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Meet the
maker

skinny laminx
Designer Heather Moore
opens her Cape Town studio

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Bold and beautiful

Step into the world of Skinny laMinx, a stunning blend of Scandi style and African soul and the design creation of Heather Moore

Interview by **LINDSEY HARRAD** Photography by **HEATHER MOORE & LAR LESLIE**

Fusing the simplicity of Scandinavian design with bolder influences from her native South Africa, the Skinny laMinx brand of homeware and fabrics reflects a cool, clean style that immediately proved popular when Heather Moore first launched an Etsy shop in 2007.

Heather admits her design ethos has been shaped enormously by one particular setting from her childhood.

'My mother's best friend is Swedish and when we were growing up in Johannesburg her home was very different to everyone else's. Also she didn't have children, so it was a very clear, ordered space and I really loved it.'

Equally fascinating to the fledgling artist was that most European of design institutions, Ikea.

'I used to draw all kinds of things, and at one point I got hold of an Ikea catalogue. It had such huge appeal to me as we don't have Ikea in South Africa, or anyone selling that kind of affordable yet clean design. Mass

market stores here tend to focus on big, heavy, dark, fussy furniture – it's very different. I drew a lot of pieces from the catalogue and put them on a tea towel and called it "I Wish We Had Ikea"!'

ATTRACTING ATTENTION

With a range of paper-cut and screen-printed designs that translate to everything from home accessories to wallpaper and fabric, Skinny laMinx products are now sold online through Etsy, wholesale through other retailers all over the world, and direct to the public from Heather's shop on Bree Street in the vibrant, creative hub of Cape Town.

Remarkably, given her overnight success, Heather had never planned for a career in design and is entirely self-taught. After studying drama and English literature at university and going on to take a teaching diploma, she worked in educational illustration for 10 years.

'I learnt a lot, including teaching myself to draw, but



Opposite page: The Cape Town shop and a selection of signature designs.
Left: Developing a new screen-print - Heather's skills are entirely self-taught.
Below: There's no shortage of themes for Skinny laMinx.



'When I got my first wholesale order, I had no idea how I was going to do it'

I'd always wanted to give screen printing a go, so in 2005 I took on a small studio,' she says. 'My husband had given me a kit for my birthday and I started out making paper stencils and printing designs onto fabric in my spare time.

'This coincided with getting broadband installed at home, and I began looking at blogs and online shops such as Etsy and thinking about ways to get people to notice what I was doing. I started my own blog in 2006 and then opened my Etsy shop, and amazingly people did notice my work – and I responded to their interest by creating more products.

'When I got my first wholesale order, I had no idea how I was going to do it, but I did! My business launched very much by the seat of its pants, just by taking opportunities as they came up and not being afraid to give things a go.'

THE FIRST COLLECTION


At the end of 2011, Heather decided to open a bricks-and-mortar shop in Cape Town. 'People do take you more seriously when you have a "real" shop – and perhaps you take yourself more seriously too,' she says.

'That's the thing about having a business that grows out of an enthusiasm: you do need to reach a point when you say to yourself, "This is no longer a hobby." Opening the shop was a good way for me to do this, good for myself and for my customers.'

Heather's Pinterest pages are scattered with gorgeous prints and creations by Scandi design leaders such as Marimekko, alongside mid-century style influences both original and contemporary – names such as Vera Neumann, Orla Kiely and Eley Kishimoto. Her own signature look combines the cool northern European aesthetic with South African motifs and colours.

'My very first designs came out of doing some work for a woman whose husband was an authority on cave art. Cave art is something I've seen all my life, it's part of the South African vernacular, but you mostly find it on horrible souvenirs made for tourists so I'd never really perceived it as beautiful. But looking at it with an expert opened my eyes to the delicacy of the drawings, so I set myself a challenge to take that beauty and merge it with the simple design that I love.

'My first fabric collection was called Sevilla Rock and it was really just repetitions of these cave paintings. The combination of cave art and a clean Scandinavian style enabled me, and hopefully others, to see the paintings for their intrinsic beauty and not simply as an artefact.'

These days, Heather enjoys drawing on influences and experiences from her travels, notably to Japan and India. A new range of upholstery fabrics and ready-made products called Diggi Dot, due to be launched in May this year, was prompted by the delicate block printing and handwork she saw on a recent teaching trip to 



Turn to page 75 to make Vanessa Lynch's exclusive mini quilt using the Yoyogi Park collection, designed by Skinny laMinx for Cloud9 Fabrics



Above: Heather in her Cape Town studio.
Top right: Change purse in Flowerfields fabric, a characteristically bold and crisply defined print.



fabric, even though I see the designs many times on paper, and then again on the screen before the fabric is finally printed.'

CREATIVE THINKING

As a designer, Heather says she is blessed with having too many ideas and rarely struggles to come up with something new. 'I just start doodling and before you know it something will happen: you find a loose thread and start pulling at it.'

Capably supported by her business partner Pearl Thompson, she tries to set aside a day a week to be purely creative.

'It's not always easy to keep it going but I have a practice that I call 'Making Friday', where I put all my effort into getting away from deadlines and organising product shoots and so on, and just sit and make something in my studio.'

'It's amazing how many of the designs that I come up with on those days end up becoming new lines. For the Cloud9 collection, one of the designs is called Feather Leaf. I'd sat down to try and work and I didn't know where to start. The Venetian blinds in my studio were down and there were dots of light falling on my desk, so I drew around them several times with an ink pen and made some little feathery patterns. It started as little more than a warm-up exercise. I had no expectation it would turn into something special.'

As a self-taught designer, Heather admits to having lacked confidence in her work in the past, but over time she has grown to trust her creativity and to let the popularity of the brand speak for itself.

'I've learned to value other people's belief that what I'm doing is worth something,' she says. 'You are your own worst critic, so you need to trust other people and their willingness to trust you.'

'There's no point feeling self-doubt – you just have to get on with it.'

Jaipur. But quilters will be particularly interested in her third collaboration with Cloud9 Fabrics. The stunning Yoyogi Park quilting collection is tipped to be hugely popular in the UK.

'Working with Cloud9 on a second fabric collection has been so easy. It was such a lovely collaboration with creative director Michelle Engel Bencsko – we have a happy chemistry in our process,' says Heather. 'My 2013 trip to Tokyo influenced the collection I designed for Skinny laMinx last year, and I thought it would be nice to tie the same story into the Cloud9 collection but with a different style more suited to the quilting market. I made some drawings of topiary and trees, and then added some birds and feathers, and came up with a design called Shrubbery.'

'All my fabric designs are hand drawn, hand printed or paper cut initially, but then the designs are developed further on the computer. And yes, I still find it very exciting to see my name on the selvedge of the finished

Below: Popular soft bucket storage in tribute Orla design.
Below right: A tempting array of fat quarter bundles.



You can find out more about Heather Moore and Skinny laMinx at www.skinnylaminx.com

To see the new Yoyogi Park collection for Cloud9 Fabrics go to www.cloud9fabrics.com
Search for stockists at www.hantex.co.uk/cloud9