



From DRAB to FAB

In her book from *From Drab to Fab*, author Almie Louis invites both current and aspiring creatives to attempt craft projects inspired by her own idea of upcycling.

By Julia Florence
Projects courtesy of Struik Lifestyle



If someone were to ask "Who are you, Almie?" what would you say?

Firstly, I am a Christian, a wife and mother of three children. I have two sons and a daughter aged eight, 12 and 14. I dedicate my passions to my family. This is especially as my husband has a demanding career which requires him to travel globally, so the time we are apart is focused on my creative pursuits. I studied law at the University of the Orange Free State. However, throughout my studies I kept in touch with my creative side by restoring furniture and designing my own clothes.

How did growing up on a farm in the Free State mould your view on creativity?

Everything on the farm was homemade, from jam to ball gowns. The skills I learnt from creating something out of nothing have proved invaluable. I love homemade items, but I dislike things that merely look homemade.

Who and what motivated you to publish *From Drab to Fab*?

The idea of writing a book started from my frustration at not being able to source any written information about craft techniques. My mother and mother-in-law knew different ways of crafting, but nothing had been written down. They graciously shared their knowledge of the skills with me and we put our heads together to find the best techniques required for various craft projects. My main motivation was that I wanted the techniques of their time to be documented and handed down to the next generation, especially my daughter.

These upmarket crafts demonstrate unique ideas for transforming unwanted, old, neglected and everyday objects into beautiful items of decor. Almie Louis takes the concepts of 'reuse' and 'recycle' much further by upcycling the most ordinary, or even ugly items, into grand and desirable pieces.

Using a variety of craft mediums – such as crackle glazing, decoupage, gilding, papier mâché and ageing – she gives the reader step-by-step instructions, accompanied by clear and beautiful photographs that will inspire anyone keen on trying their creative hand or expanding their crafting hobby parameters.

The book features 90 functional and decorative artwork projects to charm every room of the home, as well as the garden. Choose from decorative lights, useful wire baskets, wall hangings and frames, trinket containers, gold-leaf boxes, retro tins, lampshades, a variety of tables and stools, plus other treasures.

EasyDIY caught up with Almie to find out more about her and her book.

What is the significance of the book's title?

To give 'lifeless' objects new charm by using craft techniques. This is something akin to a makeover for people.

Where do you get the ideas that encourage you to create?

I am visually observant, constantly aware of new ideas and thinking up potential projects. Therefore, my immediate environment inspires me constantly.

What was your first successful project?

When my children started school I was involved in fundraising events. I once offered to do a craft market to raise money for the school, but found that I would be the only person crafting for the event. The things I made were a great hit and generated good sales. This small project was encouraging and lifted my confidence.

What value do you think a person gains from creating their own pieces?

Self-confidence is an important asset that you gain from developing a craft. A spin-off is that working with your hands is therapeutic and rests your mind from the troubles of the day.

What materials and tools should you always have on hand?

Always have enough glue and paper. It is also important to have a camera close by to capture ideas, as these are more important than any material or tool. Always try to work with the existing materials in your house, so that there is no need to constantly buy new ones. Think, re-use and then recycle.

Which is your favourite project from the book?

My favourite is the vintage-style cloche, as it is the first upcycle hanging basket project I have ever come across.

What have you learnt from publishing the book?

To face my weaknesses and walk in faith.

What advice do you have for crafters and would-be crafters out there?

The most important thing about crafting is that you must enjoy doing it. When it becomes a burden, it is a sign that you have either overdone the project or you may have lost your passion. If this happens, take a step back and leave the project for a while. If you no longer feel inspired, consider taking a break from crafting.

What techniques will crafters learn from using this book?

Readers will learn all the basic techniques needed to complete the projects in the book on pages 10-15. But hopefully they will be able to combine these skills with others and be creative in their own way.

May we look forward to another project? If so, what is it?

Yes, I always have a new idea and therefore another project.

Basic Technique Ageing

YOU WILL NEED:

- ▶ kettle braai or outside fireplace;
- ▶ charcoal;
- ▶ firelighters;
- ▶ matches;
- ▶ metal objects;
- ▶ oven gloves;
- ▶ barbeque equipment;
- ▶ rust activator.

Here's how:

1. Make a fire with the charcoal, firelighters and matches. Place the metal objects directly over the flames or coals, one by one (objects lose their shape if they lie on top of each other. Leave until all paint coatings have burned away. (Note: galvanised paint takes longer than others).



2. Wearing oven gloves, use tongs to remove the objects from the fire. Take care not to drop them or place them on top of one another as they will easily distort while hot.



3. When all the objects are cold, wash them thoroughly under running water to remove any traces of ash.



4. Dry the objects with a wet cloth; they are now ready for decorating.

5. Follow the manufacturer's instructions when using the rust activator.