

BUSINESS WOMEN FULFILLING THEIR DESTINY

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Crafty WOMEN

In a country with a wealth of creative talent, we look at women making their mark in the world of design and crafts

LI EDELKOORT (62), TREND GURU

Dutch-born Edelkoort consults to companies around the world, but would choose Africa as a base if she could. Her international trend talks and new social media platform, www.trendtablet.com, reveal her wide-ranging design nous.

Do you consider yourself a businesswoman? Partly, since I know how to direct and inspire big groups of people. But that's not my first occupation: first and foremost, I'm a forecaster. Therein lie my love and passion. My business is a new model that works with individual independence and organic growth. I try to let people design their own destiny in the company and forge their own careers.

What made you start coming to SA? Sappi initially invited me to come and give lectures. I spent some time at Rocktail Beach Camp in KwaZulu-Natal and was quickly sold on the country. I then started working with Woolworths and Mr

Price, and would either see them in Paris or come to SA for meetings. Ravi Naidoo then invited me to speak at Design Indaba, so I became a frequent visitor. I also met Luke Bailes from Singita and Boyd Ferguson from Cécile & Boyd's, and continue to work with them on trends in tourism and lifestyle.

What sparked the renewed global interest in Africa?

This is the last continent to be developed into a "market", so foreign capital is flooding in to get a piece of the cake – a positive, but scary situation where foreign forces own too much of Africa and might modify its culture. Yet there's also a growing interest in African style and design. On my www.trendtablet.com site I have an entire section on this totemism.

Tell us about *Totemism: Memphis Meets Africa*, your exhibit at Design Indaba. There seems to be a kinship between Memphis ideas and South African style – between shanty town colours and Italian kitchen laminates from that period. The use of tactile material, coloured patterns, wild

animal skins, fringes and finishes, light bulbs and neons are all reason to believe that we can expect a Memphis-inspired revival of inspiring magnitude.

Who in SA inspires you? Everybody. I like the happiness and gentleness of the people, their fresh way of looking at the world and the youth of the country. It's all very vibrant.

Which brands in SA impress you? Singita is one of the world's most important luxury brands and is doing an amazing job. Its efforts create a sanctuary for animals, local peoples and tourists, uniting them under one common sky.

What do businesses need to differentiate themselves nowadays? A complete overhaul: better working conditions, happier people, fewer and better products and services that need to acquire a certain animus. There's also a need to be spiritual in order to truly reach out to consumers, hence new ways of selling and branding would be key in SA, in particular. Businesses in this country need to understand that a good product can be born only from good and fair conditions, or the soul of the product will be negative and won't satisfy the consumer in the long run. Joy is a very important component, every step of the way.

Could SA promote the "Made in South Africa" label successfully? Absolutely. The future will see global brands using local production, creating local economies and allowing local colours to penetrate their offerings. They need to start new brands with differentiated businesses and production places.

How do you envisage the future of entrepreneurship worldwide? It will take time to develop, but ultimately the structure of business as we know it will disappear and be replaced by a more horizontal form of collaboration which includes team projects, self-developed people, involvement from high to low, sharing and gathering, lending instead of buying, continual learning and having several careers in a lifetime. After all, if we live for 100 years, we might have three real moments in life: one of learning and experiencing, one of learning and producing and one of learning and teaching. These ultimately lead to the realisation of the self.

What's the secret of your success? Willingness.

