

Unique products bring back the past

A Port Elizabeth-based company is producing unique clothing, furniture and accessories representing a bygone era - and their products can be found in exotic shops and locations ranging from the Okavango Delta to the Antarctic.

By [Shaanaaz de Jager](#) 15 Mar 2010

Husband and wife Robert and Dael Melvill, of Melvill & Moon Safari Equippers and Suppliers, are setting international trends with their mainly hand-made items in styles reminiscent of the mid-1800s to early 1900

“Port Elizabeth is a fantastic manufacturing base for our company,” said Robert. “There is skilled labour here and we have 18 staff members.”

Former staff members have also benefited from spin-offs, among them Daniel van Vuuren, who worked as an apprentice making leather items for the firm. “We now outsource our leather work to Daniel,” said Robert.

The company is located in the old Gasworks building, off Port Elizabeth's Govan Mbeki Avenue. Mass production is out of the question for their distinctive products, which include items such as pith helmets designed in early-1900s style, and fold-down Roorkee chairs, once used by army officers and explorers on campaigns or safaris.

Robert and Dael are partners in the business with Robert's brother, Rick Melvill, and his wife Sue, who started the 10-year-old company. It is still very much a family-owned enterprise, and also has offices and shops in Johannesburg. The Melvills export to countries like the US, England, Germany, Holland, Spain, Italy, Australia and Canada.

Melvill & Moon has supplied luggage racks for the Oyster Box Hotel on the KwaZulu-Natal coast and the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town.

They have supplied specially designed chairs to a chain of department stores in Spain, the Anthropology group in the US and the world-renowned Abu Elephant Camp in the Okavango Delta.

Design guru Terence Conran's shop in the UK also buys specially designed furniture from them.

The new National Geographic stores in London's Regent Street and in Singapore buy their unusual products, and their seat covers grace the seats of several privately owned planes.

Travel wallets and luggage tags go to stores in Australia, and fold-away stretchers, tables, chairs and wash basins to White Desert - an English-owned private camp in the Antarctic.

The staff mostly hand-make the brand's iconic safari luggage, campaign furniture, classic safari accessories and safari seat covers.

“Not even 1% of our products are imported. We think Africa has a huge amount of skill and potential and it is absolutely heartbreaking to think that we import so much,” said Dael.

Source: The Herald

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