

Petite French & Co. - a proudly local luxury lifestyle brand for dogs

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

13 Jul 2022

The humanisation of pets has been a [growing trend](#), and the companionship provided by them was especially prized during the isolating Covid-19 pandemic, growing the demand for pet ownership and arguably catapulting our furry friends further up the 'social hierarchy'.



Source: Supplied

The pet economy is booming as consumers, particularly in developed markets, actively seek to make life as comfortable as possible for their furry companions, from the food they eat, to what they wear and how they travel.

As [Clare Varga](#) of WGSN Beauty explains, people are looking for products that have the same properties and values that they look for themselves. "So if you're into clean beauty, you want clean beauty products for your dog. If you want ethically-sourced products, you're going to look for that. If you're using CBD, there's CBD products for dogs," she says.

Hoping to grab a slice of this growing pet economy is Capetonian entrepreneur and dog lover Gill Taylor, who left her corporate job working at a successful footwear company to launch a lifestyle brand, [Petite French & Co.](#), devoted to kitting out dogs with stylish essentials and accessories.



Gill Taylor, Petite French & Co. founder. Source: Supplied

When searching for beautifully-designed accessories for her French bulldog Sophie, Taylor struggled to find products that were locally made, and this inspired her to create her own and launch her online retail business 18 months ago.

Petite French & Co. aims to cater to design-conscious dog owners with a growing selection of quality products, including dog bowls, car seats, life jackets and toys, with blankets, puffer jackets and dog treats still in the making.

Taylor talks us through her startup journey, the potential of the pet market and why local production is important for her brand with global ambitions.

■ ***Gill, tell us a bit about yourself and your background prior to starting Petite French & Co.***

I was the MD of a baby shoe brand called Shooshoos for seven years before I decided to take the plunge and launch Petite French & Co. I poured my heart and soul into the brand and had so much fun with it. Shooshoos grew to become a global baby brand with a growing presence in the USA. I have such a passion for brands and branding.

On a personal note, I love adventure and my dogs more than anything. I've also fallen in love with sailing, and I am about to embark on a trip from Durban to Cape Town.

■ ***What inspired you to take the leap and start your own pet accessories business?***

Petite French & Co. had been an idea I was dreaming up for years. I trademarked the name and registered the business

around seven years ago but was too occupied with Shooshoos to give it the time it needed. Every time I saw a new small brand enter the market my stomach would tie into a knot.

It happened enough times to make me realise that I had to act now or regret my decision to enter a booming market I had a heartfelt passion for. I left Shooshoos in April 2021 to make this dream come to life.



Source: Supplied

■ ***How would you describe the Petite French & Co. aesthetic?***

Super luxurious, modern and trendy - sophisticated essentials. Our products are made to integrate into the homes and lifestyles of design-conscious dog parents.

■ ***What are some of the consumer trends you identified that convinced you of the pet market's business potential?***

Pet ownership has boomed during the pandemic and the global pet care market is set to reach [\\$241bn by 2026](#). I want my piece of that. Dogs are no longer viewed as pets, but rather everyone's favourite family member. I am going after a market that humanises their dog, and wants only the best for them. The trend is now and I couldn't waste the opportunity.

More millennials are living in the city, renting and delaying having children, which means that they have a high disposable income. Their dogs are their baby and they want to spoil them with luxury products. They move around the city and their dogs move with them. Their work weeks comprise of dog-friendly offices or doggy daycare. The market in South Africa lacks beautifully- and smartly-designed pet products that compliment a stylish aesthetic. Customers are looking for niche, well-designed products, which means there is great product opportunity.

There is a massive opportunity to create innovative products for dogs that merge the life between owner and pet and allow closer bonds and more synergy.

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❏ ***Could you share some of the key challenges you've faced establishing your business?***

Woah, I feel like I could write a book on this (and maybe one day will). It was quite frightening to experience so much red tape and difficulties wanting to set up a new business, and it frightens me how many entrepreneurs may have incredibly good ideas but will never succeed for these reasons.

Trying to apply for an import and export code was near impossible through SARS. They no longer allow face-to-face applications and everything is done via their site. I had a horrible time. The application gets chucked out and declined if only one thing is incorrect or missing, but it does not alert you as to which it was. I tried to have telephonic appointments with them but their line was so bad I kept having to call back. You would think applying for an export code would be easier to do, but it is near impossible without paying someone to assist you.

Trademarks are expensive but necessary. There are a lot of upfront fees you need to part with and budget for before the first sale even comes in.

I also landed an investor in December 2021. The first tranche of money was paid from overseas into my account in January, there was so much banking red tape to try and get the money released into my account it was the most stressful time I have experienced. The bank held onto the money without releasing it for almost 20 days. The frustrating part was no one at the bank assisted me or helped me clear it and I had to figure and fumble my way through it alone. Only after complaining on social media did I finally get some help from them and get the money released.



Source: Supplied

❏ ***Can you take us through your typical product development process?***

Petite French & Co. is a local lifestyle dog brand with a strategy to become a global brand. That means that we are developing all kinds of products from car seats to dog treats. We also don't want to copy or reverse engineer, but create our own unique brand in the market. This makes product development incredibly slow and difficult.

Our car seat took a year and a half to produce from concept. It involved me driving all over the Western Cape to try and

source the correct trims and materials I wanted to use. Every time we got somewhere with the pattern, we wanted it to be better or more user-friendly, and we tested it again and again. My two Frenchies at home have become extremely good at fitting things on for me or trying things out.

▣ **Why is it important to you that Petite French & Co. products are made locally?**

A few years back I was at an entrepreneurship event, and heard the quote that “if every small business registered in the world employed just two people, there would be no unemployment in the world.” I think the only hope for South Africa’s economy is up to small business. We have the potential to make beautiful products, and have an extremely skilled workforce. If a product of mine can be made in South Africa, I will make it.

The advantage of local production is smaller units and not having to battle with the global shipping crisis – but it is definitely not easy or for the faint-hearted.

▣ **How do you think South Africans can be encouraged to shop from more local brands?**

The Local Edit is doing an incredible job at showcasing local brands and encouraging to shop local. The only way to encourage South Africans to shop more from local brands is to explain to them what it does to the economy and what a difference it makes to employment in our country.



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▣ **How would you like to see the brand grow or evolve over the coming years?**

Petite French & Co.’s goal is to become a global brand. I would like to see the brand sold into luxury department stores and boutiques across the USA, UK and Europe. We are about to ship our first order to a luxury dog boutique in California.

We want to design, develop and sell every item you can think of for your dog. Small steps for now, but we are of course already thinking globally.

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

Managing editor and retail editor at Bizcommunity.com Cape Town apologist. Dog mom. Get in touch: lauren@bizcommunity.com

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