

# BESPOKE FABRIC

Create your own designs and choose your own colours  
for a personal look

There might be thousands of fabrics to choose from out there, but often just the right one remains elusive.

This usually applies to the clothes available to us, but in this instance the problem is easily solved by having an outfit specially tailored. Now the same solution is available to decorators.

African Sketchbook is a small but rapidly expanding Cape Town company producing hand-painted fabrics to order for upholstery, curtaining, bed linen and cushions.

The artistic enthusiast behind African Sketchbook is Diana Christian, who moved from clothing design to bedlinen and then gradually became involved in creating individual, one-off designs for clients. It was at this nascent point in her business that she met marketing consultant Anne Thistleton, a recent arrival from America.

Anne says she was 'just blown away' by what Diana was creating and also by the truly indigenous entrepreneurial spirit of the venture.

"You just can't get the same depth and texture with printed fabrics," says Anne. "Added to this is the very individual quality – the fact that you can have something custom made, something that is a total one-off, something quite unique."

Anne recalls how a specially designed fabric added quality and interest to a venue. The club house of a certain golf course had been draped with floral print, pretty and adequate. Diana, however, created a design for further upholstery and cushions that depicted delightfully whimsical coloured drawings of golfers in plus-fours that added a new dimension to the interiors.

Game lodges are also eager clients for fabrics that speak of the

bush and Africa through home-grown interpretations and not, highly stylised European design.

Diana creates all the designs, but says she has honed a system that is customised to such a grass roots level, that with only a short period of training her staff can recreate exactly what she has designed. One of her strengths is recognising potential talent and as a result, Diana developed a team of artists, most of whom have worked with her for many years. "Some of our fabric painters are exceptional and there is no difference at all when the stencils are used in the design I have created and what they produce."

This capacity to translate sophisticated designs with skill and speed means clients don't have to wait long between conception and delivery of the fabric. Any quantity of

fabric can be ordered – from a few metres of curtaining to hundreds of metres of upholstery fabric. Designs and colours are honed to the client's exact requirements and clients' designs are also stored for future order, ready to be recalled when needed.

Fabrics can be printed in drop lengths, so there are no complicated repeats to worry about. Borders, too, can be painted exactly where they are needed on each drop.

The company's fabrics are competitively priced and are often more cost-effective than imported fabrics. Free-hand painting, screen printing, block printing and stencilling can be done on any fabric, from silks to linens, and rigorous testing ensures that they are washable, colour fast and robust enough to take the vicissitudes of our local climate.





1. Anne Thistleton (left) discusses a project with Diana Christian and one of the artists in the factory.
2. A work of art. The hand painting imbues the fabric with a depth and individual quality that prints seldom attain.
3. A sophisticated take on the African animal theme. Deep borders with monkeys on the curtains are repeated on the cushions
4. The penguin theme of this cot duvet is repeated on the chair cushions.
5. Designs for fabric and passementerie.

Source:  
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