

Chris Weylandt on the business of contemporary home decor design

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Chris Weylandt, founder and CEO of furniture and decor retailer [Weylandts](#), forms part of the impressive line-up at this year's [Business of Design](#) conference held in Cape Town last week and Johannesburg this week.



Chris Weylandt

Weylandts began as a modest furniture retail store opened by Chris's father Edgar Weylandt in Windhoek, Namibia in 1964. Chris took up the reigns of the business after studying at UCT and completing his articles to qualify as a CA, and has been credited with transforming the business into the luxury interior retail powerhouse it is today.

The Weylandts retail chain now comprises 11 stores – eight in South Africa, two in Namibia and one in Melbourne – and boasts above 20% year-on-year growth since 1999. Chris also owns Maison Wine Estate in Franschhoek, which is home to one of South Africa's top-voted restaurants, The Kitchen, and produces a range of award-winning wines.

Weylandts stocks an ever-expanding range of furniture and homeware from around the globe alongside the products designed and manufactured by Weylandts itself. Throughout the retailer's skillfully curated inventory is a visible focus on unique, contemporary, quality design which is showcased in a high-end retail space that makes many South African retail environments appear lacklustre in comparison.

We got in touch with Chris to hear his thoughts on the state of homeware design in SA, Weylandts' successful expansion and what he's learnt about being in 'the business of design'.

■ As a *Business of Design* speaker this year, comment on the importance of events like these that recognise the role design plays in various industries.

I think events like this help to do two things. Firstly, to bring business and design closer together which helps businesses grow and design to flourish. Secondly, to highlight the importance of human design, in an ever more automated world. Design, indeed any form of innovative creativity, is something no machine will ever be able to truly do, and thus something we must cherish and stimulate.



■ ***What will you be sharing during your talk and what is the key takeaway?***

My topic is 'The Basics of Retail'. I will be taking the delegates through eight basic lessons I have learnt and that have moulded the Weylandts business over the years. Primarily I will be presenting these through the back door perspective to give delegates a view of how business works, rather than the public view of how a business looks.

■ ***Comment on the current state of furniture/homeware design in South Africa and how it compares globally.***

We have a unique culture and environment in SA and I love seeing this influence design – from tribal patterns, ancestral production techniques and materials used. In that aesthetic regard, we are up there with any country in the world.



■ ***To what and whom do you attribute the massive success of Weylandts?***

It's down to my father's determination, my vision, my family's support, the hard work of everyone who has ever worked for Weylandts, our loyal customers and of course a slice of luck!

■ ***Tell us about your experience expanding the business from Namibia into South Africa and Australia. Any key lessons learnt?***

Namibia is where it all began; from there we expanded into South Africa, and four years ago we opened in Melbourne, Australia. Expanding into new territories is always exciting, but also a steep learning curve understanding the local buying habits, tastes, and regulations. The key is adapting to these quickly, and we are fortunate to be a nimble organisation that is

able to do that.



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■ ***You also own Maison Wine Estate in Franschhoek. What inspired the move into this area?***

I love good wine, local food and beautiful scenery!

■ ***If you could travel back in time and give yourself one piece of business advice, what would it be?***

See a transaction with a customer as the start of the relationship, not the end.

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ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

Managing editor and retail editor at Bizcommunity.com. Cape Town apologist. Dog mom. Get in touch: lauren@bizcommunity.com

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