



# No Wallflower

Cara Saven is on a mission to make the world a more beautiful place. For 14 years, her wallpaper design studio has created showstoppers for private homes, hotels, creative agencies and corporates around the world. Recently, she's taken on a more unexpected set of clients – hospitals and medical clinics – where her designs are transforming stark and severe spaces into places of reassurance and peace.

BY MARTIN JACOBS





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**M**edical rooms of any nature are filled with heightened emotions. The hopes and fears of patients collide with the stress and fatigue of health practitioners. It helps no one that these spaces are so often crammed with intimidating equipment that is austere and uncomfortable, not to mention the faded posters of breaching whales put up with the intent of being soothing. There's been little within the clinical decor of these rooms that would help ease the anxiety of patients waiting for treatments of diagnosis.

But there's a sea change happening within the global healthcare community. One that Cape Town-based design entrepreneur Cara

Saven recognises as long overdue, and one that she has had a hand in effecting.

Founder of Cara Saven Wall Design, a Cape Town-based creative studio that specialises in bespoke wall coverings, Cara and her team have increasingly been called upon by specialist interior designers and healthcare practitioners themselves to collaborate on custom-designed wall coverings to support wellness within these environments.

The studio has, for years, been steps ahead in refining the art of seamless wall coverings, specialising in tailor-made surfaces of any scale. Whether used on walls or ceilings, or a combination of both, the visuals produced by Cara's team of designers are engaging, and transformative in every kind of environment.

Having worked on projects across the globe for residential and commercial clients as well as those in the hospitality and healthcare sectors, Cara has an understanding of how wall coverings can transform austere and underwhelming spaces into beautiful and captivating environments. She also grasps how this engagement of the senses,



# INSPIRATION

**PREVIOUS PAGE** A render of an MRI room shows how the wrap-around wallpaper creates a space of calm. **OPPOSITE** Cara Saven has been an entrepreneur since 2006; the studio created a series of designs for the Hutton Medical Wellness Centre in Plettenberg Bay.

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particularly within the healthcare sector, can result in lowered stress levels and a welcome sense of calm.

As a result, the studio has produced wallpaper for medical rooms which is rich in emotional nuance to offer escape when it's needed most. We caught up with Cara to ask her how her team tackled this unique project, and found out more about what she has learnt from running her own thriving business.

**It must be quite challenging to create visuals for environments within a hospital, in rooms that are often fraught with emotion.**

**What was the experience like for you?**

I have a talented team of creatives who are able to conceptualise the perfect visuals for different types of environments. In reception and waiting areas, where tempers often run short, we have worked with understated and minimalist designs to bring about calm. In MRI and mammogram examination rooms, highly stressful environments fraught with unpleasant emotions, the team has designed visuals that reference soothing and tranquil natural spaces that offer a sense of sanctuary.

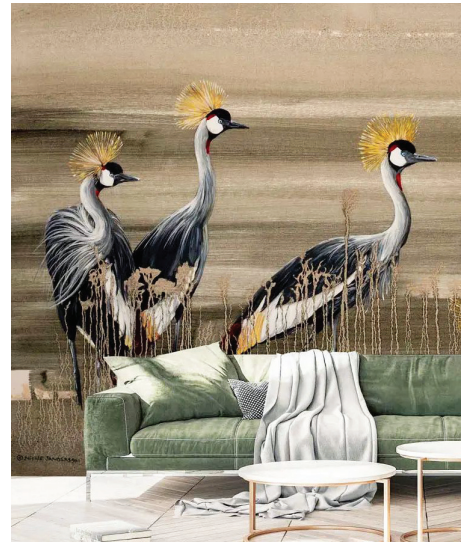
**Your business has grown exponentially since you launched it in 2017. What's the secret to your success? Can you share a few of the joys in your journey?**

Before I started the business in its current capacity, I spent 10 years as a sole proprietor doing the same thing, supplying custom wallpapers to the interior design industry. I earned my stripes in terms of understanding the many variables that go into printing and design. The real joy started when I saw how others responded to the types of designs that I loved but wasn't sure would have broader appeal. I had a vision for the type of business I wanted to build, which was focused on offering people choice. I hate being



**ABOVE** The studio's designs are sought after not only by homeowners but by interior designers, hotel owners, corporates, creative agencies and architects around the globe.

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forced to buy something I only half like. Not only do we offer a range of designs clients can choose from, we also allow them to customise any aspect of the design they choose. We are also able to execute entirely bespoke designs for them. It's quite satisfying for both our studio and our client to know that they are creating something entirely unique.

**What are some of the challenges you have experienced as an entrepreneur?**

Time. Never enough of it. Although that's only because I'm trying to juggle kids and things that need to get done at home. So maybe the challenge is that juggle, and feeling like you're

never doing anything properly. I'm pleased that I'm not a perfectionist – that helps a lot!

**You seem to have your work-life balance figured out. What advice would you give women who are juggling a career with family?**

It's all an illusion! Every day I feel like I am neglecting something. As I've got older, I have been able to accept that some days feel super balanced and others just don't. On the days I do yoga or get up the mountain I definitely feel like I have the balance more waxed. But other days I really don't. Running a business comes more easily to me than domesticity so I often feel overwhelmed on that front. ■