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The Design Partnership: Callie V Merwe & Francois Van Der Merw

An innovative team brings together branding, design and architecture



Published 9 years ago on Nov 11, 2009

By **Juliet Pitman**



The ability to adapt to a changing environment is a key success factor for any
there are those that do more than simply adapt. Working at the cutting edge of



industry, they are continually moving forward and opening up new frontiers. Instead of merely adapting to change, they bring it about. These are the true thought-leaders and visionaries.

In the complex, fast-paced and ever-changing world of design, keeping up is difficult enough. Setting trends is an ability found in an exclusive few and it is to this club that The Design Partnership belongs. Co-founded by architects Callie van der Merwe and Francois van der Merwe, the business has broken new ground in forging a cohesive design discipline that combines architecture, design and branding.

Callie explains the company's evolution: "Francois and I both studied architecture and as time marched on, retail commissions seemed to roll in at an ever-increasing pace. Retail & Hospitality design chose us. It is almost as if we had no say in the matter." The company then launched The Design Partnership Retail & Hospitality division, anticipating and capitalizing on synergies between retail and architectural design.

"The boundaries between the design disciplines were purposefully eroded to encourage more interaction and yielded great results," continues Callie, adding that one of the defining trends in the world of design today is that of blurring the lines between traditional design disciplines.

The lines between architecture and interior design, graphic and product design, fashion and food design, are less clear than they have ever been in the past. Understanding the interaction between the disciplines, particularly in the retail and foodie markets where fashion trends dictate what's vogue, The Design Partnership has excelled at delivering innovative retail and hospitality projects, among them Doppio Zero, Mugg & Biscotti and Carducci.

The more entrenched the company became in the retail design space, the more they recognized the need to tie the location, interior and exterior design in with the brand. Callie explains: "It dawned on us that because each business is developed around a very specific target audience we should logically communicate a very clear single message to that audience."

The launch of the Brandvertising Division followed and with it, a new concept in design branding. John Gordon, divisional director, explains, "If the brand is not to be successful, you need to strap everything relating to it in with one belt. That's what brandvertising is all about."

He adds that everything about a retail or hospitality space should follow on from

The process he and his team follow starts with the essence of the brand and what they like to be positioned in the market. As Callie outlines: “A project generally begins with a brainstorming session about a current market offering, its competitors, where they are hoping to penetrate the market and where it would like to position itself in the

The team then comes up with a single-minded message – a ‘soundbite’ – that captures the essence of the brand. “The soundbite is the thing that will help a brand to penetrate the market, so that’s where you need to start.

It’s the thing that draws people to a place. When they get there, the interior architecture, furniture and the location will have an impact and play an important role in reinforcing the brand, but the soundbite is what gets them there in the first place,” he elaborates.

One of their more recent projects is FSH, a seafood restaurant in Rosebank, Johannesburg. John explains how The Design Partnership developed its soundbite: “Major competitors in the same market already owned words such as ‘ocean’ so we had to come up with a unique soundbite that would get as close as possible to the restaurant’s core offering.

We couldn’t use a generic word like ‘fish’ so instead we used FSH – when people hear it they automatically fill in the ‘i’. It gives them ownership of that word in that market.” Branding projects such as this one have taken The Design Partnership’s business to a new level.

This is a team that understands that to be a leader in business is not about carving a niche for oneself in an existing cliff face; it’s about discovering a new mountain and climbing it before anyone else realises it’s even there.

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Juliet Pitman

Juliet Pitman is a features writer at Entrepreneur Magazine.

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27 Of The Richest People In South Africa

Here are 27 of South Africa's richest people, but how did they achieve this level of wealth out here.



Published 4 weeks ago on May 1, 2018

By **Nicole Crampton**

Learn the secrets of SA's most successful business people, here is the list of the 28 richest people in South Africa:

In a world with growing entrepreneurship success stories, victory is often measured in terms of money. The feat of achieving a place on this list is, however, years of hard work, determination and persistence. "One has to set high standards... I

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Meet Jan Grobler: Serial entrepreneur, Advocate, And Job Creator

It is the authors' sincere hope that young South-African entrepreneurs will learn from business men such as Jan Grobler and co-create a vibrant and legacy driven entrepreneurial environment in our country.



Published 1 month ago on Apr 19, 2018

By **Dirk Coetsee** 

Jan Grobler has either directly or indirectly created 10 000 jobs and he is not done forming a lasting legacy. The author can call on various titles in an attempt to describe a serial entrepreneur: Advocate, Founder, Franchisor and Project manager, yet no label fully embodies his unique skill set, experience, and entrepreneurial spirit.

As a highly enthusiastic observer of business leadership traits in others, I noticed a strong-willed and passionate intent to create more businesses, ignite exponential growth within them, and ultimately deliver numerous job opportunities to South-Africans from the onset of the interview.

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Published 2 months ago on Mar 12, 2018

By **Nadine Todd** 

Vital Stats

- **Player:** Bob Skinstad
- **What he does:** Bob is an ex-Springbok rugby captain, businessman, entrepreneur, a director at a venture capital firm Knife Capital and has recently developed an online course for millions on 80/20 Mindset.
- **Visit:** www.knifecapital.co.za and 8020Mindset.com

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