

DESIGN

# Design flair and retail grit

Cape Town's Monya Eastman has put her corporate skills into a thriving furniture design business now headed for Gauteng

WORDS: HILARY PRENDINI TOFFOLI :: PICTURES: SUPPLIED



The Lark coffee table

**M**onya Eastman started with a philosophy degree and ended up with a bespoke furniture business. For seven years a buyer for the Foschini Group, Eastman couldn't find the simple classic furniture pieces she wanted and ended up designing them herself. She and her husband Jeremy, a risk analyst with iJET, were renovating their new Green Point home when she took the plunge and designed, in solid wood rather than imported veneers, the pieces she desired. Eastman had them made in Woodstock. The response from family and friends was so enthusiastic she decided it was time to resign from her job and turn a hobby into a business. "Hobby" in Afrikaans is "stokperd". So she named her new venture Stokperd, and went, as she puts it, "riding off on my stick horse into the wild blue yonder".

**WINNER** That was five years ago. Her stick horse proved a turbocharged winner and soon she was visiting clients' houses, measuring spaces and creating whatever the home owners wanted, from kitchen and coffee tables to shelves, beds, headboards and lights – all her own designs, including the lights. Eastman's existing range – by then on a website – was also sought after,

especially since people could have items custom-made in different woods or sizes. Soon she brought in powder-coated metal items. Everything was outsourced. She designed on paper and took her sketches to her suppliers. Early on Eastman began providing furniture designs and décor suggestions for Ideas Cartel, one of Cape Town's collaborative workspaces, a networking environment for freelancers. The first was in Waterkant Street and the second in Loop Street, a spacious venue skilfully combining vintage and contemporary, which she uses as an inspiring office space though she spends more time with what she calls "my wood guys and my metal guys".

**TRAINING** During her time at the Foschini Group Eastman covered diverse retail ground in fashion before moving to @home. It was excellent training for a wannabe entrepreneurial dynamo from Welkom whose tertiary education was not commerce, but a philosophy honours degree from Rhodes University. "With @home I gained insights into the furniture industry and spent time with suppliers learning about manufacturing, negotiation and range building which are useful business skills. But in big corporations there's too much power play and ladder climbing for me.

**"Office spaces have changed so much"**  
Monya Eastman, Stokperd

"Overseeing manufacture was not my thing either. What I dreamed about was making beautiful things myself."

**GAUTENG** Her eyes are now fixed on Gauteng. Eastman has already supplied the big branding and signage agency Seek and during the weekend of October 13-15 will show her lights, bar stools and drinks trolleys at the Sanlam Handmade Contemporary Fair on Hyde Park Corner Rooftop. Having sorted out the tricky stuff she calls "the packaging issues" with her Cape Town suppliers, she will relocate her business and home next year. New York is also in the pipeline for this driven designer. She has been

approached to collaborate on the interior design of an office space in Soho. Although Pinterest is a big source of inspiration for Eastman, she is not a slave to trends. "I don't want things to date. I like design that's functional and classic, and will still be relevant when the latest fad has come and gone."



The Thuli light above a desk. Top: the Mirabai light



**MONYA EASTMAN ON BUILDING A BRAND**

**The office as we know it is being reimagined. Are work spaces now your main focus?**  
Not exclusively, though from a business perspective larger jobs make more sense financially. Office spaces have changed so much. Even corporates, especially in the commercial field, are spending more on making their offices look good. They realise their employees must work in a space conducive to productivity. They must have attractive surroundings and good light, for example, instead of your standard overhead interrogation light.

**How significant has social media been in building your brand?**  
Instagram has been a massive help. It's an instant thing. When I put a pic on Instagram of a piece I was working on, even before it was finished I got messages saying "I want it. How much is it?" On our Facebook page we

did a Father's Day contest to win one of our Trolley Dollys. The response was huge. People had to tell us why Pops is Tops and what his favourite drink was. You have to be creative when you have no money. Talented design blogger Diana Moss has a large website and she gave us a lot of social media exposure, so I made her a cabinet named Peggy after the buttoned-up copywriter in Mad Men (portrayed by actress Elisabeth Moss).

**You always give products on your website unusual names. Who is the inspiration?**  
I named the lights in our lighting range after women who lit up their worlds, like Thuli Madonsela who shines bright, inside and out. Women such as Boudicca, Coco Chanel, Mirabai and Sappho. My first order when I started Stokperd was a dining table for my sister so I called it the Sister Table. My Yoko rosewood desk is the most famous unknown desk in the world.



Mr Blonde barstools

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