

Kate Schrire and *The Creamery* of the crop

 By Jessica Tennant

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Strawberry basil, white nectarine, jasmine blossom, hot cross bun, pistachio, and Catawba grape are not your average ice cream flavours and when 'garden mint' in a sugar cone tastes like exactly that, it must be true that The Creamery is the cream of the crop in the ice cream business.

An increasing consciousness for slow food and sustainable sourcing has resulted in greater appreciation for the use of seasonal, handpicked ingredients and natural, handmade ice cream is a wonderful way of celebrating these.

Here, Kate Schrire, founder and co-owner of [The Creamery Ice Cream Company](#), discusses the neighbourhood success story, which she will be sharing more of in Cape Town at [Business of Design](#) on 23-24 August 2016. "The embarrassing part for someone who is speaking at a design conference is that we knew almost nothing about branding and brand design, still are not great at it, but managed to build a brand with a great customer base, in spite of ourselves," says Schrire.

■ From market scoop stalls to three and a half dessert cafés in and around Cape Town, the business has grown substantially since it started in 2011. Comment on the journey.

My business partner Marianne and I started a small handmade ice cream business in 2011, primarily selling ice cream direct to the public. Five years and three and a half ice cream shops later, we have almost fifty employees and we are still making natural ice cream with seasonal ingredients, direct to the public. We have awesome customers who visit us regularly for our ice cream and our friendly, relaxed dessert cafés.

■ For you, it is not about success as much as it is about values.

I do not like the concept of success. It feels too much like a destination, when it is really an ever-evolving, always moving target. Your business could still fail even if it is successful right now, your next product could be a disappointment, the criteria by which others judge you might change. A big moment for me was realising that my goals will – and indeed, should – change, as I and my life change. Values are your philosophy you bring to everything you do. They are never 'done' or 'finished' and should not change much over the course of your life. By focusing on how you do things, you make sure that even if your goals or direction change, you are doing things in a way that you will be proud of when you look back at it. Values will also help you make difficult but ultimately correct decisions – if an opportunity is at odds with your values, you do not need to anguish over it – you just do not do it.

■ To what do you attribute The Creamery's success?



"Chocolate is the biggest seller of our classic flavours. No surprise really. If you're selling ice cream, you have to have a killer chocolate, and ours is special."
– Kate Schrire

Picture: Supplied

It is not a straightforward recipe! Some of it was luck – that the market was ready for and receptive to our product. A lot is about getting the right mix of people together in our team, which is one of the most important things you can do for any business. While it sounds a bit clichéd, I think creating a business to be about more than money creates a brand that feels palpably honest and appealing to the customer.

📌 **Comment on your growth strategy.**

We have not spent enough time looking and planning, a classic new business error! We are lucky that so many opportunities have come looking for us. We are in the process of putting a strategic plan in place, one that clearly states our goals, and directs us how to get there from where we are now. We need to be bigger to achieve our goals, so we are currently strengthening our team, systems and products in order to grow without compromising our product.

📌 **Do you only stock your retail products in-store?**

We are working on extending the range of items we sell in-store and working on some collaborative relationships down the line. Right now, we enjoy being the ones to sell our products directly to the customer and we want to keep on doing that.

📌 **What has been the response to your gift cards?**

Ice cream is a joyful product and the gift of ice cream strikes a good balance between being celebratory but spontaneous. Since it is hard to give ice cream itself, unless you are going directly to the recipients' house, gift cards are key in giving someone you care about an experience but at their convenience.

📌 **You source seasonal ingredients from small emerging growers and local family farms, and that are grown and produced in a way that is kind to the environment and to animals. Why is sustainability and slow food in particular important to you?**

The slow food movement really appeals to me because it is not about ethics in a vacuum – it recognises that enjoying food is something that draws people together. I am so lucky to live in a time and a city where I have access to food created by small producers who are immensely knowledgeable and passionate. In addition, in terms of sustainability – safeguarding our environment for future generations and us is fundamental common sense. If you do not care about the environment, you do not care about life.

📌 **Community is also important to you in more ways than one. You told The Legacy Project that having a local community of other small food business owners you can talk to is invaluable to accessing information and resources and getting practical advice and support. Why is networking essential for a growing business?**

Because it is damn hard doing this by yourself! It is lonely, too. People who can celebrate your triumphs but totally understand your failures and fears keep you going. Networking is key to accessing resources, whether it is a good plumber or better quality chocolate. Especially since I do not think resources and information for small businesses are easy to access in South Africa.

📌 **What is the most popular classic flavour?**

Chocolate is the biggest seller of our classic flavours. No surprise really. If you're selling ice cream, you have to have a killer chocolate, and ours is special.

📌 **What is your personal favourite?**

It depends on the weather and my mood and the occasion. I have a personal nostalgia for so many of the flavours. Toasted

almond was the first ice cream I ever made; jasmine blossom is incredibly finicky to make and unique to us. Some of the flavours I am most proud of, due to the skill required to make them, and how objectively delicious they are, include strawberry basil, white nectarine, jasmine blossom, hot cross bun, pistachio, and Catawba grape.

▄ How do you select the flavour of the month?

We select the flavour of the month based on what we think will be most exciting to our customers; something a little bit over the top, or surprising in ice cream format.

▄ What inspires the monthly/seasonal flavour combinations?

We select our seasonal flavours based on what amazing seasonal ingredients we can source, balanced for texture, production method and complexity, and which flavours go well together. We always make cream cheese ice cream when we make carrot cake ice cream, for example! Or sometimes we get a bit theme-happy. We had many Asian flavours in May (black sesame, toasted coconut, and jasmine green tea), and go very autumnal after Easter (ginger choc chip, rooibos chai, roast apple, and Limpopo tea). Our seasonal menu is about six to nine flavours, which change every month.

▄ What have you learnt about ice cream since starting the company?

I continue to learn about ice cream. It is a complex product and hard to make naturally and consistently. Given how varied our flavours are, it is important that we have a good feel for what a 'Creamery' flavour tastes like. Some are no-brainers (there will never be a bubblegum flavour), and sometimes it is more subtle. A Creamery flavour must feel fresh, not too heavy and taste predominantly, almost supernaturally, of the main ingredient. You should taste peach before any other flavour when eating a peach ice cream, for example - not sugar, not dairy, not custard. In addition, we want it to taste handmade, to reflect the fact that no two batches of strawberries taste the same, but that there is a difference between an okay strawberry and a superb strawberry, and someone cared enough to make sure you are eating the latter. That someone has tasted and adjusted the recipe to allow today's fruit to shine. I believe you can taste care and you can taste the impact of human skill.

▄ In the context of Women's Month, what does it mean to be a woman in business?

As someone who has been incredibly lucky to never feel professionally or personally penalised for my sex, I think my responsibility is to be aware of all kinds of prejudice and my own biases and not make decisions based on them. Moreover, to create a work environment where others are not penalised for gender or race, and where difference is acknowledged, celebrated and accepted.

▄ What advice would you give to aspiring female entrepreneurs this Women's Month?

Strong women – be them, hire them, mentor them.

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