



Eve Branson & the genes of optimism

Walk into the El Fenn bar, and sometimes, if you're lucky, you'll catch sight of a slight figure, with an elfin hair cut, a sorbet-pink lipstick smile and the unmistakable clear blue gaze of the Branson family. It'll be Eve, gamine, whip thin and elegant, a woman of a certain age and an iron streak of determination. Eve has written and published an armful of books, earned her stripes in the WREN's during the war, founded a successful charity in the Atlas mountains, and brought into the world one Lindy, one Vanessa (co - owner of El Fenn) and one Richard Branson. Her philosophy of life, as she looks back over a life full of laughter, happy memories, saucy asides and a long, successful marriage is simple - she is an optimist. For her, the glass is always half full, if not actually brimming over: 'Let's have a whisky' she will purr in your ear, 'its so terribly good for you'.

Eve, born in 1924, has all her life been a philanthropist and child welfare activist, and has passed on her strong moral code and crusading attitude to her children. As the matriarch of a sprawling yet close family (her three children have given her eleven grandchildren and four great grandchildren between them) she has led by example, and 15 years ago, upon arriving in Morocco to cheer Richard off on a planned record breaking balloon ascent, she found herself in the Atlas mountains and fell in love.

'It was a beautiful kasbah clinging to the side of a valley, I INSISTED that Richard must buy it.' She giggles conspiratorially, and continues as if she is telling a fairy story, 'He agreed on one condition: that I would look after the people in the surrounding villages. Of course, I said yes, so he turned the kasbah into the hotel Tamadot, and I began the Eve Branson Foundation.'

Ever an entrepreneur herself, Eve, who when her children were small had a tiny factory in her garden and sold table mats to Harrods, quickly adapted that structure for her foundation. 'I wanted to teach the girls a skill that could earn them money, and craft work seemed the obvious choice here in Morocco. I had no idea how to knit, but I taught myself and then began to teach the girls.'

Today, the Even Branson Foundation has three craft houses, the original in Tansgaart and the two subsequent places in Asni and Imskar. Over 60 girls arrive everyday to learn different skills and the work is sold. The girls have opened savings accounts with the money they earn, and are developing independence and self confidence.