

# Focusing on Client's Changing Needs

**This interview has been conducted by Martin Vella.**

Real estate is an area that has a significant market concentration. Daily a large number of people are on the lookout for purchasing new property for either business or family use. We find out what drives and motivates Josette Fenech and Liliana Borg to manage Aspen Ltd and follow on that success with the addition to the furnishing business E'Casa.

**T**he world has almost come full circle for Josette Fenech and Liliana Borg. They started their joint venture in a property market which was thriving. Fast-forward to 2012, and the industry is coping with a recession and coming to terms with the consequences of over-leveraging, weak demand and weak values. If there is any money to be made in property then it will be through very careful management and spotting niche opportunities, which is exactly what Josette and Liliana have done.

“We started nine years ago with Aspen Ltd. It was a learning process beginning with a gradual development, being innovative all the time, establishing contacts, meeting people and being there. By instantaneously relating with our customers we could understand their needs and wants,” explains Liliana.

“Commencing with different creations and giving each construction a characteristic of its own, the key to our path was innovation – being innovative in design, style,

building, construction and finishes. Then we moved to completing fully furnished apartments, introducing furniture and interior design. That is how E'Casa was born,” adds on Josette.

When the business minded sisters started off in 2003 apartments were sold shell form. Both sisters started converting and finishing high quality apartments. Liliana tells us, “We started with the tiles, bathrooms, doors, furniture and for that time it was a pioneering concept in the North of the Island. Slowly, slowly, coupled with the fact that we come from a strong family business background, we continued to learn and re-invent. We were always brought up in business and our father began the family business within tourism and hospitality. Our father always taught us that if we wanted something, we had to work for it. Therefore, both of us had to work hard to earn our laurels. Notwithstanding, my father was the owner we had to work our way from the bottom-up; something which made us stronger.”

Both sisters went about putting the infrastructure in place to begin their efforts and compliment each other perfectly in the running of the company with respective roles in marketing, PR and administration. Liliana says, "I think we immediately hit it off. I love numbers and instantly set my mind on the financial side of the business. Josette undertook the artistic aspect of the venture."

Josette remarks that, "As a pastime, my passion goes into painting. Being an artist, it's natural to manage the design, enjoy playing with colours and can easily visualize the final product. Usually I lean to brighter shades, for example introducing red in nearly every painting creating an impact. Red is also the colour of the Aspen logo. However, our design projects encompass the entire spectrum according to clients' choices and requirements. Our infrastructure was built around the customer. After sales is very important in what we do and we believe that customer care is vital, as our clients are not just a number; we are there to meet people and listen to them from day one."

At administration level the projections are critical and it's all about getting it right and keeping it correct agrees Liliana, "Today life in the property sector is more competitive and difficult, so you have to plan in advance and not to bite off more than you can chew. So it is wise to take one step at a time and ensure you arrive at your objective."

Josette, who is responsible for the marketing aspects attests that, "On the PR level, the most desirable thing is seeing a satisfied and happy customer with what we deliver according to their exigencies. Building direct relationships and retaining customers is what Aspen Ltd and E'Casa are all about."

The Aspen model has always been what they were taught- to be cautious and take one step at a time. "Up to this day, we always consult our father when we buy property and heeding his advice to ensure that we are able to accomplish. He acts as a back-up and our mantra is family, friends and relationships," comments Liliana, stating that, "At work, Josette is not just my sister, she is my best friend. When I talk with her, she gives me an opinion as a sister and also as my best friend. We have a deep connection and compliment each other. We rarely have a conflict and we always support one another. If there is a disagreement, we sit round a table, discuss and decide on the best solution."

Both Josette and Liliana deem focusing on one project at a time as essential. Equally, they consider it is also paramount to be focused in giving the buyer a clear idea and improve their knowledge on how to acquire real estate that would satisfy their needs most effectively. "You are giving the client their home, their biggest investment, so you must make sure to give them what they want. Communication is essential to render their experience as hassle-free as possible. We provide an A-Z advice, such as regards to home loans and also legal

information, involving the client as much as possible," says Josette.

"What is most important in our work, apart from the strategic locations for developments of comfort, are an eye for detail, design, safety features, furniture, furnishings and technology. We bring everything the customer wishes into his home," remarks Josette.

How important is it to maintain a presence in local and international trade fairs and do you travel to keep in touch with the latest home trends and innovative creations? Liliana is quick to reply, "Providing the ultimate in practical, comfortable and beautiful living spaces requires us to maintain a regular presence at the most prestigious property and home exhibitions, translating new ideas and concepts onto the local market. Keeping in touch with latest, design, fashion, trends, colours, fabrics and furniture is indispensable in our business."

Apart from the first time buyers, Aspen caters for clients who want to purchase property as an investment and clients who buy homes for business. The company core business is specialising in buying and furnishing apartments.

So how do the sisters determine what are the key areas of focus to ensure continued success and what plans do you have for the future to continue providing a one-to-one service to all their clients? Liliana is keen to reply, "Taking a challenge and finishing a project to the satisfaction of our client is the main motivational factor that drives our success. The one-to-one service is the most important element of our work, with both companies." Are there moments when they appreciate what they have achieved? "Yes, of course. Liliana always reminds me to be persistent and that in itself, clinging on in difficult times, is an achievement. Being positive all the time, even in negative moments, allows us to achieve our goals together," states Josette. "Managing together, working as a team and creating win-win situations," Liliana is prompt to confirm. ■

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Having worked with her father to contribute in the family business, Josette Fenech moved to the real estate business with her sister Lilliana Borg. She is instrumental in the design and marketing concepts of Aspen and E'Casa. Josette devotes her energy to translate into interior design décor, handles responsibility for two business platforms and several functions including Marketing & Sales and is also an artist during her free time.



Liliana Borg began her more than 10-year real estate career after relinquishing her post as a general manager of a leading four star hotel where she held key roles in hotel management, food & beverage management & HR. Liliana is responsible for all the financial aspects of the business with Aspen and E'casa.