

Juggling it all

by Vida de Voss • photographs Lisle Bougard



SOME PEOPLE APPEAR TO HAVE IT ALL. TALENT, SUCCESS, TWO JOBS IN DIFFICULT ECONOMIC TIMES, AMONGST OTHER ENVIABLES.

Lisle Bougard seems to be one of those lucky people. But speaking to her, you learn that what may seem to have fallen into her lap actually took commitment and hard work.

There is an aura of ease about Lisle Bougard. She doesn't seem to have a bad hair day – even if she has a bad hair day. Behind her laughter you sense more easy laughs and someone who is energised by adventure. Lisle's no-sweat attitude seems to be her normal. It is this approach that saw the organic development of her as graphic designer and photographer.

It is also this approach that kept Lisle from feeling lonely as an only child. Cousins and friends were like sisters to fight

with, go on holiday with, share secrets with and feel connected to. After finishing school Lisle matter-of-factly advised her mother to get a divorce – not because her father was a bad guy – but, in her estimation, because both of her parents would simply be better off apart. Many years later she would apply similar reasoning to her own marriage. Her mother filed for divorce and all of a sudden there was no husband and no daughter as Lisle was away in Cape Town, studying. Her mother became depressed. Lisle completed her year and came home to be with her mom.

Again Lisle took things in her stride. She was without a job for a few months and then landed a position at a small graphic design company. Three months later she was without a job when they closed down. What a bummer. No. What Lisle learned at this firm – where they worked on computers and with design software – convinced her there was no need to return to campus where they still designed by hand. This was the late 1990s.



Lisle wanted to do things hands-on. She got more hands-on than she had bargained for when she started at Printech. “They gave me a manual, a Mac and a pile of work this high”, she smilingly says, shaking her head at the memory. Although someone was assigned to guide her, he was under pressure himself and could only give her pointers from time to time. Swimming in the deep end is the fastest way to learn, Lisle experienced first-hand. Her next two jobs were also in the printing industry, limiting her to desktop publishing. A move to the marketing department meant she could spread her wings and bring more of her creativity to the table.

While growing as a graphic designer, Lisle got married and had two children. And thus was born a third baby, Lisle the photographer. She always had a nice camera but never pursued photography as a career. When her daughter was three months old, they had a photo shoot with Simone. After the shoot Lisle told husband, “I can also do this.” Six months later she had a great camera and asked Simone to shadow her.

In time Lisle would put her hand to different kinds of photography until the birth of her son four years later when she found herself drawn to newborn photography. The question that wouldn't leave her was, “How do they do these sleeping babies?” While dreaming to attend a workshop by renowned newborn photographer, Kelly Brown, Lisle joined the University of YouTube. Her new food became websites, YouTube, and

blogs that dealt with newborn photography. At the time, nobody was doing it in Windhoek. Her son would be born in 7 weeks and Lisle seized the opportunity to make him her guinea pig. As she admits, “I was shooting in the dark.”

In cowboy style Lisle started in her own foyer where she would pin cloth on the wall with sellotape. All the furniture would be moved into the garage early Saturday. Then she upgraded to the braai area. During all this time she used to wonder what the clients thought. But hey, she wanted to take photos and wasn't going to let a lack of a studio keep her from creating memorable images.

The blogs could help with how to position the baby, but not with how to make it lie still. The websites gave tips on easing the nervous first-time parents, but not on how to walk away clean from a newborn shoot. Lisle throws her head back, laughing at the typical newborn shoot. Except for a nappy to protect the skin when positioning the baby in a prop, babies are generally naked for this type of shoot. This means somebody usually gets peed on. Throw-up is also common. Thankfully Lisle has her own children and knows these things are natural and to be expected. Despite her easy attitude new parents get very apologetic when these things happen or the baby gets cranky. Lisle's calmness is both in the interest of the parents and child but also in her interest of getting the perfect shot.

She wants the cloth perfectly smooth, she wants the face perfectly angelic. While she uses a good camera and pro lenses, she prefers natural light and only uses reflectors when necessary. In keeping with her relaxed approach, her children partake in the shoot. Her daughter is her assistant and her son entertains the siblings when Lisle focuses on the baby. Her son would ask, “Mommy, is there a boy or girl coming with? Can I make friends with them? What age are they?” and at the end of the shoot, he asks, “When am I going to see them again?”

As she is a mother before she is a photographer, Lisle schedules shoots late morning to first have time with her children. She furthermore does the editing and correspondence after the children go to bed or when they have homework to do. This means she often works from 8pm to 12am or as late as 4am. It seems there is seldom time she doesn't work.

Not only does she work hard at her craft, she is also very critical of her work. Lisle believes there is always more to learn and better work to produce. While she also does location shooting – the occasional wedding or event – her niche is newborn photography. And although she has been shooting this style for six and a half years, she has become comfortable to showcase her work in the last two years only.

Some would insist she is pricy and many clients have found their patience tested to the utmost. But at the end of the day they have stunning photos that forever capture the image of their newborn baby. Lisle can quit this hobby, reasoning she does not have enough time to provide her clients with timely service. Or she can employ an assistant. But then, she asserts, it won't be photography by Lisle. She can also argue there is not enough time to get to it all. Or. She can admit that she will drop the ball from time to time but that she won't allow failure in one area to keep her from giving expression to this passion brought to life with the birth of her children. ♀