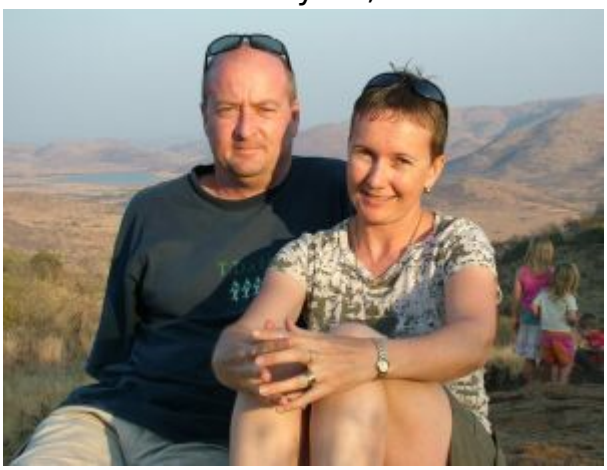
Gavin Olivier

Posted on February 13, 2025



Gavin and Miranda Olivier

Enter Gavin Olivier and you'll immediately set him apart even if you've never met. He'll be the guy dressed casually yet with flair, and if you are meeting to do an installation over a weekend, you can trust Gavin to bring along the croissants and most certainly hot, strong coffee. In fact, he may just call the meeting at Vida-E.

In 2004, after 13 years at Electrosonic, Gavin took the plunge and established Digital Fabric, working on a consultancy basis. "It has been fantastic," says Gavin. "I get up every morning and say a prayer of thanks. This has been the single most enjoyable years of my career. I enjoy the freedom of doing what I do and it's very rewarding."

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The Mining Heritage Tour

In a short few years, he has played an influential role in the creation of many of the countries top Visitor Attractions and Museums. “I have worked on projects from remote locations as far north as Limpopo all the way down to Cape Town, with the subject matter being as diverse as the geographical separation.” These projects have included Africa’s first ever 4D Theatre, De Beers World of Diamonds in Kimberley, Origins Centre at Wits University, The Apartheid Museum, and SAB’s World of Beer to name but a few.

While initially consulting on audio visual hardware, Digital Fabric have broadened their horizons and now play an increasing role in the conceptualization and planning of projects. The technical scope is also increasing and more often than not includes lighting and interactives. “It’s a logical progression really” says Gavin. “In my line of work the technical process is integral to the core concept so inevitably I am involved from early on. I’ve also been loving the interactive development, there are some crazy ideas finding their way to reality and each one is entirely different from the last. It’s nice to be doing stuff that is unusual or unique, that’s what Digital Fabric is all about”.

This niche market sector has proved to be very rewarding. Here it’s not about putting up loudspeakers in a corporate environment where nobody notices them, or hanging up a flat monitor in a boardroom. Attention to detail is paramount with the main focus being on how the audience will perceive the end message, be it to gather information at a museum or to experience a fantasy thrill in an entertainment venue. Where loudspeakers are mounted, how a monitor is selectively placed in an exhibit environment to create visual appeal and the choice of

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equipment down to the last detail, makes the projects all the more purposeful and rewarding.

More recently, Digital Fabric has been appointed to projects like the Liliesleaf Heritage Project in Rivonia, Freedom Park's new museum wing Hapo, the Nelson Mandela House Project in Soweto and a very exciting mining museum project close to Sun City.

How it all began



Sound Engineer at work

Stepping back in history, Gavin attended Sir Pierre van Ryneveld in Kempton Park and then began an apprenticeship in electronics. "I was always keen on audio and especially wanted to be a sound engineer," he says. "I was involved with doing sound anywhere I could." The apprenticeship with STC (Standard Telephone and Cable) served a good purpose providing a solid background in electronics, but the monotony made it impossible to stay. After a stint in the army and two years working on computer mainframes, an opportunity arose at a small audio PA rental company, Evergreen Productions, for half the salary. "It was a way out of the rut at that time and a way into the industry. We did a lot of local stuff, jazz items, with a mostly dodgy audience. It was in the bad days when if Brenda Fassie didn't pitch up to a gig the audience would burn down the rig," he smiles. "It was gritty, low budget stuff and I loved it." Evergreen Productions also made flight cases for the bigger rental companies of the day, like Robbie Bailey who owned Sound Scapes. "Lighting wasn't a big thing in those days. The idea of corporate events as we know them now didn't even exist."

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A big rig for Gavin in the 80s

Thereafter, taking a sabbatical from the sound industry, Gavin spent a year of his life building beach buggies with a friend. “We were building really top quality buggies, built from scratch on old beetle chassis’.”

In 1993, at the same time Gavin was about to get married, an opportunity knocked in the appearance of an advert. “The position was for a small, new company in the form of Electrosonic, and the rest is history,” says Gavin. Most of the industry has come to know and respect Gavin from Electrosonic SA days, where he played a prominent role in building the business and expanding the Crestron and Kramer product ranges and was involved in significant projects and installations.

“Electrosonic was a year old then and there were only four people, Lourie Coetzee, Bruce Genricks, Gizelle Coetzee and Grant du Preez. I was the fifth member of the team and we had exceptionally good times. In those early days Martin Professional made disco stuff, dodgy mirror lights. CRT Projectors were the only projectors arriving long before LCDs, and it was the day of the legendary Celco Gold lighting console, Ofer Lapid still has one embedded in his boardroom table. Electrosonic grew from a small company to a premier company in the South African market. We had big milestones like ICC Durban, which was 13 months of solid work.

“The beauty of working then was that we never did the same thing twice. We would do a video wall one day, sound the next. We were in a top bank boardroom one day, and then taking a projector down with a scaffold at a nightclub the next because they hadn’t paid us,” he laughs. “We really paid our dues like driving to Durban to do an installation, and coming home the next morning at 3am. These days you fly and stay over. In a way things were simpler in those days but

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you did seem to work harder for your money.”



Gavin with his boys Peter (front) and David

Today, with Digital Fabric fulfilling Gavin’s passion for design and love for people, any spare time is reserved for his wife Miranda and their two sons David and Peter. The young boys jump at the opportunity for adventure, and whether it’s camping in Sabie, visiting the Kruger Park, or just enjoying shopping with their dad, it’s clear to see that theirs is a close knit family. On one particular occasion, Gavin walked through an upmarket decor outlet with his two sons. On the wall hung an oil painting of a semi-nude woman, her derriere only partly covered by a swag of cloth. Not one to miss anything, Gavin’s youngest son Peter shouted out “Look at that plumbers crack”, much to the amusement of the surrounding Saturday morning shoppers.

Miranda recently asked Gavin what five dreams he would still like to achieve in his lifetime. Content as he is, he came up with a few.

> “I would like to live by the sea in a simple house that overlooks the ocean. I also intend to design a living museum in South Africa, something meaningful, from scratch.” Oh, and a Porsche Cayenne wouldn’t exactly hurt either.”

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