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## Zulu Mama

South - Africa

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### DESIGN WITH A CONSCIENCE

My first attempt to design with a conscience was the Zulu Mama Café chair. As it is with most of my designs, Zulu Mama is an expression of our new emerging South African identity.

This theme of contributing to a new South African design language has been central to my work as designer since my student years in the early 90's.

In fact, I was studying Industrial Design at Cape Tech, when across the road on the Parade, Nelson Mandela delivered his famous freedom speech after being released from prison. The embarrassing fact is, that being an ignorant young white South African, I hardly even knew who Mandela was at the time! Such are the sins of Apartheid.

Striving to understand and forge a new national identity, has helped me heal from the pain and shame of Apartheid.

We South Africans, have a real need for ICONS, to stand for what is possible and good in our new democracy.

I wanted to create a café chair that embodied the nurturing aspect of the Mother archetype. This archetype is somewhat missing in our western culture. Perhaps it is really the nurturing Universal Mother that we are looking for when we take time for ourselves to enjoy a tall creamy latte at our favourite Café.

I began collecting hand woven baskets from all over Southern Africa, which beautifully express the feminine gesture of gathering and holding. The rounded organic form of these indigenous baskets, would be perfect for shaping a comfortable seat.

I worked together with Ester in rural Limpopo for a week, to develop the weaving technique suitable for this chair. She was taught weaving by her mother when she was a young girl. This experience was one of the highlights of my career.

We, two South Africans, managed to transcend our vast racial, cultural, language, and social differences to create something beautiful together with our hands.

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The seats are now hand woven by 6 rural woman in Limpopo. Craft work raises dignity and provides much needed income for many South Africans. The cost of pursuing this "idealistic" scenario of supporting rural craft, is excessive road freight. Road freight is a major contributor to global warming. Trying to weigh up social benefits with environmental costs is a major challenge in Africa. In hindsight it would perhaps have been wiser to set up the weaving with township women in Khayalitsha....even though this would contribute to the continued urbanisation of rural people. This is the kind of struggles between right and wrong I was talking about at the beginning of my presentation! The answers are certainly not black or white!

I replaced the traditional weaving material, which is slow growing Illala palm, with plastic. The UV stable plastic is more durable and can be used outdoors without deteriorating, which is important for a café chair. Contemporizing and evolving traditional craft in this way ensures that hand work will always have a place in our hearts and homes.

I originally intended for the plastic to be made from recycled household waste, as this picture indicates. But when it came down to production, the plastic extruders refused to extrude this material, as they were afraid that the recycled pellets would contain dirt and bits of metal that would damage their extrusion machines.

Together we compromised, – and began recycling the plastic factories own inhouse plastic waste. Another challenge was that the only colour we could recycle with consistency was black. Fortunately black is proving to be the most popular colour.

The feminine, hand woven, traditional basket seat, is held by the masculine stainless steel frame. This beautifully expresses the integration of the 1st and 3rd world realities that exist side by side so uniquely here in SA.

The frames are manufactured in 304 stainless steel which is the "cleanest" steel available. Stainless steel is made up of 60% recycled material, is 100% recyclable.

Even though the stainless steel and plastic used in the Zulu Mama are both made from recycled material, these materials are still very high in embodied energy and are also originally mined from the earth's crust.

Never the less, Zulu Mama, has been designed more responsible than most chairs in the market. As the hospitality industry has become more sensitive to these soft issues, Zulu Mama has proven to be an attractive option over imports that don't consider Africa's cultural, social and environmental issues. Here the Zulu Mamas are being used at Little Kulala Game Lodge in Namibia.



# Fiela se Feather Light

South- Africa

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I am always looking for ways of using local resources in a contemporary way.

This strategy also helps me differentiate my products from imports. Differentiation is the only way I know for my company to survive globalisation.

Ostrich feathers are a by product of the lucrative ostrich hide export industry. I see it as my duty as a designer to add value to local materials BEFORE they are exported. In this small way, I am do something positive, about the 25% national unemployment figure!

I am awed at the beauty of organic geometry found in nature. I wanted to pay homage to the Creator by mimicking the organic pattern of flower petals in the layering of the 64 feathers that make up this light.

The end result is Fiela se Feather Light. Named after Dalene Matthee's heart warming story "Fiela se Kind" which is set in the same ostrich farming district of Oudshoorn, where the feathers for this light come from.