CENTER STAGE
Ballet Styles Keep Us On Our Toes

MISSION HILLS #3
And (Somewhat) Proud Of It

HOUSEWIVES OF THE HILLS?
Not So Much

JIM MOFFETT
Investment Whiz
HOUSEWIVES OF THE

These Women
CHANCES ARE YOU’VE SEEN THEM, EVEN IF YOU WISH YOU HADN’T. THEY’RE THE INFAMOUS HOUSEWIVES OF REALITY TELEVISION, THOSE DRAMA-DRIVEN DIVAS LANTUISHING IN SOME OF THE COUNTRY’S MOST LUXURIOUS ZIP CODES. THEY DON’T SEEM SATISFIED UNTIL THEY’VE OUTSPENT, OUT-TANNED OR OUTMANEUVERED THEIR BACKBITING PEERS.

But if unflattering female caricatures such as these have you feeling outnumbered or simply out of touch, don’t stop reading just yet. You’re about to meet a group of housewives who are more “real” than their television counterparts in every sense. They’re women with energy and passion, women who’ve dreamed big, worked hard and made names for themselves just might recognize. They’re women from all walks: doctors, lawyers, developers, philanthropists and business owners. While they all live in Mission Hills, Sunset Hill or the Plaza area, they share more in common than just an address. Most of these accomplished wives, mothers and daughters say they’ve turned their dreams into realities by taking a few simple steps: staying true to themselves, refusing to take no for an answer and approaching each day with curiosity and gratitude. The best part? These women aren’t done dreaming yet.

If you’re looking for a catfight, you won’t find it here. If you want to meet some of Kansas City’s most extraordinary women — and get inspired to become your own brand of extraordinary — read on.

SHARON AUBUCHON,
REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONAL

Best advice: Treat people the way you want to be treated.

Kansas City real estate Juggernaut Sharon Aubuchon might be living proof that great sales people aren’t always made. Some, like Aubuchon, are born that way.

The Reece & Nichols agent who sold $5 million worth of homes in her first six months on the job admits the signs pointing to her success go way back. “When I was a kid, I loved checking off the chores I completed on a chart at home. I kept a journal of every babysitting job and how much I earned,” laughs Aubuchon, whose drive and diligence still comprise her hallmark style.

When the manager at her first job post-college commented that she would be his boss someday, he turned out to be right. In her 20s, she vaulted to a vice-president position within a business of more than 10,000 employees. By her 30s, she was running her own company and winning over big-name clients like the Kansas City Chiefs.

Choosing to eschew corporate titles and perks, Aubuchon found her new love: real estate. “It’s a wonderful business for me,” she says, “because it’s not just about buying and selling. It’s about making people happy.”

Aubuchon also loves to make real estate easy for clients. She’s been known to cut through rolls of red tape and even rocked a fussy baby to a hush at a house closing.

Most of all, the Sunset Hill resident feels lucky to be right where she is, working and living in Kansas City’s most sought-after neighborhoods. On warmer days, you’re likely to find her pushing babies — her two Sheltie dogs — in a stroller through Loose Park.

Either way, Aubuchon enjoys being in the driver’s seat. “I love driving my car down Ward Parkway and seeing one beautiful home after another,” she says. Noting what peers and clients say about the congruency between her life and profession, she adds: “They tell me I was born for this job.”
all about. For this self-confessed lifestyle guru, it’s about enhancing and expressing the day-to-day lives of the people who already live there. “The goal isn’t someone else’s idea of perfection,” Higgins says. “I want people to look around a space, then at the person who lives or works in it and be able to say, ‘This is _you._’”

**KATIE KWO GERSON,**
**REVIVAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNER/OWNER OF K2 JEWEL DESIGN**

*Best advice: Find your authentic voice; then answer its calling.*

Meet Katie Gerson and you’ll get to know a woman who’s made a career out of inventing things. She’s developed products for Hallmark, created a family and volunteer career, built homes from the ground up and crafted a jewelry business with her bare hands. Fueling all of her inventions is one of Gerson’s most magnetic traits: a flair for reinventing herself.

Perhaps reinvention comes naturally for Gerson, who seems to bounce between both practical and creative endeavors with unusual dexterity. A marketing undergrad with a master’s degree in business, Gerson spent the first 14 years of her career developing products at Hallmark—a job in which she still takes pride. “I loved helping that business grow,” she says.

Eventually the Sunset Hill resident left Hallmark to create something else: a family. Next came volunteer work fostering new initiatives as president of Junior League.

While jogging past old houses with a friend, Gerson stumbled — almost literally — upon her next endeavor: breathing new life into historic properties. Along with her jogging partner, she
created Revival Development (now Revival 51), a company that’s committed to reviving the historic integrity of homes in some of the city’s most beautiful neighborhoods. After building homes in Brookside, Revival launched a new concept in Loose Park. Forging a design partnership with Nell Hill’s Owner Mary Carol Garrity, Gerson developed exquisitely constructed and adorned lock-and-leave townhouses, a first for the area.

These days Gerson is reinventing herself once more, channeling her creativity and business acumen into starting a new venture, K2 Jewel Design. The one-of-a-kind jeweled pieces she creates for K2 are lovely, translucent and ethereal. “I don’t feel like making jewelry is work,” she insists. “For me it feels more like good reflection and recharging time.”

Knowing Gerson, that means another invention is likely to come soon. Still, she deflects praise for her ever-evolving talents. “I don’t think of myself that way,” she says. “I’m just a piece of a really big puzzle that helps things move along.”

LAUREN PERKINS ALLEN, ATTORNEY

Best advice: Don’t be so dug into your own position that you can’t see both sides.

Lauren Perkins Allen knows it’s coming. When the accomplished 2009 Kansas City Metro Young Lawyer of the Year tells people where she grew up, inevitable questions follow about Allen’s hometown of Koshkonong, Mo. Where is it? How do you spell it? And later, is Koshkonong’s population really only 198?

And while it’s true that Allen’s Mission Hills neighborhood houses 15 times the number of residents as her hometown, the
award-winning attorney is proud to say her small-town roots have made her who she is. “I learned a lot about community, about honesty and openness in Koshkonong. It helps me do my job today,” she says.

Allen loves her job. As a trial lawyer with Fondel, Wickens, Eisteider, Roper & Hofer, she specializes in product liability and business litigation, often for plaintiffs. “I love advocating for people who wouldn’t otherwise have a voice,” says Allen, who, despite her fresh-faced look, has already accumulated a decade of trial work. “Plus, every client has a story, so each case is a new adventure,” she says. “I never get bored.”

Judging from her resume, boredom is something Allen’s rarely suffered. A degree from Vanderbilt, an internship at the U.S. Attorney’s office, a “Best of the Bar” designation in 2010, board positions with the Bar Association and Junior League – they’re all there on paper. Plus, Allen took on another title late last year: new mom.

Recent sleepless nights aside, you’re still likely to find the young attorney hard at work in her law office, searching for that needle in the haystack that might turn a case on its ear. She admits to a talent for viewing a case from all sides, and clients and peers alike praise her for one defining trait. “You always look us in the eye,” they say. The comment doesn’t surprise Allen, who knows it’s how honest work gets done, in both Kansas City and Koshkonong.

**AUDREY KUNIN, DERMADOCTOR FOUNDER**

*Best Advice: Life is short; keep it simple.*

*Allure, InStyle, Self, O Magazine, People, Real Simple.* It seems there’s nary a national publication worth its salt that hasn’t featured Audrey Kunin’s age-defying, beauty-enhancing DERMAdoctor skin products.

The Mission Hills dermatologist is amassing television airtime, too. After appearing on QVC and Home Shopping Network, Kunin landed a spot as a regular guest on “The Dr. Oz Show,” where she’s now the resident skincare expert.

It’s a lot to comprehend for Kunin, who – in the name of helpfulness and efficiency – started answering patients’ skincare questions online back in 1998. A self-described dermatology “problem-solver,” she regrets that her chosen field seemed at the time too clinical, complex and accessible to too few. In response, her DERMAdoctor website and product lines aim to make skincare easy for everyone. “The cosmetic industry has brainwashed the typical American woman by making skincare too complex. It’s not that hard,” she insists. “Forget skin typing or spot application. Every woman can benefit from just one or two products filled with the right ingredients and applied all over the face.”

If anyone understands that life is too short for ineffective, time-consuming regimens, it’s Kunin. Although she suffered both a heart attack and stroke before the age of 44, she’s busier, more passionate and more determined to make her customers more beautiful than ever before. With a half-dozen product patents pending, you can usually find Kunin either in her 22,000-square-foot lab and store at 19th and McGee streets or at her Plaza storefront, hard at work on her next big thing.

And one of those next big things is already here. Billed by the “Today Show” as “the must-have, anti-aging product of 2011,” Kunin recently launched DERMAdoctor Photodynamic Therapy, a sunlight-activated lotion that converts the sun’s UV rays into anti-aging red light. “Solar-powered skin therapy – it’s creating an entirely new class of products,” says Kunin, who’s living proof that there is indeed something new under the sun.

**KIRSTY MELVILLE, PRESIDENT OF ANDREWS MCMEEL PUBLISHING BOOK DIVISION**

*Best Advice: Don’t be afraid to sail away from the safe harbor.*

If life was a playbook, Kirsty Melville would take a page from her Aussie-born, football-playing father. “He called it ‘G & D’,” she says, referring to her dad’s key ingredients for living well. “It stands for guts and determination,” Melville explains. “Anytime I’m fearful, I remember his words.”

Not that fear has ever occupied much of a place in Melville’s life. President of the Book Division of Andrews McMeel Publishing, the Australian-bred Melville has created a storied career in publishing spanning two continents. She’s married to Jonathan Chester, an adventure photographer who travels (literally) to the ends of the earth. She’s also mother to twins.

Something about Melville seems to attract activity, life, even adventure. “I suppose I’m just really curious about a lot of things,” she admits. “I get really excited about ideas.”

It’s those ideas – ideas for great books in particular – that have driven Melville to crisscross the globe for years now. After publishing a slew of successful books for Australia Doubleday and Ten Speed Press in California, Melville answered the call from Kansas City’s Andrews McMeel. Today the Mission Hills resident is grateful for a short Midwestern commute to a job she loves. “I love publishing
KIRTY MELVILLE

because it’s a marriage of art and business,” says Melville, who feels fortunate to be helping authors nurture and refine their talents into best-selling books. In addition to her company’s regular titles, she’s recently spearheaded a list of lifestyle cookbooks and Posh Puzzles, a new line of artfully crafted, journal-sized puzzle books for women on the go.

These days Melville also is hard at work refining the online segment of McMeel’s business, coming up with new ways to attract and keep customers who prefer their information digitized. When asked if she’s ever afraid of her industry’s change to online, her father’s G & D attitude seems to echo through the room. “Afraid? Oh no. I’m excited by it,” she says.

RACHAEL WEBER SABATES,
PHILANTHROPIST

Best advice: Never waste an opportunity.

If you devote much time at all to perusing local magazines and newspapers, chances are you’ve already heard of Rachael Sabates. Open the society pages and you’re likely to find Sabates front and center, spearheading initiatives, chairing galas and serving on the boards of some of Kansas City’s most impactful institutions, charities and events. The list includes The Lyric Opera, The Kansas City Symphony, Starlight Theatre, the Trolley Run, Head Start and Operation Breakthrough, to name just a few.

But posed and glossy photos of a ball-gown-clad Sabates belie what really fuels the energy and passion for her expansive philanthropic work. A law degree, a love for kids and the arts, and an open-minded determination to make a difference drive this humanitarian. Sabates began her career as an attorney, championing the underprivileged in the public defender’s office of her native Boston. Work with abused women soon found Sabates’ heart growing for kids. “Kids, even teenagers, are still being formed,” says Sabates, who supports organizations like CASA and Head Start with characteristic optimism. “If you can just get to them, you really can help steer them in the right path.”

Sabates attributes much of her success to her own guiding parents and a German-born, physician father who opened the world to his youngest daughter through travel. “My parents emphasized education and open-mindedness about other cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds,” she says.

While she continues to work tirelessly for kids and the arts – plus dedicate legal work to her husband Nelson’s eye centers, healthcare administration and commercial development companies – the Mission Hills resident and mom of three is following her heart more and more these days. She dreams about one day building a home for underprivileged kids or maybe even starting a German shepherd rescue. “I just like to find a need and then fill it,” she says simply.

Cisley Thummel is a freelance writer who began her career at university presses in Kansas and Georgia. She managed sales and training communications at Sprint before becoming a write-from-home mom for local magazines and businesses. While daily life with Caroline, 8, and Joe, 6, provides her with much to write about, she most enjoys interviewing individuals about their passions and connecting readers with the people, places and things that matter mos.