

Story SARAH HENDER

DREAMER

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CREATOR

**INSIDE THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF ARTS
PHILANTHROPIST ULRIKE KLEIN, CO-FOUNDER OF
THE GLOBAL NATURAL SKINCARE BRAND JURLIQUE
AND DRIVING FORCE BEHIND ADELAIDE HILLS'
CULTURAL CENTRE UKARIA**





Businesswoman and philanthropist Ulrike Klein, left and below, at Ukaria, the arts centre and gardens she built at Mt Barker in the Adelaide Hills; and Australian String Quartet cellist Sharon Draper, right, with the \$1.8m Guadagnini cello Klein bought to help the Adelaide-based ASQ reach greater heights. Pictures: Mark Brake, Brenton Edwards

“**ALL I DID IS I PUT THAT SEED IN THE GROUND. AND NOW IT'S THE TREE THAT'S GROWING**”

Slight framed, animated and sparkly-eyed, Ulrike Klein AO defies age and exudes joy. Having turned 80 this year, while also celebrating 40 years in her adopted country, it's obvious the two things she views as essential to the human soul – nature and music – have guided her life path.

The driving force in Klein's life has not been about herself, however, but the importance she places on the elevation of both nature and culture in her community.

Anyone who has been to Ukaria will know what it is to feel that uplifting of spirit. But if you think this all sounds rather idealistic, don't be fooled, Klein's life path has meant taking huge leaps of faith and plenty of hard work.

“She's an idealist but she's also good on delivery. I think that's been the secret to her success with both Jurlique and Ukaria,” says Alison Beare, chief executive of Ukaria, who shares a close working partnership with Klein.

“We have these sessions down at her beach house where we really look at the big blue sky and we're able to translate that into action and strategy and then deliver and always keep it moving. It has been an incredible gift for me to work with someone like her.”

As a child, and a budding violinist, Ulrike's greatest wish was to be a musician but her father, facing a post-war Germany, was concerned only that his daughter pursue an occupation that would secure her future.

For him, music was not one.

Growing up on a small farm in a village in the highlands of eastern Germany, Ulrike formed a close bond with nature, watching things grow and spending time in the nearby woods. She gave up on her musical dream and studied horticulture, learning, among other



things, about the properties of herbs. But she didn't go on to qualify. She chose instead to be a primary school teacher where she was able to engage in her love of music and culture with the children she taught.

Meeting chemist Jurgen Klein, her future husband, set her back on the path of the natural world, investigating ways to create products based in nature. They decided on Australia, specifically the Adelaide Hills, as the perfect place to grow their herbs in a natural, clean environment offering cheaper land.

At 40, with four small children and limited English, Ulrike Klein and her husband headed into the unknown, armed only with a firm belief in their mission, to, as she says, “reconnect people with the healing forces of nature”.

The Kleins would need that firm belief. At the time they started their new enterprise, no one in Australia had heard of natural skincare. Banks weren't willing to fund them. The question they were most often asked in response to their venture was, “Why natural?” When they proudly put up signs saying “Australian-made” at trade fairs displaying their products, they were asked to pull them down. “That won't help,” the Kleins were told.

Initially, only the US was interested in buying what they were offering, something uniquely quirky, clean and green. Gradually, as the term “natural” became the buzzword in the skincare industry, Australia too, caught on.

Jurlique had started a movement.

As this gained momentum, so did the Kleins' wealth. For Ulrike, this was a chance to invest in her other passion, music. She set about interweaving music into the life of Jurlique and holding concerts in a small seminar room on the Jurlique Herb Farm, inviting visiting artists to play to an audience of 100, funding the concerts in a way that made them affordable for all.

But it wasn't until the sale of Jurlique and the money and time that came with it, that she was able to fully realise her dream of elevating music to a new level.

After 20 years of hard work, the sale of Jurlique to James Packer in 2004 marked the end of an era for them both personally and



professionally. Jurgen Klein left Australia and Ulrike stayed on in the Adelaide Hills, a place she, by then, considered home.

A self-confessed curious person, Ulrike Klein has continued to make a way of life out of making the impossible possible. In 2009, her decision to track down and purchase four matched instruments made by an 18th century Italian instrument maker so the Adelaide-based Australian String Quartet could reach greater heights, was about as impossible as it gets.

Advised that this would be the ultimate way of obtaining a superior quality sound, Klein was also told she would be unlikely to find such instruments and if she did, the cost would be eye-watering. That advice was right on both counts.

But, as Beare, then ASQ executive director, recalls, Klein “saw this as a big vision to elevate Australian musicians on to the world stage and give them the tools of the trade to enable them to achieve that kind of level”.

The project took most of the next decade to accomplish but persistence won out and Klein personally paid half of the \$6m price tag, fundraising the other half from the public.

Struck by the rarity of the project, Scott Hicks documented the journey to track down these rare instruments in Italy with his 2015 film *Highly Strung*.

“Ulrike Klein is really the modern-day equivalent of a Medici in Renaissance days, when Stradivari was making instruments for the patrons who could afford them and then loan them to the musicians. It’s an honourable historic tradition and we’re lucky to have her here in Adelaide,” Hicks said at the time. “It’s an amazing gift to the state and to the country.”

Klein understood the full impact of her gift when a departing member of the ASQ handed back the instrument, saying, as Klein recalls: “Ulrike, now I know the colours, the tones, the nuances that instrument has taught me. I will always have that with me and whatever instrument I play I will reach for that.”

With elevation of music being the aim, this act had achieved it. But there was more to come.

In 2013, Klein was faced with the need to modernise the ageing seminar room where her



Ulrike Klein at Ukaria Concert Hall gardens, Mt Barker Summit; inset, with her then-husband Jurgen Klein at the opening of Jurlique store in Rundle Mall, in 2002; and, above right, ASQ’s Sharon Draper with a Guaragnini cello and Stephen King with a Guaragnini viola, bought with money raised by Klein, pictured with donor Dr Rabin Bhandari, for her \$6.1m Guaragnini quartet instrument project. Pictures: Mark Brake, Tait Schmaal

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concerts were held. The building was beyond repair. This led to her most ambitious dream yet. She would build a new European-standard concert hall where those beautiful instruments could be heard at their best. She would fund the project herself so she could be in full control, ensuring the artistic freedom of the musicians that played there.

When Rob Brookman AM, former executive director of the Adelaide Festival, now chair of Ukaria first heard Klein’s plan, he was incredulous. “People simply don’t build theatres or concert halls privately. It’s a remarkable thing not only in this country but anywhere in the world.”

Well aware of the momentous nature of the task, Klein turned her focus to the detail.

Her brief to architect Anton Johnson was

clear; the new building would not be on a grand scale but an intimate space that would have a strong connection with its natural surrounds.

As a concert hall, acoustics was a priority. The architect worked with acoustician Cameron Hough from ARUP to create the right blend of aesthetics and acoustics for the hexagonal-shaped space with its domed ceiling and a floor-to-ceiling glass wall with views to the Mt Barker Summit. The outcome was more than Klein could have hoped for.

When she first saw the building, completed in 2015, she was awestruck. “And that feeling hasn’t changed, every time I enter the hall I think how beautiful it is,” Klein says.

And she is not alone.

“It was a revelation,” Brookman says.

“Just the boldness of the vision to create something where music, nature, architecture, art and horticulture are all brought together in this kind of utopian environment, it’s just a stunning experience.”

Klein’s purchase of the neighbouring property of Twin Peaks and the creation of accommodation with a rehearsal space was the master stroke for Ukaria.

Situated adjacent to the Mt Barker Summit, it boasts spectacular views and a serenely beautiful environment for visiting artists and annual residencies for those seeking to create new work. Klein’s belief that nature inspires creativity is supported by those who have experienced the centre.

“We know the world’s going on out there, but everything feels a bit easier to deal with. It’s like the land is helping us to do what we’re doing. It’s talking to us. And that view, it’s kind of extraordinary,” says Australian pianist, composer and producer, Paul Grabowsky AO.

Klein’s vision, now a reality, of a place closely connected with nature where artistic freedom is

THE LIFE & TIMES OF ULRIKE KLEIN

» **1983:** Immigrated to Australia from Germany.
 » **1985:** Co-founded skincare company Jurlique. Under her leadership, Jurlique grew from a small family business into a successful global brand. Over the next decade it grew to employ more than 200 people across Australia, with more than 30 retail outlets, exporting to 18 countries.
 » **2004:** Sold Jurlique to James Packer.
 » **2009:** Founded Ngeringa

Arts, which later became Ukaria. The same year she launched the Guaragnini Quartet Project - a \$6m campaign to acquire a quartet of instruments by master luthier JB Guaragnini.
 » **2015:** Established the environmentally sustainable Ukaria Cultural Centre, which was purpose built for chamber music and has become a destination for artists and audiences from all over the world.

» **2012-14:** Served as a board member of the Australian String Quartet.
 » **2016-19:** Served as a board member Adelaide Festival of the Arts.
 » **2015:** Inducted onto South Australia’s Women’s Honour Roll.
 » **2016:** Received Premier’s Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2016 Ruby Awards.
 » **2018:** Named in the Australia Day honours as an Officer of the Order of

Australia for “distinguished service to the performing and visual arts through philanthropic support for a range of cultural organisations, particularly to classical and chamber music, and to the skincare manufacturing sector”.
 » **2019:** Awarded by Ernst and Young as a Champion of Entrepreneurship.
 » **2023:** Celebrated 80th birthday and 40 years since immigrating.



“It is absolutely one of those beautiful gifts in life,” she says.

Sophia believes one of the greatest gifts her mother gave her and her three siblings was teaching them the importance of living their lives true to themselves, as she has done.

Growing up, Sophia proved to be a talented violinist and Klein, so discouraged from that herself as a child, wanted this for her daughter. When, at 15, Sophia told her mother she would rather play sport, Klein, with her husband, accepted her choice.

“She wants you to find your own path and unwaveringly supports you,” Sophia says. “She keeps on creating this incredible space for you to keep digging

deeper to find your own way.”

Despite living in separate corners of the world, the family remains closely connected. Brought up to share in their parents’ deep love of nature and strong sense of community, each sibling is involved in philanthropic projects of their own, supporting conservation, social projects and the arts. Earlier this year, 18 of Klein’s family came together to celebrate her 80th birthday at a special concert at Ukaria and then stayed together on Lord Howe Island, known for its unique natural environment.

Turning 80 might make a person take stock, put their feet up and look back fondly upon their past life achievements. For Klein, it is a time to look to the future. She is determined to ensure that those dreams she transformed into reality will continue to flourish long after she has gone.

To that end, she has invited people who share in her values and passion to join the Ukaria Foundation so they can be its caretakers now and into the future, ensuring that artistic freedom will always be the highest priority.

This thoughtfulness is what makes Klein stand out as a philanthropist. “There are many ways that people look to leave their marks but usually that is either by way of a one-off gift or support they might provide,” Brookman says.

“There are very few that will establish something themselves and, not only that, but seek to establish it in such a way that it will well outlive them.”

Bearé agrees that Klein’s brand of philanthropy is remarkable in its effectiveness.

“It is one thing to approve a donation for something but, for Klein, it is a partnership, it’s making sure that what you’re supporting is working, that it’s having an impact and is being evaluated,” Bearé says.

“She doesn’t just write the cheque and never think about it again.”

Klein doesn’t need to see her name splashed all over concert halls, she is only interested in seeing great art made and providing opportunities for artists to do that. People often compliment her on Ukaria and she finds it difficult to accept the praise.

In her view, she may have started the process, but Ukaria has its own life now.

“I am just so grateful that I’m a dreamer and I have these ideas, these possibilities that I can realise. All I did, all I claim ownership of, is that I put that seed in the ground.

“And now it’s growing, but it’s not me, it’s the tree that’s growing.” ■

celebrated, has led to Ukaria’s reputation as a place that is cherished by musicians on a global scale.

Gone are the very early days of Ukaria’s arrival on the scene, when Klein and Bearé would travel to Europe to promote the centre and encourage musicians to come and perform there. Ukaria now needs no introduction. Artists the world over are lining up to come.

“I can’t tell you how often we hear from musicians that nowhere else in the world are they treated in this way, where they are so valued,” Bearé says. “They feel we are there to support them and present them and when they come on to our property all they need to do is to focus on the music.”

Ukaria once held a modest 10 concerts a year. These days it is up to 50. It is an eclectic program offering up jazz, contemporary and classical music. What an artist chooses to perform is up to them. This can lead to surprises.

Swedish mezzo soprano Anne Sofie von Otter was one of them. After performing her chosen classical repertoire to perfection she followed it up with a rendition of ABBA songs. Klein recalls that the audience reaction was positive although she’s sure that some purists might not have felt the same way. Klein, herself, is not one. She relished the fact that von Otter felt free to do that.

“We didn’t know she was going to do ABBA,” Klein laughs, “but it was so human.”

Klein’s personal life has offered up some surprises too. After she and husband Jurgen parted ways, Klein spent more time visiting her friends and relatives in Germany. One of those friends was Gustav Meincke, her boyfriend when she was 17. Fifty years later they reconnected at a school reunion. After



Meincke’s wife died, they began to spend more time together and there came a point when a decision had to be made. He asked her if she would come and live with him in Germany. She said no. Australia, especially since the birth of Ukaria, was her home.

There was nothing for it but to convince him to come here. It was a big ask for someone who was 70, retired and knew little English, but his children, who could see the tenderness between them and had grown to love Klein, asked him what he was waiting for.

“He didn’t have a choice,” says Klein, laughing. “There is this saying, ‘You can’t transplant an old tree’ – well, I transplanted it! He loves it here.”

Meincke shares Klein’s love of nature and music and is equally devoted to Ukaria. Talented at woodwork, he made Klein the beautiful boardroom table that we sit at.

“He loves and cherishes her the way you wish your favourite person in the world should be loved and cherished,” says Klein’s daughter, Sophia. “My mum is a butterfly, full of life and new ideas and he just holds her and loves her through that.”

It is a joy that Klein can’t believe has come her way at this age.

Klein, above, and, top, with chief executive of Ukaria Alison Bearé who says working with Klein is ‘an incredible gift’.