

SA social distancing design solutions attract interest abroad

Social distancing will remain on the menu for the restaurant trade for a while longer. The challenge this presents for sit-down establishments that want to create superlative experiences for diners while adhering to health and safety regulations, calls for innovative thinking.



Source: Supplied

Nando's Design Programme creative director and the founder of Studio Lee Lynch, Tracy Lynch perceived that social distancing requirements presented an opportunity to engage with designers to find solutions. So, at the start of the global coronavirus lockdowns in 2020, she started working on a series of screens and furniture accessories that would not only serve to make social distancing a bit more intuitive, but would also provide as enriching an aesthetic experience as possible.

Linking designer-makers to interior designers

These designs were included in the [Nando's Portal to Africa](#) and made available to purchase by over 2,500 Nando's restaurants across the globe. Over the past five years, together with Nando's property director, Michael Spinks, and with the support of Nando's, Lynch and her team developed the Portal to Africa as an online marketplace that connects South African designer-makers to interior designers working on Nando's restaurants around the world.

The social distancing design project has been well received internationally, especially in the UK, with over 7,000 products sold there to date, amounting to a total spend of R7,456,827. It also received a Bronze Loerie at the 2020 Loerie Awards in South Africa.



Source: Supplied

The first range that emerged from Lynch's design process is a range of 'table-blocker' screens used to create distance when customers are sharing a table, or to completely block off certain areas. These screens are festooned with lively patterns drawn from the motifs created by the 10 finalists of the 2018 Nando's [Hot Young Designer \(HYD\) Talent Search](#) competition.

"To make it more interactive and to bring home the Nando's experience, I created an opportunity to showcase our Nando's Hot Young Designers' patterns. This way, the young designers also get to earn a licensing fee for the use of their work," Lynch explains.



Nando's Hot Young Designer Talent Search 2020 finalists revealed

13 Oct 2020



And when the screens are not emblazoned with bold patterns, they showcase artworks created by artists who are part of the Spier Arts Creative Block project. "At the same time as we are practising social distancing by creating a practical solution, we're also supporting creativity and showcasing beauty," Lynch adds.

Holistic view of the restaurant space

Because there are many instances where restaurant patrons might find themselves not observing the necessary distancing, the table-blocker screens were soon joined by an entire collection of social distancing products, including bollards for

queues, contact-free hand sanitising units with foot pedals, and seat-stoppers that clearly indicate which restaurant seats can't be used.

From the moment customers walk in until they leave, this array of solutions takes a holistic look at the restaurant space, considering all aspects of the experience, such as conscious and careful ways of using condiment stations, through to queuing and paying at the cashier.



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The full catalogue of social distancing items was created together with South African designers such as Dokter and Misses, Pedersen and Lennard and The Urbanative. The new range is available to Nando's restaurants and to any other establishments that are interested in purchasing these socially-sensitive but attractive solutions to ensure the safety of their customers.

The social distancing range brings South African ingenuity, creativity and design thinking a bit closer to restaurant patrons around the world, as they keep the necessary distance from each other.

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