

PERSONAL FINANCE

How Terry Eaton Turned His Passion Into A Thriving Business

John Schneider and David Auten Former Contributor ⓘ

Cashing in on fabulous with queer money.

Jul 10, 2019, 07:35am EDT

🕒 This article is more than 4 years old.

Terry Eaton is the founder, president and chief curator of [Eaton Fine Art](#). He's has collaborated with some of the world's most prestigious hotels to guide their art programs, including The Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas, The Palace Hotel in San Francisco and The Four Seasons Los Angeles in Beverly Hills.



Terry Eaton of Eaton Fine Art EATON FINE ART

Eaton, along with his husband who is also his business partner and The Eaton Team “infuse creative soul into guest rooms and public

spaces alike” with their mastery of art. They serve as the premier innovative art resource for developers, brand leaders, interior designers and purchasing agents producing the art programs for hospitality and healthcare-related projects in the US and internationally.

BETA

On [this episode of *Queer Money*®](#), Eaton shares how he turned his passion into a thriving business and advice for today’s budding queer entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship from Terry Eaton on *Queer Money*®:

Oops, we couldn't find that track.

[Privacy policy](#)

What is a fine arts curator?

As an art curator, Eaton Fine Art helps its customers with both the art and accessories for various projects. It acts as a team member with the interior designers and lighting consultants. Eaton Fine Art’s particular niches are creative elements, such as wall art and accessories.

In addition to high-profile work, Eaton Fine Art does pro bono work curating for healthcare facilities that benefit the queer community. Of his team, Eaton says, “Everybody on our team, we share the same passion. We share the same moral values and the same sense of integrity.”

From where did Eaton’s entrepreneurial spirit come?

Even as a child, Eaton was driven, frequently setting up a table at the San Antonio Art Fair to sell his paintings, arts and crafts. He's known to have created and used his own business cards as early as age 13.

Eaton watched his father work as a civil employee for the U.S. Air Force, and he wanted something different. Because he found success with selling his arts and crafts at a young age, he knew he wanted to be his own boss by 18 years old.

This drive inspired Eaton to attend business school, after which he worked for different marketing firms and held several other jobs including working for a public relations firm, a furniture manufacturer and even sold office equipment.

Eaton's experience as a child entrepreneur shows how those who have the entrepreneurial bug don't have to go all-in before testing the waters. Dabbling in a prospective business, starting as a hobby and transitioning into a side business, is a good way to [start a business](#) before quitting a day-job.

Why did Eaton believe he could build his own business and support himself?

Eaton says he had an inner understanding that what he put his mind to would pay off, and he attributes much of his success to his family's support and his education.

Eaton says he attended "one of the best business schools in the country, the University of Texas." Being in that environment, surrounded by business leaders helped him increase his confidence as he grew into a business leader himself.

Eaton continues, "I was surrounded by business leaders, and I went to many educational seminars. I was on the student council, and I

heard their stories. Their stories were ‘you try, you do your best, and sometimes you fall flat on your face – but you pick yourself back up and try again.’”

Eaton learned this skill when he didn’t sell his goods as a young entrepreneur at the San Antonio Art Fair. Learning from these leaders that failures like this are normal and overcoming them is possible, increased Eaton’s confidence.

Eaton encourages entrepreneurs to not be afraid of failure and to, “Go for it. Be passionate about what you love and, if you need, reassess what you do.” Eaton further advises entrepreneurs to surround themselves with those who will support them, are excellent at what they do and will foster personal growth.

How did Eaton get started?

Simultaneously feeling capable of running his own company and thinking he was crazy; Eaton started his firm in a spare room in his San Francisco flat. Since then, along with the support of his husband and business partner and the whole Eaton Team, Eaton Fine Art has scaled up to have its own studio based in Austin TX today.

Growing a successful business, though, isn’t always an upward trajectory. “If you’re [starting your own business](#),” Eaton says, “you better be driven.” There were times when Eaton had to juggle multiple jobs in addition to long hours working on Eaton Fine Art until it was on solid financial footing.

Eaton, however, looks at challenges as something to overcome rather than something that will overcome him. He shares that despite trials and tribulation “passion will take you far.” It’s his

passion today that helps Eaton and Eaton Fine Art weather ups and downs in the economy and changes in business.

BETA

These are challenges every entrepreneur must endure no matter how new or established they are.

How did Eaton overcome the limiting beliefs that often afflict LGBTQ people?

“During my formative years, there weren’t discussions about ‘LGBTQ.’ I went through high school in the late 70s, and I was bullied. I was made fun of because I wore nice clothes, and I had a sense of design,” Eaton says.

Though Eaton’s family was supportive, Eaton remembers regularly using his grandmother’s sewing machine. His father once wondered aloud if the younger Eaton should be sewing so much “because it’s not sports, it’s not masculine.” Eaton’s mother replied, “Why should we stop him? He could be the next Calvin Klein.”

Eaton encourages those in our community who experience bullying to not let it affect them, as hard as that may be. “As cliché as it may sound, it does get better.” He continues, “Embrace your uniqueness. Embrace your creativity in whatever form that is. It’s not always the easiest road, but it’s the truest.”

What value is there in being a certified LGBTBE with the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce?

Encouraged by a fellow queer entrepreneur, Eaton Fine Art became certified as an LGBTQBE through the [National LGBT Chamber of Commerce](#) (NGLCC).

Eaton initially became certified because of the sense of community the NGLCC offers for queer-owned small businesses. He came away

from his first annual NGLCC conference in 2018 feeling empowered and has since partnered and collaborated with other LGBTBEs to grow his own business and support other queer-owned small businesses.

BETA

What's most important with being a queer business leader?

Eaton thinks it's important for [LGBTQ people to be at the table](#) with other business leaders. It's with this credential that we can shape what true diversity looks like in American society and business. He says, "It's not that I wear my 'gay hat' on my head, but it's important to be there and be authentic to who I am." The same goes for all LGBTQ people because it paves the way for other queer and marginalized people to live their authentic truth.

Eaton takes pride in giving back to the queer community in multiple ways, including donating his skills and money to important people and causes, and inspiring and advocating for our community.

His ability to be his authentic self, be creative and to give back to his community are all reasons why Eaton hopes to see more queer entrepreneurs. He advises, "Go for what you want and be passionate about it."



John Schneider and David Auten

After living fabulously the wrong way and accumulating \$51,000 in credit card debt, we learned how to be even more fabulous and debt free. Now, we use our... **Read More**

Editorial Standards

Reprints & Permissions

ADVERTISEMENT