

Chris Weylandt on the basics of retail



By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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In the afternoon on day two of the Johannesburg version of Business of Design, Chris Weylandt, founder and CEO of Weylandts, the contemporary furniture and décor chain store, explained his tactics to competing or rather leading in the retail game.

He spoke from the standpoint of coming in through the backdoor, sharing the behind the scenes and the sum of what they have to do to create the retail environment Weylandts gets so right.

First, he shared a bit about his story – his design and business influences, and then how these extend to the way he works.

Weylandt grew up in Namibia where he was surrounded by wide open spaces, representative of the large-scale Weylandts stores, and was exposed to great design at a young age.

“People often say to me, but there’s no colour in your store, and I say yes, but do you not realise I grew up in a desert?” His background is evident in these destination stores, but it’s the tactility of what’s happening there that it’s really all about. “For me, materials are king. I really love materials. I value them and I believe in their integrity.”



Chris Weylandt

Another influence, besides the external environment, was his upbringing in an architectural home, housing beautiful furniture: Scandinavian, Italian, South American designs... “Growing up in that environment you get to understand... it becomes part of your DNA... these kinds of design philosophies.”

Three men that influenced his business mindset are his father, Edgar Weylandt, who opened the first Weylandts store in 1964 in Windhoek; Terence Conran, founder of home furnishing chain Habitat; and Ingvar Kamprad, founder of IKEA, a Swedish retail company also specialising in furniture.

He respects and admires his father’s long-term vision, perseverance, conviction and incredible eye for good design.

Merchandising was key for Conran. “He didn’t like what the retail stores were doing from a merchandising perspective, so he created his own stores because he didn’t see his vision being executed in the market, so he did it himself.”

And then the genius and forward-thinking ‘Mr IKEA’. “What is so fascinating about this business besides being the most successful furniture retailer in the world, is that he managed to take IKEA to so many different markets. I haven’t found, yet, a furniture and homeware retailer that is global.”

The basics of retail

So if you want to be in the retail game, you've got to enjoy selling, you've got to be a trader by heart, because that's what retail is. You're selling product.

1. Clarity

Business: Vision; identity

Design: Authentically; ethos

2. Thinking long-term

Business: Strategy; investment

Design: Stay true to yourself; future trends

3. Have conviction

Business: Do it!; perseverance

Design: Follow your gut; make it yours

4. It's a team game

Business: Expertise; environment

Design: Collaboration; suppliers

5. Numbers never lie

Business: Rand/m2; overhead ratios

Design: Visibility; material selection

6. Dress to impress

Business: Brand consistency; merchandising

Design: Inspire; showcase

7. Customer journey

Business: 360°; brand advocates

Design: Environment; five senses

8. Learn

Business: Best practice; be humbler

Design: Evolve or die; travel and be conscious

"Retail. It's dynamic. It's exciting. But you've got to have the balls to do it. It's not an easy game, but it's enjoyable. I love it."



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ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

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