

By Eugene Yiga

# Profiting from flower power

Fleur le Cordeur is about unique, beautiful and sometimes weird and wonderful floral creations.



Heike le Cordeur  
founder and  
creative  
extraordinaire

**f**leur le Cordeur is about blessing people on their special occasions, especially on their wedding day. The company loves everything about anything that grows from soil, and especially using these gifts from nature to bless people on whatever occasion may be important to them. It works with flowers – any colour, any texture and any scent – and is challenged by all the lovely and unique gifts from nature that it discovers.

The team is led by **founder and creative extraordinaire Heike le Cordeur**. She loves her job, her husband, her kids, and her home, and wears her heart on her sleeve. She is all about family first, and her mom Johanna and sister Silke play a massive part-time role in ensuring that ideas stay fresh and that delivery is above standard.

### What did you do before starting your own business?

I worked in the IT industry for about five years, ending up as a functional process analyst as part of a team responsible for implementing enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems.

### Where did the idea come from?

When I was pregnant with our first of three children, I wanted to make a change from IT to something more creative and flexible, thinking it would be a part-time endeavour, and I started helping a friend who is a wedding planner. Within less than a year, all based on word-of-mouth marketing, I had enough work to call it a full-time job.

### What motivated you to turn the idea into a business?

I realised that there are few people who can be both creative – coming up with new ideas all the time – as well

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as technical and logistically-driven. There was almost a gap in the market at the time for that. **I was pedantic about my cold chain not being broken, about delivering flowers as efficiently as possible, and in turn ended up delivering highly creative flowers of absolute outstanding quality to my clients.** I had found my passion and was determined to make a life doing it, and that was the motivation.

**When did you officially start operating?**

Five years ago, just after the birth of our daughter and when we moved to Paarl in 2011.

**How did you get funding to get started?**

The beauty of this business model is that I did not need funding. Each project's deposit would cover its costs. So each product funded itself. I started small, asked my mom to help me, and used my and my husband's cars to deliver the flowers and décor. As my projects got bigger, I was able to put money away and, within two years, had enough saved to invest into some serious infrastructure such as walk-in fridges and trucks, as well as full-time staff.

**How many people do you currently employ?**

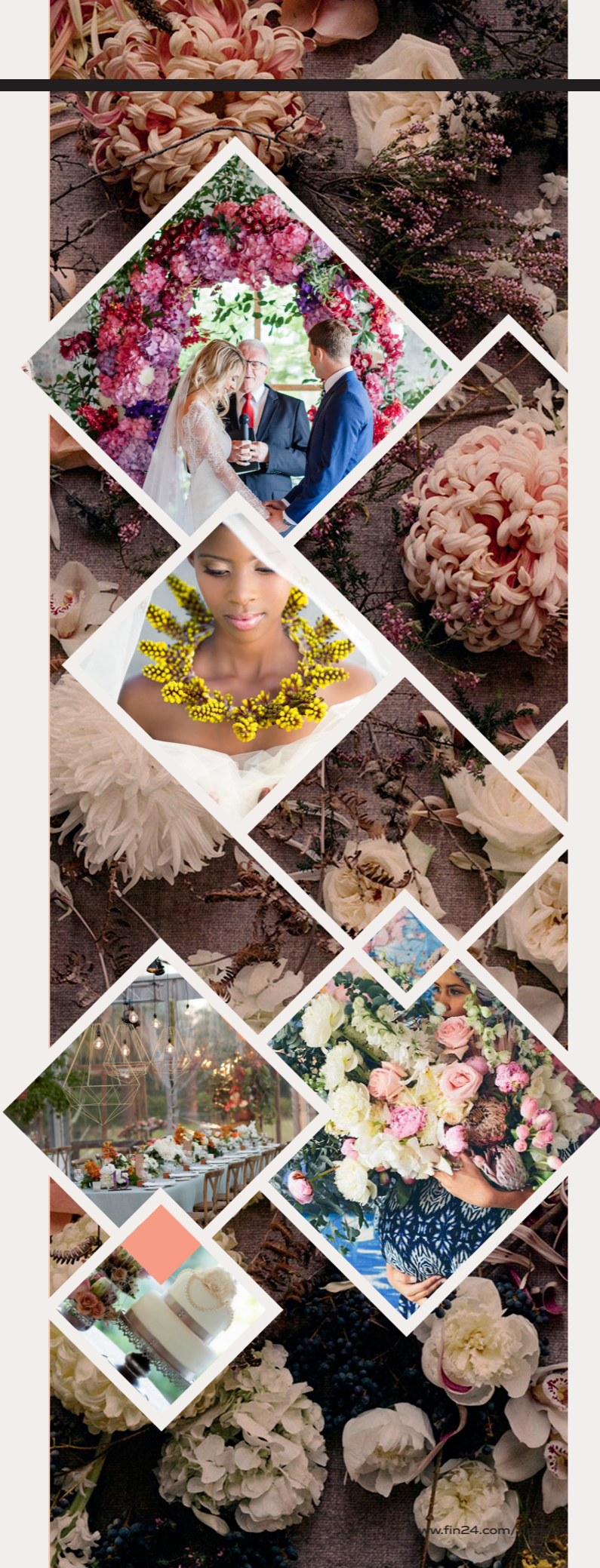
I employ eight people full-time, and have access to another 40 part-time consultants. On large projects we would be a team of 30-plus working on site.

**What's been unexpected?**

How quickly and effectively this business grew from literally working out of the kitchen to providing a super service to the most high-profiled and demanding clients. The unexpected part is how easy it has felt. It feels like last year that I was doing everything myself, from cleaning vases and flowers, packing crates, loading and cleaning and setting up, to running a business and a team that is so efficient in such an effortless manner.

**What have been the biggest difficulties you've had to overcome?**

The biggest difficulty is juggling a demanding industry and clientele with my role as a wife and mother. People are emotional when it comes to their wedding and special celebratory events, and I invest a lot of time and emotion back into each client. This is all-consuming and takes up a lot of my free time. I literally have 24-hour days; juggling kids, work and gym as and when possible with no set hours. I often find myself working odd night hours and playing when the sun is up – all in the name of being the best mom I can be too! I am definitely addicted to my work, and so excited about the possibilities we can still make reality by means of what we do, but I constantly have to face up to the challenges of sleepless nights and crazy days juggling three small kids and high-expectation clients.



There are also the challenges of importing flowers. We order large shipments from every continent, and until we physically see the flowers arrive in Cape Town at the airport, we have no idea whether they are in fact what we ordered, or what their condition is. One slip-up on the cold chain side of things and white flowers could turn brown – risky business, which is out of my control. **The biggest challenge is when such a shipment doesn't go according to plan and we have to make last minute changes and fall back on a backup plan to source substitutions locally. And with this we always have a quantity issue.**

**What lessons have you learnt so far?**

Give freely of your creativity! It does not help to hold on to your ideas and designs and not share them with the world. There was a time I wanted to stop showing people what we were doing over social media because other companies would immediately start copying our design. This got to me and I ended up wasting a lot of emotional energy worrying about it. Someone then said to me that if you set trends you should expect to be followed, which put this in a whole new perspective. Now I go out there, share our ideas and designs, and feel blessed and honoured when other companies follow.

**How tough is competition in your sector, and what differentiates you from others?**

I have been fortunate to have created a niche service and have a specific clientele. I am not aware of any competition as I do not have to do competitive quotes or pitch any work. My clients approach me because they have seen our work and they have already decided they want to work with us, regardless of what it will cost.

I have also managed to emphasise the importance of "design" in what we do so our clients expect us to come up with the ideas and, more often than not, are open to being pleasantly surprised on the day of their events, given that they understand the concept, but not the details involved. I think this is a major difference between how we work and the rest of floral designers in the industry.

**What's the best business advice you've ever received?**

My husband Andrew said that when you feel emotional about anything (and as an artist I can get quite emotional!), you should never send an email. Draft it, read it again 12 hours later, but still don't send it. Read it again 24 hours later and, if you still think you should send it, ask

your mother to review it. If she is happy, then send it.

**How do you stay motivated?**

I have an overactive brain. Even if I wanted to shut down, I couldn't! Everything I see is a potential for something amazing, and that motivates me. I could drive past a tree changing colour or flip through a fashion magazine; what I see and what my brain absorbs turns into motivation to take that and create something amazing out of floral, which has a shelf life and once that is reached can never be recreated exactly again. As the flowers die, the experience dies with it, and the audience has experienced a once-off event that can never be replicated. That is so inspirational!

I am also motivated by success. The more we deliver successful projects and mind-blowing work, the more I want to continue defying what are seen as "normal" ways of working with flowers. The motivation that comes with trying to stay ahead of the game is massive.

**What are your non-work habits that help you with your work-life balance?**

I started CrossFit two years ago which has been the best thing for me. Not only have I found a way of being away from everyone for an hour without any interruptions as a way to maintain a healthy brain given the stresses of our industry, but I have also become strong and fit, which has enabled me to work hectic hours, doing physical work such as climbing up and down ladders, loading and unloading trucks, and carrying heavy arrangements and elements around.

**How has your business grown over the years?**

We have branched out into home ware, using my floral designs to create beautiful high-quality linen items, as well as collaborated on some beautiful planner notebooks. I am constantly on the lookout to use my brand and my love for flowers and design in other ways that naturally complement the floral design heart of the business. I guess the branching out is a way of creating streams of revenue while I sleep.

**What's your three-year goal for your company?**

I have never thought too far ahead. Not even from the beginning of building the company did I ever imagine it would become a global brand! I take every day as it comes. Every year we are more than doubling turnover and the growth is just off the charts. My goal is to continue to grow, continue to push boundaries, and continue to defy all logic with what we can do with flowers. ■

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