

SUNSHINE COAST

# profile

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WITH A REPUTATION FOR INTEGRITY AND PRODUCING INTERIOR DESIGN SOLUTIONS THAT HAVE QUALITY AND SOUL, EILEEN MIDDLETON TALKS TO AMY CLARKE ABOUT SETTING UP SHOP IN A REGIONAL CENTRE AND HOW IT HAS HELPED HER TO PROVIDE UNIQUE AND GENUINE DESIGNS FOR HER CLIENTS.

**E**ileen Middleton's success, which she claims is due to her tenacity and persistence, is an inspiration to anyone trying to run a business on the Sunshine Coast.

However, while recently completing nine high-end, environmentally-conscious, waterfront homes at Ocean Reach on Kawana Island for leading developer, RGD, Eileen claims the early days in business were tough.

"The lifestyle of the Sunshine Coast has attracted many city, sea-changers which over time has brought a skilled workforce and high income earners. It was difficult at first. Migration to the Sunshine Coast has increased," she says.

"My background was in hospital and retail design in Brisbane. These sorts of opportunities were few and far between. There were also few architectural practises, so initially I started doing kitchen and bathroom designs with cabinet makers. This led to high-end residential and one thing led to another."

Eileen's big break came in her second year on the Coast when Con Zahos, a well-respected and successful architect from Brisbane, asked her to work on an international client's house in the Hinterland from Noosa.

"This was a turning point for me and provided me the opportunity to work on a high-profile home which won many awards. This opened doors for me and gave me credibility. Since then I have had the privilege of working on many beautiful projects.

"My clients say they like my work because our team knows its stuff and we do what we say we are going to do," says Eileen. "We pride ourselves on going the extra mile to make the process as stress-free as possible for them.

I think it is our professionalism and confidence in our selections that people find so invaluable."

She adds, "It just feels right working here. I find I have the head-space and quiet to be creative that was somehow lacking for me in the hustle and bustle of a big city."

Eileen has won 16 prestigious HIA awards for kitchen and bathroom design, acknowledging her work at a local, state and national level. EMI Interior Design was established in 1999 and creates solutions for living and working spaces for residential and commercial clients, large or small. Her background and experience has attracted a client list that includes architects, developers, designer home builders and individuals.

"My company works closely with architects and builders – within the constraints and guidelines of the building services authority in a very strict way. We don't go outside our scope. We work with all professionals and their different expertise. Our ultimate goal is to provide a cohesive and impressive exterior and interior finish," says Eileen.

Despite a natural aptitude for creative pursuits at school, Eileen took her father's advice and enrolled in the more 'sensible' option of a business degree upon leaving school. It was later in her career that Eileen decided to follow her dreams. In 1997, Eileen graduated from the Queensland University of Technology with a bachelor of built environment - interior design.

Her interest in design began when she and her business partner ran a residential building company in Brisbane. For many years they provided a range of building services to some of Brisbane's leading architectural firms.

Not content to rest on her laurels, Eileen is constantly updating her skills and reinventing her business to keep up with the changing needs of clients and the industry. Whether it is CAD, Photoshop, 3-d programs or business skills, she likes to stay on top of her professional development.

"Interior designers need to have so much technical knowledge at their fingertips – fabrics, finishes, timbers, tiles, carpets, paints etc. We have to know all the different codes, have a good understanding of construction and be able to work with builders. You can't be a pushover and need to be confident, assertive and polite – as well as manage people and finances. It's not a small task!

"I am competing with other professionals who have these skills. I need to keep up-to-date if I wish to remain at the cutting-edge," says Eileen.

In keeping with this philosophy, EMI online has just been launched. "By tapping into our online service anyone can access products that you wouldn't get unless you went through an interior designer," she says.

Eileen also teaches interior design at the Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE, where she has taught for the past six years.

So what does the future hold for such a dynamic woman? "In the near future I see myself opening a professional office on the Sunshine Coast, and as my business expands, potentially looking at other regional centres. Having regional offices is a sign of the times. It's part of the work-life balance thing."

To contact EMI Design go to [www.eileenmiddleton.com.au](http://www.eileenmiddleton.com.au)