

# *Dynamic* DUOS

*A psychic reading suggesting that their combined energies would result in a successful creative company encouraged Sharon and Ryan Kensley to extend their partnership from marriage to business.*

*Ryan and Sharon Kensley*  
- Akashic Tiles

*T*oday Akashic Tiles in Knysna provides breathtakingly beautiful, handmade ceramic tiles to clients from Sandton to Miami and Dubai.

"We bought the business from emigrating friends in June 2018," said Ryan. "Neither of us knew anything about making tiles or the science of dyeing." A material dyeing facility formed part of the sale and the couple still runs The Dye House alongside their tile emporium. "We each had a six-week intensive, hands-on crash course - Sharon learned all about dyeing while I was shown how to make the tiles."

Now artist Sharon manages the administration and financial side of things and designs their ranges while Ryan heads up the production team. "We would be nothing without our family of employees," Sharon said. "We retained all the original staff members and, as we tripled production, employed another three."

Counted among Akashic's employees is the homeschooling teacher for the Kensley's children, Ariella (9) and Kingston (6). "We work where we live," Sharon explained. "While the house is removed from the showroom, studios and kilns, we love the flow of working and living in one space." The property is shaded by a lush garden and green trees, infusing it with a tranquil atmosphere. "This is a fantastic place to be creative in."

Working from home seems to suit the Kensleys. "We're both Leos," said Sharon. "So we have our occasional blow-ups, but then it's over and we don't drag our issues around. We have a great understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses when it comes to working together, and we make that work for us."

"We're also very focused on achieving the same goal," Ryan added. "It helps that we share the same vision of the future we're working towards, and sharing the same spiritual values and approach to life is an important factor in our success as a couple, as parents and as business owners."

The couple, who have been married for eight years, are no strangers to working together.

Sharon started Wake Up & Dream in 2013. The couple crafted exquisite, upcycled, vintage-style journals from old books. "We operated Wake Up & Dream together for five years," Sharon said. "Our main focus is very definitely on Akashic Tiles, but we do still supply a selection of boutique stores and the Hout Bay Market with our journals."

Akashic Tiles won the Best Newcomer Award at Decorex 2019 and has cemented a reputation for contemporary design and quality craftsmanship. Aside from designer homes across the country, they adorn the walls of some of South Africa's most stylish restaurants and hotels, including Saigon Suzy in Parkwood, Alice & Fifth in Sandton, and FYN Restaurant, Gorgeous George Hotel and La Parada in Cape Town.

"We truly enjoy what we do. We have a fantastic team working with us, and we are blessed to have our work- and home lives mesh so well."

[akashictiles.co.za](http://akashictiles.co.za)



*Living and working together isn't always easy  
but these Garden Route entrepreneurs are shining examples of how to get it right...*

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*Having just celebrated 30 years together, the pair have managed six business collaborations in the past 26 years.*

### *Dean Byram and Jon Lown*

- African Tusk Clothing

Jon Lown and Dean Byram met in Cape Town and started their first clothing company together in 1994. The couple has run African Tusk Clothing from their Ruigtevlei farm between Sedgfield and Knysna since 2003.

"My mother, who was living with us, passed away in 2002 after a long battle with cancer," Dean remembers. "We realised that life is short – it was a good time to make some changes. We sold our company, Abuzz Promotions and, as we'd always loved the greater Knysna area, we moved to Ruigtevlei."

Abuzz Promotions had dabbled in the game lodge clothing market. "After settling in the Garden Route, we found that there was still a demand for our products from some of our game lodge clientele and so African Tusk Clothing was born." Now, most of their products are exported to the rest of Africa and they've developed a chef's wear brand called eChef. "Our customers include guest houses, hotels and lodges, chef's colleges, restaurants, and even universities and mining companies."

The pair had run factory mentorship and empowerment programmes in Cape Town, where they also provided suitable candidates with financial support to open their own factories. They made use of this network to start manufacturing for their small client base and employed their first Garden Route staff member to assist with sales and administration. "The business has grown steadily in the last 17

years," Jon explained. "The large office complex on the farm now employs 12 locals. We process marketing, sales, administration and production schedules from here and manufacturing and distribution happens in Cape Town. Depending on seasonal demand, we provide work for between 100 and 200 factory workers in the city. Our growth has been affected by COVID-19, but we expect to regain our ground in the next 12 months."

Playing to their strengths is key. "For us, maintaining an excellent distribution of labour is a big part of working together as a couple," Dean said. "Jon is responsible for administration, human resources and accounts, while I manage sales, production and marketing. He is a lateral thinker and comes up with great ideas, while I'll make sure that they're implemented."

"We both have very strong personalities," he laughed. "Of course we have disagreements at work and home, but we've learned how to step back and compartmentalise issues where necessary. We know that life is short, so neither of us carry grudges about disagreements anymore. The most conflict we have these days is in the mornings."

"That's when I have my brightest ideas," Jon interrupted. "I'll talk to Dean about them and he'll ask me to write them down, or keep them for the office."

The office complex is distanced from the house, but the farm is filled with a warm family atmosphere. "We love living and working here," he said. "We get to make and enjoy a home-cooked lunch every day and listen to our son laughing and playing outside. Who wouldn't want that?" They share the complex with their seven-year-old son Luke, Jon's 83-year-old mother, and Luke's mother and her partner.

[africantusk.co.za](http://africantusk.co.za)

*As seasoned divers Ken and Leanne Walmsley are always excited to introduce people to an exhilarating sport which allows them to stay fit and have a lot of fun.*

### *Ken and Leanne Walmsley*

- Electrodiv

Absolutely SCUBA and more....

Mossel Bay's Ken Walmsley, the owner of Electrodiv and his wife, Leanne, manager of the dive centre, are a lively husband and wife team making waves in a town situated at one of the best diving locations on the Garden Route.

After nearly eight years of marriage, Ken says: "We're working very well together!"

A healthy sense of humour is key to their happy relationship, as is their mutual commitment to running a successful venture. Electrodiv, one of the longest-running diving operations in South Africa has been in business for over 35 years and has a perfect safety record. Diving reefs close by are home to dynamic displays of soft and hard corals, vibrant with colour and marine life.

Leanne and Ken ensure that they continuously keep up with international standards. Committed to driving education for safe, responsible and environmentally-conscious diving, their business is constantly evolving, as they make use of the latest diving equipment and technology available.

"It's estimated that only 2% of the world's population dive, this coupled with challenging economic times has prompted us to diversify our interests to appeal to a broader market," says Ken. As well as a wide range of diving courses Electrodiv offers courses in snorkelling, spearfishing and mermaiding (yes, mermaiding!). Leanne, an attorney by profession but now managing the dive centre has an avant-garde way of thinking. In line with their motto, 'SCUBA's not only for guys!', she is excited about launching mermaiding courses and has imported a range of mermaiding monofins, skins and flukes from an exclusive US designer.

Artistic Mermaidry appeared on the scene in 2004, pioneered by the likes of Ocean activist - Hannah Mermaid, a recognized underwater mermaid and performing artist who is hired out for functions and special events.

"NAUI and SSI have both developed mermaid courses that we can offer and I like to incorporate other aspects such as suppleness, fitness, strength and grace to complement the

training and make these courses even more enjoyable," says Leanne.

As an electrical engineer Ken – the level-headed partner – had some trepidation when he heard about Leanne's idea but he admits after seeing people's response he's hooked! According to folklore these half-human and half-fish creatures live underwater. Without water, there's no life for 'Mers'. This idea appeals to Ken who has a passion for underwater hockey, which he has coached for 40 years.

Diving is a legacy in the Walmsley family as both of Ken's daughters qualified as diving instructors when they were 18. Both still dive but have chosen careers on dry land.

Ken and Leanne eat, sleep and walk SCUBA day and night and seem to be finding the right balance between living life and making a living.

"Ken doesn't just survive, he thrives, through good and bad times, always staying afloat. He is always focused, an anchor in our relationship, captain of our ship, through smooth sailing and rough seas..." says Leanne who describes herself as more whimsical and spontaneous. There is no doubt that their relationship is based on the fact that they intrinsically trust each other.

[electrodiv.co.za](http://electrodiv.co.za)

