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Annette Conradie

Interior Decorator

EXPERT IN BREATHING LIFE INTO DULL AND DREARY INTERIOR SPACES

Interior Decorators bring life to inside spaces through upgrading aesthetical and practical features. By assisting clients to decorate homes, offices and businesses they create the most functional and beautiful decor in a space as possible. Introducing leading local Interior Decorator, Annette Conradie, whose creative ability to transform lackluster interiors into striking and captivating spaces has made her a sought-after service provider. This is her story.

CREATIVE TALENT

Born and raised at Graskop, a small town in South Africa's Mpumalanga province, Annette Conradie's creative nature manifested at a very early age. Her grandmother was keen on crochet- and needlework and with toddler Annette always fiddling around, it came as no surprise to the family when she too demonstrated a desire to make her own clothes.

“From about six years old, I started knitting and crochet work under my grandmother's watchful eye. No doubt, I inherited my talent and passion for needlework from her. She taught me needlework and at age eight, I made my first piece of clothing”, Annette recalls.

Whilst at school, Annette also excelled in music and her talent as a pianist encouraged her to apply for a Bachelor's in Music degree at the University of Pretoria. “Music was my thing and I harboured big dreams of becoming a concert pianist. However, I continued to make curtains on the side for an outlet at Nelspruit in Mpumalanga. Not only did it help in keeping the pianist fingers nimble, but also to generate an income to support my studies and related expenses”, she shares.

EMPLOYMENT WOES

It was also at university where Annette met her future husband, Pieter, whom she later followed to Windhoek where he landed a job at a local commercial bank. “I fell in love and married a man from another country and followed him back to our new home”, she notes.

Struggling to secure employment as a music teacher in Windhoek, Annette again turned to her childhood passion of needlework, to keep busy and earn an income. “I started making curtains and later landed employment at the Kock and Schmidt Company, where I worked for many years in the curtains department”, Annette shares.

“Looking back, my curtain days were where I really cut my teeth in this industry. The frequent interactions with clients brought along the experience and ability to read them and their needs. Listening is a very important skill to possess in this sector. At the end of the day, you need to listen and have the ability to make changes to ideas and rooms to accommodate your client’s wishes throughout the decoration process. It’s about guiding your clients to what they need, whilst at the same time striking a balance with what they want”, she explains.

OWN BUSINESS DREAM

Annette saw a gap in the market for a fully-fledged curtain shop and approached a local bank for funding to get her venture off the ground. “My husband helped in putting a loan application together, which the bank approved. I got a loan of just 90,000 dollars and I went solo with the Quiltmaster franchise. This, more or less coincided with the completion of the Maerua Mall, which offered plenty of floor space for rent. ‘Touch of Style’ was born and I haven’t looked back since”, Annette reminisces.

Asked about the name of her business, Annette explains that the name encapsulates the customer-oriented vision of the venture to establish itself as a preferred service provider to discerning clientele. “The name says it all. There is a touch of style in everything we do. And that touch should stand out when people see it. Not only is it about creativity and skill, but service and quality, as well. That is our trademark”, she adds.

BUSY WORK

Skilled interior decorators have one thing in common - a thorough appreciation and sense of composition, layout, and color design. “These fundamental elements strongly influence interior decoration. We work with different mediums and our varied product offering of curtains, window blinds, wallpaper, upholstery, bedlinen, décor items and carpets make us a one-stop shop”, Annette explains.

“Don’t be fooled by the tranquility of our showroom. Behind the scenes, I manage a very busy workshop where we manufacture custom-made curtains and other products. There are also installation and sales teams I oversee. I need to interact with clients and suppliers as well. It’s just a continuous flow of job cards, quotations, orders and site visits. So, all in all, a very busy and demanding environment and you need to stay on the ball. And that ball is quality in all we do”, Annette highlights. Another key component of Annette’s work is the training of her employees, some of who have been with her company, since its

inception. “Investing in my team is very important. Without them, ‘Touch of Style’ will not be where it is today. I need to plough back and growing their skill sets so they too can go out there and make a difference to the lives of others”, she emphasises.



BUSINESS GROWTH

With a growing clientele, including bigger corporate clients in the hospitality and services sectors, ‘Touch of Style’ continues to cement its reputation. Starting out with three employees, the company now employs 17 permanent workers and was appointed as the decorator of choice for both the old and new presidential residences, including the staff and guest houses. It has also landed deals for the soft decorations at the five-star Hilton Hotel and various other luxurious hotels and lodges across Namibia, as well as large corporate offices.

“Although demanding, such bigger projects boost our growth and profile significantly. But, that doesn’t mean that the individual client is treated differently. At the end of the day, it is all about personalised customer service and quality”, Annette stresses. “Personalised service is very important in this line of work. If a client is looking for new curtains, I visit them at home, because the moment I walk in, I get an idea of what their style is”, she adds.

Today, ‘Touch of Style’ is located in a big showroom, designed by Annette, in partnership with a local architect. “The showroom was one of my dreams when I started the business. I first acquired the erf. You need to start somewhere. But, I was able to make it happen. Today, coupled with our reputation of inspiring creativity, it is our showroom and what it offers that sets us apart from our competitors”, she notes.

STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM

Notwithstanding her business successes, Annette stays grounded and humble, appreciating the support she received from her staff and family, in growing her business and brand.

“No doubt, none of this would’ve been possible without my team, both here at work, and at home. I have a strong and loyal team here at work. They too, love what they do. I just lead them, but they are the ones that make it all happen. They are no other family”, she acknowledges. “Equally, the support of my husband and mother allowed me to deal with the early pressures of getting a one-man business off the ground. I took its toll initially, but they’re my pillars of strength. I make a good team with my husband, Pieter. I’m more of the creative type, but his financial acumen continues to add significant value to our growth as a business”, she adds.

With her business well established and sustainable, Annette now has more time to pursue her other childhood passion, music. A partnership she struck up with the talented singer, Rene van Wyk, whom she now leads on the piano, is starting to pay dividends, and the duo recently released an album. “Music will always be a passion. Playing the piano calms me. It feeds my soul. It reinvigorates me”, Annette explains.

Asked about the prospects for future local interior decorators, Annette is very optimistic. “Interior decoration is all about giving soul to spaces and make them more livable and pleasant. Although the market is tough and competitive, I believe that young

talent can make it with the right mix of creativity, innovation, a customer-centered approach and a drive to succeed”, she concludes.

Annette Conradie, resourceful, driven and industrious. Although a successful businesswoman, she remains an artist at heart. Her story teaches us the true meaning of creativity as not only artistic ability and talent; but also the ability to take risks, ignore doubt and face fears. Her story teaches us that success is no accident: that its price is dedication, hard work and an unremitting devotion to those things you want to see happen. She is living her passion.

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