

ENTREPRENEUR
of the month



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The queen of junk

Katie Thompson has an eye for spotting the potential in discarded junk and turning it into functional art.

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At a time when the earth's resources are being strained, it's wonderful to see 'old rejects' being given a new lease of life. This is exactly what Katie Thompson, an innovative, quirky Cape Town designer, does.

About Katie

Katie is an interior designer with seven years' experience in the design industry. Today, she is at the helm of REcreate, a company that repurposes found objects and turns them into unique functional objects infused with character, and with a new use. For example, she turns old vacuum cleaners into arch lamps, typewriters and milk bottles into desk lamps, scales into clocks, buckets into stools and – her most popular product – battered old suitcases into stylish chairs.

How did she start?

About 18 months ago Katie realised interior design wasn't challenging her any longer. But it was only when she turned a broken chair into what has become known as her 'heart chair' (a missing piece of the wooden backrest was replaced with a Perspex section) that the idea of creating a range of furniture and lighting from junk items was sparked. She resigned from her job and, as fate would have it, was invited to exhibit at the design show Decorex in Cape Town.

'I had to furnish a lounge within three months,' she says. Not only did she rise to the challenge – her

suitcase chairs and other designs won two awards.

Money matters

To finance REcreate, Katie rented out her house and moved in with her parents for about six months. She then set about drawing up a business plan. 'It made me consider all the aspects I had not yet thought of and made me focus my excitement and streamline the process. I look back on my business plan whenever I'm in doubt.'

Marketing

Katie sells her products from her studio, at selected retail outlets and on her website. 'I have been very lucky in that my website has taken off. It is crucial to update it often, to have links to Facebook and other popular blog pages and to ensure that it is easily navigated. I photograph all my completed products, upload the pictures and insert a description, price, dimensions, and so on.

'Clients browsing my site can view the products and email me via the website to place orders, or can register so when I add a new product or blog update, they receive an email notification – a very efficient marketing tool.'

Personnel

'I am very particular about the finish of my products and am fortunate to be working with some of Cape Town's best craftsmen. I also employ an office assistant.' ■



- Write a two-year business plan. Give it a lot of thought, even if it's just for your own records.
- You will only ever be as busy as you want to be – don't wait for the work to come to you.
- When setting up your website, get a good web designer – don't attempt to do it yourself or with a friend if you don't have the know-how.