

ING BELLES

Boardwalk's Carina van Dalen knows what it takes to make wedding dreams come true. With a talent for matching brides-to-be with their perfect dress and a flair for fashion, this petite beauty is the face of Lady Marmalaide in Pretoria.

It's the month of love and business is booming at Lady Marmalaide, purveyors of fine imported Demetrios wedding gowns. Fit for a princess, glamour-puss or sophisticate, the layers of toile and lace, satin and silk, stirs something deep in every woman's heart. None more so than Carina van Dalen, who chucked in a promising career in radiography for the far more satisfying (and fascinating) world of brides, bridesmaids and mothers-in-law. They say that dynamite comes in small packages, and Carina certainly manages to pack a lot of go-go-go into her tiny frame. The dark-haired beauty with the easy smile and refined sense of style is kept on her toes (well, her knees really) by the two Lady Marmalaide studios she runs in Pretoria.

With a happy smile she admits that before the December holidays, she only had one weekend off last year, and that was over Easter. With all the energy that goes into choosing, fitting and finalising wedding dresses, we're not surprised. Lucky for her, divine husband Chris van Dalen is a wedding photographer and understands the demands of her job. It was purely by chance that Carina discovered her dream job and it took a lot of courage to take the plunge. She says 'I was in my second year of studying radiography when I realised it wasn't what I wanted to do, but in my family we finish what we start. During my community service year in Tembisa I rented from a woman called Lani Butler, the owner of Lady Marmalaide in South Africa.

'It just clicked for me. I've always been interested in fashion and I loved it. There was a lot to learn but in my home you

didn't grow up without learning how to use a machine or two and how to put a zipper in a dress, so I managed!

'Mine was the first Lady Marmalaide studio to open in Centurion nearly six years ago and today, Pretoria is mine! There's a lot of competition around these days so we have to make sure our service makes us outstanding. I'll spend around an hour and a half with a new bride-to-be, just listening to what she wants and what her dreams are. I'm happy to advise, too, and six years in the business has taught me a lot about what body types work in what dresses and how to match a

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personality with a style.'

That's the creative side of things taken care of, and Carina's bruised knees bear testament to the hours she spends on them, pinning dresses. But there's more to running a successful business than flair and being a great listener. She's got a head for business on those pretty shoulders. 'My dad is a bank manager and my mom is a broker. I think I always had the business part of twings inside me, I just studied the wrong thing! It's also important to believe in your product, which she does. When she married Chris (who she met when he did Lani's wedding photos) at Kievits Kroon, it was a fairytale wedding with the bride in her dream Demetrios wedding dress. 'It was the most gorgeous venue and I

wore the most romantic dress ... It was the perfect day!

'Demetrios dresses are special because of the way they are made. The boning and the structure is very important because you want your dress to look good for the whole day. We also understand fabric – how to find where the problem is and fix it properly.'

With the busiest wedding months being August to April, she doesn't get a lot of downtime. But she and Chris spend most Sundays together, walking their dogs (she thinks of them as her children) around their Boardwalk suburb in the East. Of herself she admits 'I'm a big shopper so I love Woodlands Boulevard. I'm not such a big eater though, but when I'm in the mood for a romantic dinner there's nowhere better than Cream in Brooklyn. If it's more casual I like Tasha's in Brooklyn too.' But to keep this lass really happy, just point out the shoe shops!

'I strive to be the best at what I do and find satisfaction in knowing that I've done my best. Maybe in 10 years time I'll be inspired to design a wedding dress, but not yet!'

What does it take to balance the business and personal sides of life so well? A great support system! From her friend and mentor Lani to her husband Chris, the brides who make her day by sending her their gorgeous wedding pics and, of course, her family. 'My mom is great at giving me good advice and she's always said that you have to work hard in life. She also says you can eat anything you want as long as you remember to exercise! Lady Marmalaide, Pretoria East is open by appointment only. Visit www.ladmarmalaide.com for more information. Details: Carina 083-661-1282.