

**Paula Emery
packs, pastes
and applies
paper as
way out
of 8-5 rut**



By
Marsha Talley



PHOTO BY DAN LASSITER

Emery loves going to different worksites with every job.

Novice wallpaper hangers everywhere know the hard work and frustration of measuring paper, smoothing bubbles, and painstakingly matching edges.

But Paula Emery does it with ease.

While wallpapering one of her rental units one day, a friend dropped in and said "you know, people pay to have that done."

That was five years ago. Now Paula owns Paper Dolls, a wallpapering service. She wallpapers homes and businesses and loves every minute of it.

"Every house is different," she says. "Every customer is different. And that's one thing I love about the job. Every single day I'm in a different location. I have worked in Estes Park. I've worked in Denver. I've gone from working for funeral homes to restaurants to bridal boutiques."

In Fort Collins, Paula wallpapered the

Mountain Empire Hotel, The Egg & I, and Steele's Market, to name a few businesses. She also enjoys papering in different homes in the area.

"I don't know if you ever do this," she confides, "I mean, you drive down the street and you see a really neat house. You think 'I wonder what that's decorated like.'" Paula not only gets to find out, but she enjoys working with different people, observing different lifestyles.

"Even though they're employing you, you're almost like a guest in their house. Sometimes they'll fix you lunch, make you cookies. They'll treat you just like you're being entertained. It's really nice."

"It's the most interesting job I've ever had," she adds.

Paula, a 1968 Poudre High School graduate, has a degree in business and a hair

stylist license, and she has worked in two local banks. When her two children, Josh and Ethan, were born, she quit her banking job. But when her children began school full time, she began looking for work again. Not wanting to be locked into an 8 to 5 schedule, she thought Paper Dolls might be just what she wanted.

"I'm the kind of person that likes to be in different places all the time. I get bored if I have to go to the same cubicle every single day. This gives me the flexibility and I love it. Every few days I get a new boss!"

Paula's office reflects her own flexibility. It consists of her home, comfortably but meticulously papered in pink; her black shiny van; and her various job sites. "If it weren't for my answering service and my daytimer, I might be lost!" she says jokingly. "I kind of have an office, and it's mobile," she points to her black van.

Since what she sells is a service, and she works either over the phone or at the job site, she doesn't, in fact, believe a formal office is necessary. She explains, "Where I have my

business has absolutely nothing to do with what I do."

Operating out of her home seems to have few drawbacks for Paula. Working at the job site most of the time, she has few family and phone interruptions. And she lacks no self discipline to keep working.

"I think sometimes people have the conception that when you own your own business, you can take off whenever you want. That is one of the attractive things about owning your own business, but it can also be a Catch-22 in that you also think 'Well, if I just go ahead and work an extra hour, I'll be totally done with the job, and I can start on a new job.'"

Paula laughs, the gal that sometimes works for her says, "You always say you don't work long hours but I always work long hours when I work with you!"

Except for working with a partner when she first opened for business, or during busy times, Paula works on her own most of the time. But when she needs a little help moving heavy scaffolding, her husband, Gary,

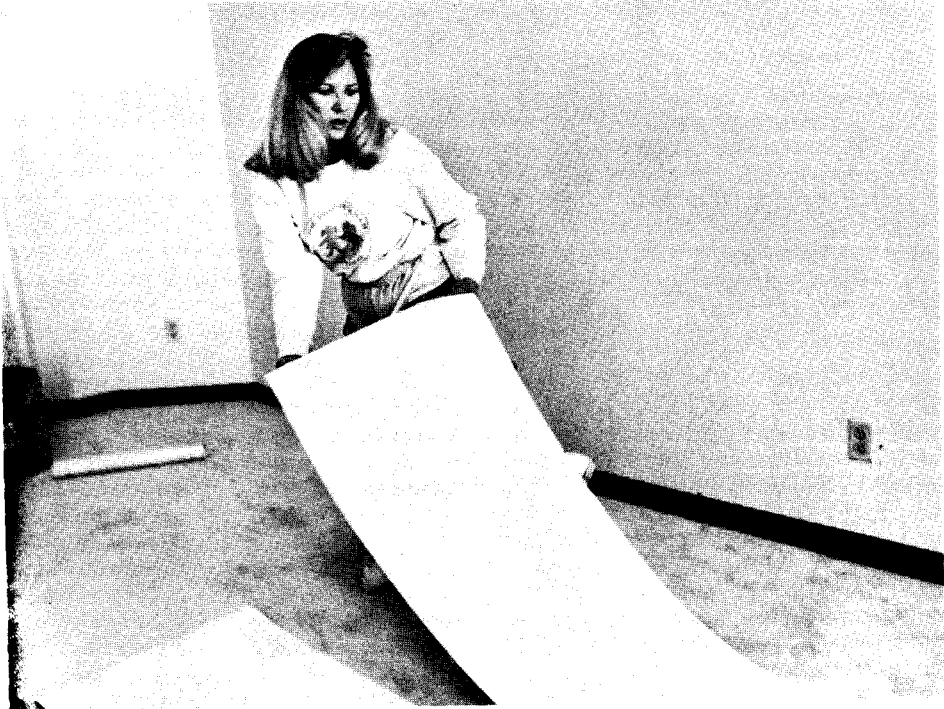


PHOTO BY DAN LASSITER

Roll out the paper...Paper Doll, Paula Emery is having a real good time with work.



PHOTO BY DAN LASSITER

Paula's husband is her main jogging companion and cheerleader for business efforts.

sometimes helps.

She describes one such job. "Gary just hung wallpaper with me at the funeral home and it was over a stairway. And so we had to build this strange planking. Here you are up in the air 25 feet on a board, hanging wallpaper on the ceiling!"

But he doesn't just help with physical labor. "Gary's been my number one cheerleader," says Paula.

Paula also had other mentors to fuel her enthusiasm. She remembers a woman from Longmont calling her when Paper Dolls was only one month old. "This gal called and said 'a friend recommended you and we've got this big job up in Estes. Could you come help me?' I said, 'Gee, I've only been doing this for about a month. I don't know if I'd be an asset.'"

"I learned so much by being able to work with her. We discussed everything. We discussed business philosophies, we discussed bidding, we discussed customer relations. It gave me so much confidence."

Paula's dream, and part-time occupation,

is to develop a way to provide this opportunity to other women, to pass on her own proven methods, tips and tools. "I want to be able to train them in how to hang wallpaper and how to run the business. You just can't read it out of a book and then do it. It's just not quite the same. There are some things you can do that with, but I don't think wallpapering's one of them."

Meanwhile, Paula's love of her primary job is still quite palpable. But she likes to keep her business small enough to emphasize quality. "I always wrestle with 'How big do I want to be? Do I want to get more into management or do I still like hands-on?' I still like hands-on."

Indeed, most of Paula's competitors are men, and much of her work is physical. "But I like physical labor," Paula defends. "And yet when I'm all done, it still has that decorating aspect where you can stand back and look at it and it looks great!"

In five years, Paula Emery turned an idea and a one-time job into an art form and a business. And after five years, she says, "I still like it!" ■