

# Designing women

Rosanne Buchanan looks at the recipients of this year's Elle Décor Fabric Award - a success story in an industry facing much adversity



**W**hen 28-year-old Amanda Herholdt and Lise Butler finished their BTech textile design and technology course at Pretoria Technikon in 2000, they weren't ready to burst into the big bad world of commerce. So they formed a small commercial textile design unit within the technikon's textile department. It all really kicked off when they were invited to develop a range of fabrics for Decorex 2000. It was such a hit that the two talented graduates started designing and manufacturing scatter cushions, aprons and gardening kits for big homeware names like Loads of Living and Jack Tupp.

on their own. They opened a little factory in Centurion and have employed seven production staff.



Rich silk textures.

They'll be launching their award-winning fabric range at Rooms on View early next year. The range is inherently inspired by South Africa but is not ethnic, says Lise. "It's more international in that it's cutting edge design," she says.

The fabric incorporates some of the most popular designs developed by the Design Team. "The range includes mostly printed silks and is really a collection of our most popular and well known designs," she says.

Now business partners for close on a year, they say the biggest challenge is facing the reality of the textile industry, and having to diversify and look at other avenues to grow the business. They've stepped into the fashion trade and now supply T-shirts

and skirts to Big Blue. They've also just completed a design makeover for a big hair care brand by designing new aprons and products to complement their salons. "We've used design elements that will give them an edge in business," says Lise.

It hasn't all been plain sailing though, says Lise, who worries about the future of the textile industry, which has seen massive job losses - 100 000 jobs over three years - and shutdowns due to cheap Chinese imports.

"We've really had to work hard to carve a niche for ourselves," she says, noting that South Africans are not buying enough local products. She adds: "It's all price-related. The problem is that these imported finished products are cheaper than what we can source the raw materials for. Our biggest achievement is that we're still here!"



Local is lekker.

It was difficult to expand the business with students working on projects as they found it hard to balance their studies and work, Lise says. In the end the designing duo took a brave step and split from the technikon to venture into business



The Design Team - Lise & Amanda.  
Photo by Nerissa Korb