



MY WORLD

DEBBIE CAVIT, OWNER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR
AT CAVIT&CO, WHICH THIS YEAR CELEBRATES 25 YEARS
IN HOME FURNISHINGS AND INTERIOR DESIGN.

Debbie Cavit spoke to *World's* Patrick Smith.

“Design is very much my world,” says Debbie Cavit. We’re sitting on very comfy sofas in Cavit&Co’s Christchurch showroom surrounded by elegant furniture and other beautiful things. She’s just returned from a whirlwind trip to the United States and will soon be off to Arrowtown, where she has another store and a 140-year-old schist cottage that is her second home.

“I’m usually in America twice a year,” she says, “and on this particular trip I went to New York for a couple of days and then to High Point Market in North Carolina, which is the world’s largest furnishings fair. I was there for seven days and then through LA to go to the design centres and see some of the retailers on the way back home.”

“I always try and spend a couple of days in New York on the way through, because it’s all about what the current trends are and what all the other top design companies are doing.”

The trips are taxing, she says, and she always arrives home exhausted. “You work for 12 days solid – and very long days – but it’s fabulous, very exciting. We’re very privileged to deal with a lot of the companies that are the leaders in their field.”

Her “charming, cosy, simple and homely” Arrowtown cottage, then, will be a peaceful retreat after the rigours of her travels.

Cavit has been sourcing and selling high-end furniture and accessories for 25 years and today she’s been looking over the draft of a book she’s written to celebrate the achievement. It tells the story of Cavit&Co from its inception to the present day and shares her views on many aspects of interior design.

She offers us a peek inside.

“I have always loved beautiful things,” she writes. “A piece of furniture, a fabulous light fitting, beautifully hand-blown glass, a well-stitched and -designed item of fashion clothing, a handsome car: if it is

well made, with the lasting touch of fine craftsmanship and a keen eye for design, proportion and quality, then I’m hooked.”

Her world of design is fired by “a very strong passion” – one that has consumed her life since the days when, as a mother of two young girls, she started “a small procurement enterprise” from the spare bedroom



Debbie Cavit leads a busy life travelling overseas and between her three New Zealand stores. She loves the simplicity of her Arrowtown cottage.

of her house while studying interior design by correspondence. Her first success came with office furniture from Scandinavia and the chance to fit out a pharmaceutical firm's new offices in Auckland.

Other interior design projects followed in New Zealand and overseas – hotels and apartments in Queenstown, Fiji and Vanuatu, offices in Auckland, New Zealand High Commissions in India and Kiribati and, a major undertaking, the athletes' village for the 1990 Commonwealth Games.

But Cavit was looking for a change of direction away from a focus on commercial interiors towards high-end retail "to enable us to showcase some of the fabulous ranges of furniture we had seen in Europe on our business trips". She had no doubt other New Zealanders would share her enthusiasm for the beautiful pieces she'd seen – and want to have them in their own homes.

In 1991 Cavit&Co was born and a showroom found in the former Foundation for the Blind building in Parnell, Auckland, where it remains today, though much enlarged to cope with the ever-expanding ranges of furniture and accessories.

The showroom where we now sit to chat is filled with furniture and furnishings from some of the world's most distinguished brands; the Cavit&Co catalogue reveals names such as Ralph Lauren Home, Baker, Henredon, Matsuoka, Baxter, Bolier, Verellen, McGuire, Milling Road, Frette and Lalique, along with designers at the top of their game – Barbara Barry, Bill Sofield, Jacques Garcia, Laura Kirar and Kara Mann and others.

Cavit talks enthusiastically about new ranges they're launching this year to celebrate that quarter-century in business.

"We've got Kelly Wearstler that we're launching in late June/early July this year. "And we've just picked up a new Mexican range of furniture called Alfonso Marina, which is going to be fabulous. It's really, really interesting, so I sincerely hope the market will like it."

Cavit spends most of her time in Auckland but flies to Christchurch for a couple of days every three weeks and then on to Arrowtown for three or four days.

Her Auckland home is in Parnell, about 2½ kilometres from the Cavit&Co showroom.

"It's just the sort of commuting distance I like, but it can still take me 15 minutes to get to work," she says. "In Arrowtown I'm 4km and four minutes away from my offices – a perfect commuting time."

Her Arrowtown cottage, The Croft, reveals the kind of relaxed elegance and warmth you'd expect of someone whose company motto is "Timeless Interiors" and is filled with an eclectic mix of fine furniture from – naturally – Cavit&Co.

"Although we sell beautiful products at quite a sophisticated

level, we still really want to make sure that somebody, when they walk into a home, feels comfortable. I'd hate somebody to walk into my house and say, 'I can't sit down there', 'I can't touch this' – that hasn't made a home."

From the way she talks about her country cottage it's tempting to suggest her heart might belong there.

"It's interesting, [designer] Barbara Barry and I have become good friends and like me she has worked really, really hard for the last 30 years. And she has been looking around the world to find a house on a lake to have a simple life. And that's exactly what I've done... I don't know why we didn't just take the shortcut, but yes, it's fantastic. No fuss, it's just incredibly simple to live there."

Last year, *House and Garden* asked Cavit to open the cottage to raise funds for Breast Cancer awareness. "I was surprised so many people came to see it," she says. "And I was gratified by the lovely comments from people for such a very small house, in comparison to the beautiful new larger homes they had visited. They often commented that mine felt like a real home – and that's always our end goal."

Away from work, Cavit plays a bit of golf for relaxation and Arrowtown has a couple of excellent courses nearby. Does she play there?

"Yes, I try to. People who play golf with me would wonder. In fact, I've got a piano at the house down there and a friend came and said, 'Oh you play the piano!' I said, 'I play the piano like I play golf.' She said, 'So it's really just ornamental!'" She hoots with laughter.

After 25 years building a successful business, she may be forgiven for having a decent holiday and when we speak she's planning to take off in a couple of weeks' time.

"I'm going to South Africa – to play golf," she says with another hoot. "So yes, a lot of buggy riding, it'll be fantastic. But it's a good opportunity to get away, it'll be lovely."

And lovely not to take the business with her, as she's done in the past, spending down time answering emails on her laptop. "I didn't even notice I was doing it, it's become such a part of my psyche," she says. "So no, when I go away in two weeks I'm leaving my computer behind. I have to take a deep breath!"

And hopefully the accommodation will be up to scratch: she's been known to completely rearrange the furniture in hotel bedrooms "to create a better-balanced interior".

"I like balance and proportion, it's a huge part of what we like to do for our customers. And it's often subliminal; a well-balanced room is calming – there's nothing that's jarring... And I think life's so jolly hustle-and-bustle and difficult for so many people, if you can make anything easy, then you do it." ■

“I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED BEAUTIFUL THINGS”