



South African Women Improve Lives By Selling Their Products in U.S.

Sell Hand-Made Items to Support Their Family

 By George Pennacchio

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, August 8, 2007 - The night before I left to go to South Africa to cover the opening of "The Lion King," I got an e-mail about the opening of a hair salon in Santa Monica.

Related Links

- [LINK: AfriCan Employment Project \(www.unitydesign.co.za\)](http://www.unitydesign.co.za)
- [LINK: Studio DNA Salon \(www.studiodnasalon.com\)](http://www.studiodnasalon.com)
- [MORE: George's South African Travelogue](#)

The timing was unbelievable because by the time I finished reading it, I knew I had another story to tell.

This is a story about two different worlds colliding in the most beautiful of ways.

In the poor Soweto Township of Johannesburg life is difficult, and to a stranger, heartbreaking.

But the heart of Soweto and other South African communities is beating in a new salon in Santa Monica.

In true show biz style, Studio DNA opened its doors with much fanfare in June.

And in doing so, its owners opened up their clientele to a whole new world of South African artistry.

Many of the items sold are hand-made by South African women once trapped by the shackles of apartheid.

Now they are free, and working hard to make their lives better.

"These women are being able to support their families when once upon a time, you know, they were relegated to being servants and relegated to very, you know, low-paying jobs," Danny Leclair said.

Leclair and Aubrey Loots own Studio DNA. Loots is from South Africa and has been here now for 14 years.

"I've always said it's great to have a business and to earn a living. But to have a business and actually make a difference in the world at the same time is, you know, you can't beat that," Loots said.

As I looked at the items they sell, I saw a television on in the background.

It was playing a documentary called "Beauty From our Hands," which shows how the lives of women in South Africa are changing thanks to their new employment opportunities.

The organizations Studio DNA are involved with all help to better the lives of South Africa's disenfranchised.

And that brings us back to Johannesburg to a place called The Unity Gallery.

It is not connected to Studio DNA, not yet anyway, but it's a great example of how lives are changing.

Unity not only mentors people, it helps sell their work all over the world.

Pop tops are brought from the dumps of Johannesburg by unemployed people and turned into art.

That's right, art using the tops of old soda pop cans.

They call it Afri-Can.

With the help of some glue and some beads, Edna Phiri carefully creates her boxes. And what she's gotten in return is a real gift.

"It really makes me like feel having something and now I've bought a house because of this project," Phiri said.

One of the friends of Unity says this project has a bright future that will help change many more lives.

"Our plan is to buy a building, which is going to be a Unity building. And that building will house artists, poets, singers, musicians and all sorts of artists," Phehello Mofokeng said.

Much of the work comes from widows working at home and raising their children at the same time, it's something to think about as Studio DNA continues to branch out to empower the impoverished.

"We hope to then introduce the line to other stores and teach people about socially conscious purchasing and the power their dollar has to make a change in the world," Leclair said.

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