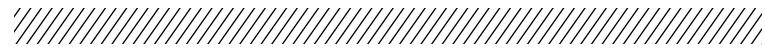


47. Sarah Santin



For me, sustainable
development is a
way of life!



At the age of 32, Sarah Santin has already lived several different lives. Although she started working at 18, she did not leave the world of study: for three years she took evening classes run by the Belgian Chamber of Accountants. And then, still in evening classes, she had earned a degree in business management at the University of Liège. After taking up various business management positions, she returned to the university as a research assistant in SME management. In 2008, she had set up her own business offering sustainable interior design. Throughout these years, between work and study, Sarah had not neglected what was for her a true passion: interior design. At 19, she bought a small house to renovate. “I told myself that I would do it all a little bit at a time, room by room. That was where the first stone fell into place.”

“At the shops they offered me pots full of toxic products. I said to myself that it wasn’t normal to give that stuff to a young woman of 20, who hadn’t had children yet.”

////////////////////

And another fell came when she had to renovate a staircase. “At the shops they offered me pots full of toxic products. I said to myself that it wasn’t normal to give that stuff to a young woman of 20, who hadn’t had children yet.” So Sarah turned to family wisdom: “My grandfather, who was a carpenter, explained that in the old days they used natural products and pigments like walnut stain. Although the world has changed in a very short time, there still are products on the market that allow things to be done in a healthy way.” Sarah Santin met specialists in health issues, suppliers of environmental products and researchers, to finally sift through the composition of the products on the market.

While she was renovating a second property with her partner, Sarah came into contact with many contractors in the course of her work at the ULg. Her meeting with Bénédicte Philippart de Foy and the Liège women’s



© Sarah Santin

network FAR was decisive. “I realised that I really wanted to develop an ecodesign project. I called her to talk about it and to see what could be done since I couldn’t finance it myself.” Three months later Sarah applied to the Walloon Region for a start-up grant, handed in her notice and spent 9 months in a business incubator. Since then, Sarah Santin has been offering interior architecture services to business and private customers, including the design of sustainable contemporary interiors, designing costumer furniture, colour analysis, lighting studies, ecodesign, site management from A to Z, etc.

“Organic food is certainly more expensive, but for decorating materials, that’s not necessarily the case: there are paints with the same quality which have the same or even a lower price!”

////////////////////////////////////

If success has come her way, it is because Sarah Santin advocates the concept of sustainable interior design, a concept whose dual impact she appreciates: “It is not just the occupants who benefit from a site that respects the human aspect, but the healthier the building is, the longer its usable life will be... And all that for an investment that doesn’t need to be any greater. Organic food is certainly more expensive, but for decorating materials, that’s not necessarily the case: there are paints with the same quality which have the same or even a lower price! And that goes for furniture as well.” As someone with a fine understanding of the business world, Sarah Santin offers her professional customers solutions which allow them to see rapid returns on investment. “For our private clients the return on investment is well-being and interior balance, but for businesses, it is also a matter of turnover. Recently, a client told me that she had an increase in turnover of more than 15% after I helped her! Our contribution has made a positive impact on users and customers, and on the bottom line as well!”

For Sarah Santin, technical considerations are fundamen-

tal, and the environment follows from that. “We can make savings by thinking carefully about space. For example, the space in the ‘Terre Mère’ snack bar (Liège) was so small and cluttered that customers hardly dared to come in. We rearranged the space, while respecting the requirement that there needed to be 18 seats and easy access for take away customers.” Sarah then used environmentally friendly materials, oils and paints. The furniture for the business was created with the most environmentally friendly OSB on the market. The result is modern and warm. By allying aesthetic qualities and functionality while maintaining a tight focus on the final aim of bringing the right customers into the business, Sarah achieved her aim, to persuade the widest possible clientele: “Before, it was only the dedicated fans of organic food who went into ‘Terre Mère’. Now the owner has confirmed that things have changed. It is a success because it needs to reach as many people as possible if you want to change the world. Interior design allows us to play a part in that, and that’s really exciting!”

“Advice for improving an interior to make it a place that feels better, doesn’t always costs an arm and a leg. Plenty of people can afford some of our services.”

////////////////////////////////////

The communicative Sarah is very transparent and clear when she sets out her business philosophy: “Design which is contemporary and sustainable, knowledge transfer, and socially responsible enterprising.” Besides the projects which keep her busy, she gives training in interior design and business practice, in the lifelong learning programme, at Design Innovation or at CreaPME. Again with an eye on sharing her knowledge, in 2010 she co-wrote a book on interior design for a professional readership, ‘Quand l’entreprise passe commande au designers d’intérieur’ (‘When a business places an order with an interior designer’), published by Edi.pro. In 2010 Sarah Santin was



awarded the Walloon price for entrepreneurship. An award that delighted her on a personal level but which she also appreciated for the doors that it opened to her profession: “People think that interior design is expensive and reserved for an elite. I have always wanted this service to be available to a wider audience. Advice for improving an interior to make it a place that feels better, doesn’t always costs an arm and a leg. Plenty of people can afford some of our services.” As a real woman of action, Sarah has also set up a partnership which allows her customers to buy at discounted prices from the shops that she works with. Always looking to the future, she is intending to move her offices to a larger space and to open a branch in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. she has also received a grant for innovation in the field of sustainable development from the Walloon Economic Development Agency. Her days and evenings are likely to be still more packed in the future, much to her satisfaction, since she is now working on a collection of furniture and on modular spaces for gardens. This with the prospect of producing a prototype in mid-2012. Another tale from a full life... and surely not the last!



Isabelle Masson-Loodts voor REcentre
interviewee /
Sarah Santin, interior designer

Sarah Santin
Chemin des Crêtes 9
B-4130 Esneux
Belgium

www.sarahsantin.be

Sector • interior design

Year of foundation • 2008

Number of employees •
1 full time and 2 part time

Turnover (2010) •
100.000 EUR