

# TWO'S COMPANY

DAVID NICHOLLS talks to three design company partnerships about the pleasures and pitfalls of working and living together

PHOTOGRAPHS  
HELEN CATHCART

## Oona Bannon and Russell Pinch

DIRECTORS AT PINCH | [pinchdesign.com](http://pinchdesign.com)

### OONA ON RUSSELL

When we got together, Russell was my boss at a branding agency that he had set up. After we got married, he said he wanted to go back to his first love: designing furniture. I thought, "Sounds great, let's do it. Let's design a company that works for our lives." I continued doing the day job as a branding director, and then I'd come home and help Russell. Because we'd already worked together, I wasn't worried about how we'd get along. I respected the way he worked and it felt natural. In our case, it's made life easier.

"When it comes to designing a new piece, we'll discuss what we want. Say it's a table. We'll do lots of research, dig out references from art or fashion, and discuss shape and material. That's my bit done for a while and Russell goes off to think and draw. And then comes this spiral of despair – it's like a cathartic panic that he has to go through. "Why are we doing this table? Does the world need another table?" Meanwhile, I do a lot of nodding and passing of tissues. He has to divest himself of the panic and I know that sense will prevail. I have so much respect for him – I don't know where his ideas come from. So I leave that magic to him, and then I'm involved again with finessing the piece.

"I'd say Russell knocks off my harder edges, and I think I make him less worried about things. We carry the can together. You'd think that 14 years in we would have a better work-life balance, but we're entrepreneurs and that means not clocking off at 6pm. Of course, this comes with a personal cost, but I'm doing it with him. We're managing to do it with the kids. They're the people I want to be with, so it's win-win for me."

### RUSSELL ON OONA

I felt as if, in branding, we had spent too much time working with large companies who saw their customers as consumers without any human element. We wanted to go back to basics and be the ones who initiated the creativity, rather than responding to someone else's brief. I think one of the secrets of success for running the business together is that we knew each other as colleagues first. And although it sounds cheesy, we both have enormous respect for each other's skills. Oona is influential in the design of our products. The only thing she doesn't do is draw them, which is a bit more my métier. And it's not all plain sailing. She challenges me: "It needs to be 2mm smaller, it's not right." The result is always a better product. Of course, there's very little diplomacy compared to speaking to another colleague, but with that comes a shorthand in the creative process.

"We often say that if we had to work as hard as we both do, but in separate companies, we would have split up. But I understand why she might need to stay up and work late, and she understands when I get into a panic over a blank page. Although we do have to divide and conquer sometimes, Oona and I are rarely two feet apart during the day. She sits right behind me and we finish each other's sentences. I'm sure if a management consultant ever came in, they'd say we're mad and that this was not an efficient way of working. But then, I don't think we'd ever hire a management consultant." >

Oona and Russell in their showroom in Bourne Street, SW1

