



# A tale of two Cambridges

Smart Entrepreneur co-author **Sabrina Kiefer** came to “the original Cambridge” the long way round – from Massachusetts. But **Mike Scialom** doesn’t hold that against her – at least, not for long

“I’m from the other Cambridge and it was full of absolutely brilliant people when I grew up there.”

There’s a hush as the ConnectedCambridge audience gathered upstairs at CB2 takes this in. It’s the sort of silence you might hear if you saw Hermann Hauser talking about why he enjoys a bit of cross-dressing or listened to Mervyn King explain his new role as head of the Tea Party’s financial arm – these things happen, but who’d have thought it?

Fortunately, such is the sheer ballsiness of speaker Sabrina Kiefer’s revelation that the moment passes without anyone shouting “traitor” or somesuch. In fact rather the opposite: one finds oneself quite interested in what it is about Cambridge, Massachusetts that

Sabrina, who was born in Italy, found so illuminating. “There were several experimental schools there in the 1970s,” she explains. “It was a bit of a hippie town

which had a combination of intelligent and knowledgeable people who were also very open-minded.

“I went to a small liberal arts college, Sarah Lawrence College in Westchester County.” Former alumni include Obama’s former chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, fashion designer Vera Wang and writer Alice Walker. “I had a concentration in humanities: I was very interested in dance and at SLC you could study dance and do the intellectual work – it was very balanced.”

After developing persistent back pain Sabrina stopped dancing and worked as a journalist for several years, mostly for Associated Press and Business Week. She also studied the Alexander Technique to address the back problem, and decided she wanted to introduce it to the wider world. “It’s a 100-year-old technique and it’s used by a lot of musicians, sportspeople, people who need to use their body, and I was

trying to bring it into the business world. I started doing a lot of customer-centred marketing; it was entrepreneurial but I still needed a job so I went to

“You need to find that group of people who will first adopt what has hitherto been unconventional”

work at the FT for a couple of years, then landed at the Entrepreneurship Hub at Imperial College. After a couple of years there, Bart Clarysse came over from Belgium and asked me to work with him full-time: he wanted to redefine our entrepreneurship offering and I started to put some tools online and then Bart suggested the book."

One result of this effort has been to explain that "it's very hard doing innovation, especially when it requires people to change their habits. Sometimes the most similar product to the existing product is preferred – Thomas Edison's light bulbs were adopted because they were the most similar to gas lights not because they were the best design. Today, people find it odd to switch to LED lighting because there are no bulbs.

““ If I'd asked my customers what they wanted,” Ford famously said, “they'd have said a faster horse””

"You need to find that group of people who will first adopt what has hitherto been unconventional, and we've tried to be relevant to the challenges entrepreneurs face."

The talk ends and the CB2 audience fires off a wide range of questions which Sabrina answers with grace while displaying a keen insight into the entrepreneurial mindset.

Sabrina's co-author, Prof Bart Clarysse, is currently director of the Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Design programme at Imperial College Business School. Sabrina is a venture coach in the same department – it's just as well folks in Cambridge are broad-minded, or we'd be getting all flat-earth about this sort of thing (always a danger in such a monstrously horizontal landscape) – and I hope it's not too forward to suggest that her unconventional upbringing has helped her validate her take-no-prisoners attitude.

So how does she feel about her first visit to East Anglia? "It's kinda fun to be in the original Cambridge," she says with a bright smile.



Sabrina Kiefer

ConnectedCambridge is managed by Dr Peter Hewkin. Visit [www.connectedcambridge.com](http://www.connectedcambridge.com) for event information.