



"MISSISSIPPI ENTREPRENEURS"

Nuno Gonçalves Ferreira and Erin Hayne are co-founders of NunoErin, a Jackson-based art and design enterprise.

An artistic vision

Couple creates art enterprise

Special to The Clarion-Ledger

The genesis of a Jackson-based art and design enterprise was born during a three-day workshop in Portugal.

There, in 2005, serendipity brought NunoErin's entrepreneurs together.

Erin Hayne, who grew up in Jackson, was completing her master of fine arts in fibers from Savannah College of Art and Design. She traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, to participate in a workshop taught by the man who would become her partner, Nuno Gonçalves Ferreira.

Ferreira, a Lisbon native, graduated with a degree in sculpture from the Faculdade de Belas-Artes da Universidade de Lisbon.

During the workshop, he and Hayne "started to collaborate, talking about the same creative processes and the same



This is the last in a weekly series of excerpts from "Mississippi Entrepreneurs" by Polly Dement.

dreams," Ferreira recalled.

"Why don't we build a project of life and creativity together?" Ferreira asked Hayne.

Three months later, Hayne was picking him up at the Jackson airport. She took him to the Cypress Swamp on the Natchez Trace near Canton.

The artists married there in January 2006. And for two years they experimented in her mother's garage with "recipes" for thermosensitive material that would enable their vision of creating interactive objects.

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In 2009, NunoErin introduced the Swamp Collection, including a cypress-inspired stool and a lily pad-shaped lounge, at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York City. Heat from hands or hips change the color of the material.

NunoErin also created two "lightning benches" for the Mississippi Children's Museum. Electrical charges from the bodies of patrons set off interactive light sensors, causing LED lights to flash in patterns. The benches also captivated a McDonald's Corp. interior designer, leading to "an opportunity that started the business relationship," Ferreira said.

The designer requested a table along the same lines, and the artists designed a "Sparkle Table" sample. Meeting with the McDonald's team in Chicago, the couple wasn't prepared to answer a lot of business and manufacturing questions. Matt Thornton, managing principal with Butler Snow's Business Advisory Services, provided the expertise.

A Mississippi Arts Commission grant enabled the couple to make a full-size Sparkle Table. Thornton became CEO of NunoErin.

Here are some of Hayne's and Ferreira's reflections on their success:

Q: How did partnering with a business team work out?

Hayne: It's still a work in progress, but the business team has been an essential part of NunoErin's growth. They have been immensely helpful navigating through complete business opportunities. Matt has been a wonderful mentor.

Ferreira: The creative vision has to come first, though, with business as a supporting element.

Q: How are McDonald's sales?

Ferreira: We see a trend toward multiple tables per store. We've shipped over 200 tables to McDonald's restaurants in over 30 states and are piloting locations in Vietnam and China.

Q: You're doing projects in health care.

Hayne: Through research collaboration with Judy Lindsay, a pediatric therapist who headed the Beyond Therapy Pediatric Group, we learned how our products can benefit autistic children. An 18-month-old child with Down syndrome finally learned to crawl when her therapist used the Sparkle Bench's responsive light effects to capture her attention and guide her to put one hand forward, then her knee, then her other hand.

Q: Advice for artist-entrepreneurs?

Hayne: Articulate your vision clearly. Remember that passion and working hard for a vision come naturally to most artists. These are our secret weapons.

Ferreira: Take risks. Believe in yourself. Recover fast from your mistakes; don't forget your primary focus.

Excerpt from "Mississippi Entrepreneurs" by Polly Dement (Cat Island Books, distributed by University Press of Mississippi).

