



(L to R) Camp Casual Owner Rosie Hirsch developed the company's products to emulate the relaxed lifestyle camping in an RV is known for. She is depicted here with her rescue dog, Misty, on a relaxed California morning.

# RV Housewares Go from Hall-full to Overflowing

*The 2017 sales explosion of retro-inspired RV dishes and blankets has retailers and distributors clamoring for more inventory from this Agoura Hills, California company. In 2018, Camp Casual has gotten "Camp Serious" about filling distributor/retailer orders and having adequate inventory.*

By Cheryl Ghrist

**R**ight place, right time, smart startup. Camp Casual owner Rosie Hirsch saw a need for RV housewares and got to work in anything but a laid-back manner.

Since the company began in 2014, Camp Casual's business plan and resulting success has been anything but casual as the retro-inspired products continue to be big-sellers at retail outlets and dealerships across North America.

Photos by Rylea Foehl

Camp Casual first offered melamine dining sets graphically designed with retro RV images, followed by a serving bowl with servers, four oversized ceramic mugs with squared handles and

then the throw line—five blankets with retro designs and faux-fur backs and then nesting bowls with lids. Initial sales were good, and last year the company brought out three new mug designs and three additional ones early in 2018. The demand reassured Hirsch and her team that the launch into the niche RV housewares market was game-changing.

### New Products Prompt Surge in Sales

“It happened last May,” Hirsch says. “We didn’t anticipate it, it just exploded. And because they were new products, we had alerted our distributors and given them a heads-up that there would be a wait time. What we didn’t anticipate was how fast they would sell out.”

Hirsch had ordered “tens of thousands” of the new versions of The Mug, a throwback to vintage tin Coleman mugs. To satisfy the unexpected demand, she spread out the product equitably among Camp Casual distributors, “so everyone would have something” to work with, then immediately tripled her orders.

“It was a blessing that it was received extraordinarily well,” Hirsch says, “but a curse that we didn’t have enough.”

That won’t happen again. This year, Camp Casual is already “outperforming last year’s sales by quite a bit,” Hirsch says. “Things have been moving right along and we’re pretty jazzed.”

The ordering process has been adjusted so the company is “definitely ready for the season, there is plenty of product. We’re prepared,” she says.

However, the company’s busy season is now a constant.

“It used to be the holiday season for gifts, and then last year May, June and July kicked in,” Hirsch says. “Now, we’re getting large orders in January and February for the shows



The company’s mugs were designed to endure the rigors of camping while also encapsulating the relaxed and carefree lifestyle of RVing.

and showcasing and orders haven’t stopped. We’re seeing this order boom and we love it.”

### Echoes of Retro RV Lifestyle

Hirsch describes her company’s rise as organic.

“We’re not like other RV aftermarket companies. We don’t have investors and big money behind everything. We started with one product for six months, then brought on another product for another six months. Now, at nearly four years, we have 20 products.”



The Camp Casual throw line has 5 products, and distributors say consumers are more likely to buy them when they are displayed in a way that the consumer can feel their softness.

The best-seller is the 12-piece dishware set, plus mugs are always winners, as are the five-piece kids’ sets, and nesting bowls are moving on up. The nesting bowls, Hirsch says, “just showed up last year, but have been driving a lot of our sales.”

The Mug names—Bird’s Eye View, Vintage Blues, Paws and Relax, Travel Map, Desert Dreamin’, Into the Woods, Starry Night, Beary Green, Wanderlust White





The company's nesting bowls are a recent addition to the Camp Casual Line and are not part of the 12-piece dining set.



The company's dining set are BPA-free and made with melamine making them resistant to damage while packaged away in a cupboard while traveling down the road. Dealers report this is a top purchase for first-time RV buyers.

and Tangerine Trip—and the throw themes of Road Trip, Travel Map, Cozy Critters and Serene Sequoia (“because it actually looks like the trees”) evoke a retro RV experience.

All of the housewares are Food and Drug Administration-approved and bisphenol A (BPA)-free.

The melamine dishware is shatter-proof, scratch-resistant and top-rack dishwasher-safe; the ceramic mugs are dishwasher- and microwave-safe.

The 50 X 60-inch throws are 100 percent polyester and machine washable, with a print on the front and earth-toned Bella faux fur on the back. The Serene Sequoia throw (60 X 72 inches) is all faux chinchilla fur (“to offer something for everyone” who may not want the RV theme).

#### **Women Drive Retail Sales**

Camp Casual sales are predominately female-driven. Customers walk into a retail outlet and while the men look



for something specific for their RV, the women are “left to walk the store, and they see something new, colorful,” Hirsch says, and “even if there is only a small plan-o-gram, but it’s displayed properly, the sales and margin on the products are phenomenal.”

The mugs are often impulse items, and a lot of men purchase Camp Casual items as gifts for the women in their lives, and Hirsch says “often they come back and buy one for themselves.”

Displaying Camp Casual items is quick and easy. All throws are packaged in reusable plastic tote bags, and all mugs and dish sets are in stackable boxes. Merchandising options the company provides include



Hirsch thought carefully before launching the company to ensure the product would align with the lifestyle. The idea for the company was sparked by a vendor mentioning to her that there were few good options in the aftermarket for housewares such as dishes.

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Operations Manager Tom Bartlett, who is also Hirsch's husband, ensures the warehouse and shipping operations of the company run smoothly. He is depicted here preparing a distributor's order for shipment.

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The advertisement features a background image of a white RV driving away on a paved road through a mountainous, hilly landscape under a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid on a dark blue background.





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plan-o-grams, header cards, samples of dishware and The Mug, and 4-by-4-inch swatches of all five versions of the throw on an O-ring, encouraging customers to see and feel the quality. Display aides such as plateholders also are available.

Hirsch has a philosophy of “If you build it, they will come” to prompt sales.

“If you display the product properly—in baskets, stacking them on counters or on plan-o-grams, using header cards, products by themselves, in sets or with complementary products,” she says. “If you create that, even if you start small, just try something, from there it just kind of takes off.”

Camp Casual directs consumer sales leads to stocking retailers. When customers call Camp Casual, they’re steered to a nearby retailer in their area. The company website features a store locator map, where consumers access the stocking retailer’s name, address, phone number, website and listed store hours.

### Camp Casual Fills a Need

Hirsch has always had a success-oriented relationship with her distributors and retailers—in fact, past company relationships factored into Camp Casual’s launch. Those companies remain her biggest supporters today.

Hirsch first started in the RV industry at age 20 working for her father at Lubin Sales Co. In 2002, she branched out to form her own similar firm—RV Lifestyle Inc. (RVLI), a manufacturers’ representative agency for RV, marine and campground products—based in Agoura Hills, California.

A few years ago, at a marketing meeting with an RV distributor,

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Camp Casual's mugs have been such a sales blockbuster that the company recently released three new designs in 2018.

the distributor rep asked if Rosie had ever noticed "there was a lot of need for RV houseware items, yet there wasn't anything of quality being manufactured."

Hirsch next brought up the subject with two members of the Recreational

Vehicle Aftermarket Association (RVAA) board, on which she served at the time.

"They were extremely supportive," Hirsch says. "They said, 'If you want to do this, we'll support you.' And I felt I could be onto something.

"I researched what I could purchase and there wasn't a lot, so I started using resources I had to figure out what niche market I could have a passion about. And I loved the retro or vintage look and talked to my daughter Rachel about it. She said,

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‘Let’s do it, let’s figure it out.’”

Hirsch incorporated her new company in the fall of 2013, and by April 2014 “started off and running” with the first product shipped in December, 2014.

For the name, Hirsch says, “We started sourcing what we wanted to reflect (in a company name) as a feeling, what you’d want to feel when you’re outdoors, wanting to relax or be casual. Have that peaceful feeling. And the name wouldn’t encompass just dishware, it would be more of a lifestyle that we would incorporate into the RV experience.”

Camp Casual was born, and fans—affectionately named “Camp Casualers” by Rachel Hirsch when she started posting on the company’s social media sites—respond enthusiastically to calls for action, such as product ideas or RV, camping and tailgating experience photos that are shared on the company’s sites.

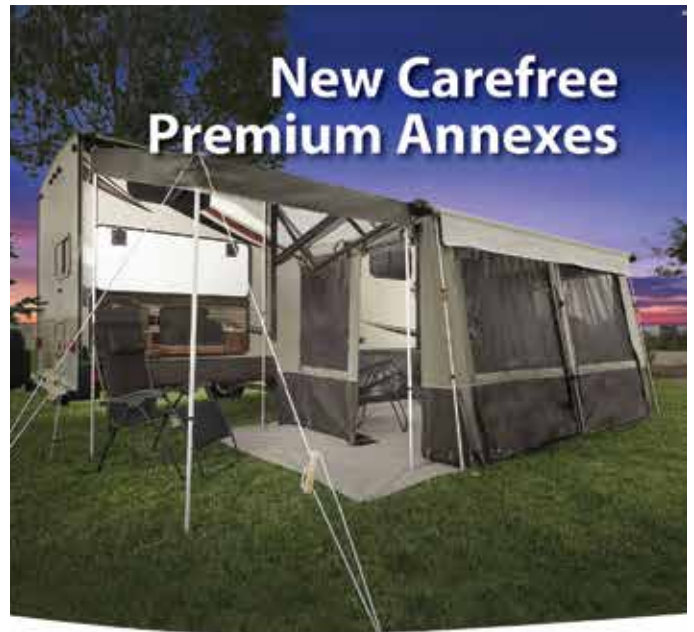
“We don’t want just the standard photos for marketing materials,” Rachel Hirsch, branded/content marketing manager says. “It’s important to us to show people camping, and show our products as a complementary item.” Likewise, “I’ll do shoutouts to retailers who send in photos of their displays.”

### **Making Dishware Beautiful & Better**

Camp Casual wants to set the standard for camping housewares, beginning with product graphics different from anything else in the market provided by local artists. The company then works with global logistics brokers to manufacture Camp Casual products overseas in three American-owned plants.

“We are very clear with our manufacturing plants. We inspect everything, we test everything. We lip- and rim-test all of our products,” Rosie Hirsch says. “And all of our melamine is 100 percent; we don’t use any added plastics or inexpensive (typically added solvent) plasticizers.

“We use a very thick melamine, a heavier compound. If you pick up our plate and you pick up a competitor’s, they use less-dense melamine, and theirs will be much lighter. Rest-assured our products will be quality,” she says. “Ceramics, same thing. We test it all. Everything is lead-free as far as the manufacturing process. The most important thing for us is to identify the safest way to create our product.”



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Rachel Hirsch, Camp Casual branded content/marketing manager tests the company's Road Trip Gray throw on Lola to ensure the blanket is "dog friendly."



The throws are 50 X 60 inches and are composed of 100 percent polyester. They are machine washable and have a camping-themed print on the front and earth-toned Bella faux fur on the back.

Retailers might expect another product demand explosion in the near future, as the Camp Casual team has more new products in the pipeline.

"We've had a lot of talks and we want to give people what they want this summer or fall," Rosie Hirsch says, "including an anniversary product around December."

She says sales reps will bring new product brochures to their territories for spring/summer and fall/winter, including "point of sale strategy for those specific time periods and help retailers concentrate on what will create more margin and profitability."

**RVN**