit of levity.

Retail Zoo, the company she co-owns with husband Jeff Allis and private investment firm Bain Capital, has more than 650 company-owned and franchised stores in more than 13 countries with brands such as Boost, Betty’s Burgers and Concrete Co, Salsa’s Fresh Mex and CIBO Espresso.

Like most companies, it had assessed many risks, but a pandemic wasn’t one of them. “We just kind of went ‘what the?’” recalls Allis of that time.

“I’d built this business for 21 years, and I didn’t see a way out of it.”

Allis says the Australian government’s response with financial assistance, emergency leasing arrangements for retailers and some astute and agile decision-making by her executive team saved the company from disaster. Nevertheless, the experience has left an indelible mark. “Every day, you wake up and go, ‘OK, right. What’s today going to hold?’”

**M**eanwhile, the pandemic also prompted Allis and her husband to move home. The couple had been spending a weekend at their Noosa holiday house when Victoria went into lockdown. “We couldn’t get back,” says Allis. “So, I mean, help! Poor us, we got stuck in Noosa ... [But] we had this lifestyle where we went swimming and surfing every day and took the dogs for a walk in nature. And we just went, ‘this is what we want.’”

In March, they sold their Toorak home for more than \$20 million and now live in Sydney’s northern beaches, close to the city (for business), her two sisters and the beach.

Although their Great Ocean Road property in Fairhaven is technically on the market (known as the “Mad Max House”, it’s valued at more than \$10 million), Allis appears reluctant to sell. “That’s more of an emotional house for us. That’s where the kids have done nippers; it’s been a happy place for 20 years.”

But Melbourne hasn’t lost her for ever, says Allis, who visits at least once a month. “I’m straddling both cities. My mother lives in Melbourne ... but the best thing about coming to Sydney being a Melbourne person is it got me to appreciate Melbourne again. I was there last week, and I walked down the street, and I saw the beautiful trees that have changed colour. And I love the freshness of Melbourne.

“The cool boots and the great fashion you can wear is awesome. And you know, there might be a time when I will return. But for this period of time, we’re going to go on a new adventure.”

New adventures, it seems, are a driving force for Allis, personally and professionally. In business, she keeps the Boost brand fresh by talking to her young customers, staying relevant and having fun (think Vegemite smoothies).

“The day that you go ‘we’re done, that business is done, we’re successful’, is the day that you’re in serious trouble,” she says.

“[It’s about] that curious mind – if there’s a better way, we’ll find it. I think the meaning of life is learning. I don’t care if it’s me learning to be a yoga instructor, which I did a few years ago, or me learning to drive a boat or learning to teach my dog a new trick; learning is the key thing.”

That said, it’s difficult to pin down what Allis’s next adventure may be. Last year her company Retail Zoo withdrew an application to float as a publicly listed company on the Australian Stock Exchange due to the economic environment. That may change in the coming months if conditions are more favourable. “I would say that there is an event likely to happen in the near future,” she says. “But, it depends; there are so many things.”

Meanwhile, she recently joined the board of electronic retailer Kogan and says she had been talking to Andrew Banks (of *Shark Tank* fame) about his investments in a business that specialises in longevity and quality of life.

“I think that anything to do with whatever idea that comes up, or whoever I support in a business, my skill is to understand the customer, keep business simple, and just keep delivering what they want.” ●

**THE CELEBRITY APPRENTICE AUSTRALIA \**  
Airs Sunday to Tuesday on Nine