

# home luxe

BY ASHLEIGH ROMAN

It's all in the detail! These homeware business owners are helping to create dream spaces and nostalgic aromas, and they're keeping it 100% local.



## Cara Saven Wall Design *Cara Saven*

**Startup costs:** 'About R20 000, which I used to buy a computer,' says Cara.  
**Turnover:** 'The business has grown from one employee to seven, and we've enjoyed 30% growth year on year.'

### How did you get into selling wallpaper?

After I had my first daughter, I always thought I'd go back to my nine-to-five because I loved my job. I was a footwear buyer, which is every woman's dream, but I just couldn't work those hours with a child. In 2006 I turned a hobby into a business called Cara Saven Photography. I then discovered wallpaper and large-format artwork, and the focus of my business shifted. I rebranded in 2017 to Cara Saven Wall Design and put together a



**This pic** Cara Saven turned her passion for photography into a luxury wallpaper business.  
**Left** Each design is customised to fit the clients' space. The wallpaper is the first to be 100% sourced and printed in SA.

For the first few years, it was just three of us until we had built up enough profit to hire more people. It was also about creating designs that stood out from the crowd.

### Who are your clients?

Every job is slightly different. Someone who wants one of our designs for a room in their home could walk in off the street; we will then customise it to the size of their walls.

Our interior design clients usually have a clear idea of what they want. If they don't, they usually send us mood boards and ask for suggestions. We also work with hotels and restaurants.

### Are the materials used in your wallpaper sourced locally?

We are the first wallpaper company that does our own printing in South Africa. We have a 100% local wallpaper substrate. Most large-format wallpaper printed on in South Africa generally comes from China or Europe. We are the first company that sells 100% locally produced, designed and created wallpaper. We consider this to be one of our most unique selling points.

### Why is your product unique?

We use a kind of wallpaper called VividTex, which is an unbelievable product. It ticks almost every box that most other wallpapers don't: it's seamless, has no joins, it's scratch-

collection of designs aimed at interior designers, decorators and architects. We've been doing really well, especially since we started trading within the US and the Netherlands.

### Do you have a background in design?

I started off at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, but that lasted only a year and a half because there was no focus on how to make money from your art. I've always said that my creativity is 49% while business is 51% of my brain; it tips over just slightly. So I completed my BA in History of Art and Psychology – but I was desperate to do something business-orientated, so I did a postgrad in Marketing Management. If I deliver something creatively, I have to understand how it would be consumed from a business point of view.

### What kept your business afloat in the early days?

I've always tried to keep our overheads very lean and mean so we could offer our clients competitive pricing.

proof and the print quality is astonishing. It prints very strong colours such as solid black, and can withstand intense climates like extreme heat and moisture. It's a game-changing product in the industry.

### What's the best part of the job?

Hotel work is my favourite thing to do. A month before lockdown, we supplied a boutique hotel in Zanzibar with wallpaper for about 10 rooms and their public areas. I told the owner that her hotel is going to be one of the most Instagrammable locations in Zanzibar.

That is when I get most excited – when I'm able to help somebody not only make their place look beautiful, but to help them market it without doing anything extra. Everyone will be taking a photograph of themselves against those wallpapers, posting it on Instagram and tagging the hotel. That is what I love: that we can offer our clients more than just wallpaper.

### How helpful has Instagram been as a marketing tool?

For the first eight or nine years, marketing was 100% word of mouth. I didn't touch social media until the beginning of 2017 – I just didn't have the time and I didn't understand the power of it. The minute we started our Instagram page, the business went to a new level.

### Has lockdown taken a major toll on production?

Lockdown worked well for us. We spent about five or six weeks hunkered down, putting the most amazing designs together. Generally, we wouldn't have the time to do that because we juggle designing between each job that comes in. During the second phase of lockdown, we were able to take orders and print, so we managed to catch up.

**Website:** carasaven.com  
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