

Up Close & Personal With **ANDREA DUCLOS**

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A writer who writes from the heart is not always easily found in this age of mass produced and often recycled communication. In a rare interview, South Florida writer and creator of the blog “Oh, Dear Drea!” Andrea Duclos talks to WPB Magazine about how she has made a name for herself in the last decade as someone whose heartfelt words touch people’s lives.

Duclos has been called a writer, a blogger, a photographer, an influencer, and lifestyle expert—whatever that means. But the truth is, she does not like to be put in a box. Her sort of visual and aesthetic language has attracted big companies near and far to take notice of her eclectic site that simultaneously celebrates the simple life and the minutiae of our everyday obsessions like food, travel, and all the beautiful

things in between.

In her blog, she writes, I’ve been a collector striving for minimalism my whole life—I’ve wanted less and collected more as a constant part of my life path. I’ve bought things, held on to things, struggled to let go of things, and then dropped everything completely and totally at once to start afresh all in the same month.

The simple life!

So easy to define it; so hard to sustain!

When you look closely, behind Duclos’ svelte, exotic baby face, you will find a strong and creative 30-something woman who in her quest to find life’s secret to simplicity has discovered her voice through blogging. A relatively new

phenomenon in the late 90s, blogging was especially welcomed by writers and artists who found it to be a perfect writing platform outside of the media landscape, which is sometimes far too vast to synchronize a reader’s focus.

Up and close, Duclos writes on a recent ‘Oh, Dear Drea’ post: “I’ve done this physically and emotionally throughout my entire life—but I still feel like I’ve come a long way in my past 31 years. If I met her today, I wouldn’t recognize the candy bar eating, binge drinking, pretend-healthy microwaving mock meat cooking, Red Bull drinking insomniac, anxiety prone person that I was 12 years ago. Sure, I look the same—maybe it’s genetics on my side, and when attempted, most people do guess that I am a decade below my actual age.”



“Other than my rounder face, the bleached blonde hair, and the non floppy pre-baby boobs I had, I do look the same. Emotionally, I’m different.”

The blog has always been the same as it is now—a sort of personal diary. So, let Duclos tell the rest of her story in her own words...

What made you start this blog?

AD: I wanted to write about my experiences in life, and how I lived my life. I was pregnant when I started the blog, so as a single mom, I wanted to talk about that. But this was not my first blog. I started blogging when I was 15 years old. When I got pregnant, I wanted to start afresh, with a completely new blog, and document this new journey.

Your visitor numbers on your blog continue to increase. To what do you attribute this huge success?

AD: I had the amazing opportunity to reach out to companies that I wanted to work with, but I didn’t do it. It still makes me nervous. I let them come to me, asking me whether we could work on something together. They would say, “Look at our brand, it would be great for your blog.” I do everything on my blog. I’ve never hired anyone to coordinate or promote it. I like to personally work with the emails as they come in, and create a campaign or sponsorship.

What kinds campaigns or sponsorships?

AD: Like tomorrow, I am flying out to Mexico to a resort that reached out to me about a year ago. They may want a blog post or an Instagram, Twitter, Facebook—all of the social media outlets. Then, we set the rate and then we create the campaign, which is basically advertising on my blog or through my social channels.

So, what do you say in your blog post?

AD: For instance, if it is a travel destination, I show pictures of my trip and write about what a great time we had. I write about the product, “This is what I am using, this is where I went...” It depends, like the hotel I was just in last weekend, they don’t want me to write anything on my blog, instead they want me to send them pictures that I took of their location and write a blog on their website.

Tell us why you decided to write a cookbook?

AD: Two years ago, I published a cookbook, *The Plantiful Table: Easy, From-the-Earth Recipes for the Whole Family*. It’s separate from my blog, and I created it because people visiting my blog kept asking me for my recipes.

What was people’s response to your cookbook?

AD: They liked it. It’s a vegan cookbook and only 10% of my readers are vegan, which I came to find out after I did a survey a while back. It’s worked out really well because I keep hearing feedback like, “We are not vegan, but we are converting to vegan!” or “We’re eating 50% more vegan because of you. And our kids like it too.” It’s good not to push people, or telling them what they are doing is wrong, or be offensive. I just tell them, “Well, this is what I do! If you want to try it, that’s great!” And, a lot of people do try it.

When did you become a vegan?

AD: I became a vegan 11 years ago. Being a vegan is about sustainability. It’s 100% better for our earth for us to be vegan. And it’s also so much healthier for our bodies. I used to suffer from chronic sinus infections, and after only two weeks of changing my diet to all vegan, I never got another sinus infection. There’s no cholesterol and you’re detoxing your body constantly. You feel lighter, you feel healthier. Overall is better for you and better for the earth. Why not do it, or do more of it, at least?

Continues on page 50...





Do you grow your own fruits and vegetables?

AD: We do grow a bit of food, fruit, herbs, and salad primarily. My husband is the one who does it mostly. He plants, waters, and takes care of everything in our garden, and I am reaping the benefits! There are a lot of fruits and plants that are heat tolerable and can be grown here in Florida. Our growing season is the winter, which is opposite of other states, whose growing season is summer.

How do you balance the act between your blog and still keep a simple family life?

AD: I got married three years ago, and before that I was the go, go, go type. I would get up, work on the blog, then spend the day with my kid, do all the house stuff, and between 8pm and 1am is when I would get all my work done. A year ago, I got really sick, and so now I am very careful in the way I balance my work and family. Also, my daughter is now in school, which is great because I can do my work while she's there. From 2pm until she goes to bed, she's got my undivided attention. Now, it's more like an 8pm - 10pm work process. Once I am focused on something, I can sit there and be a workhorse.

How did you come up with the "Oh, Dear Drea" title for your blog?

AD: It's just one of those things that I felt like it flowed together. I feel like I am like the person who is very real, and things happen and you just have to let them happen. Instead of being sad about it, you just say, "Oh, dear..." then, you move on...

From looking at your blog and your house, one can see you are very creative.

AD: I've always been like that. I was very much into art growing up and my parents put me into art classes. If I wasn't in art class, I was painting my desk or something. I went to college and took a lot of art classes. But even in college, I was always decorating my room and painting my tables. I've always been inclined to making things colorful and mixing them up.

Have you always lived in Florida?

AD: I was born in West Palm Beach, and when my parents divorced, my mom moved us to Massachusetts. My dad was still down here so I came back down during high school. Then, after one year of being here, I decided to go back up north. I am not good with just being in one place; hence, the traveling all the time. I don't like to feel stuck in one place all the time.

When did you decide to come back?

AD: First, I went to college in Rhode Island, where I studied for three years then dropped out. I moved to Arizona, since I had never been there before so I thought I should try it out.

It was sunny all the time, and I was tired of the snow and the rain. I lasted there about a year. I came back to South Florida, first to West Palm Beach, then Miami, then back here to West Palm Beach. I've been here for the past six years, which is surreal because friends of mine tell me, "I'm surprised you've lasted there so many years!" WPB is great, and that I've lasted here that long is a miracle.

What's the attraction?

AD: I've settled here. My husband and I have our house here, and our family and friends. My mom is hoping to retire here in three years, so I am looking forward to having her nearby. For now, I am content being where I am, just traveling all the time, and writing.

How would you define yourself?

AD: I don't know. I am called so many different things. I am called a writer, a photographer, a blogger, an influencer, a lifestyle expert—an endless amount of things. I'll take it; it all sounds great, but I don't know how I would describe myself. I'm just living and doing what I do, putting my heart out there, and people are liking it. Somehow we have common ground. If I can be influential or touch someone with my photographs, or if my writing makes them happy, that's wonderful.