

Renovate a home for a business showroom

# The origin of OreJen

*it's all about a love for old wood*

It all began when I first bought my own house in Greenside in 1987 and we added on a bedroom, a bathroom and a dressing room. I couldn't find windows and doors that matched the other windows in the house, so my husband made my windows for me. Because the original windows were made in England to imperial measurements, i.e. feet and inches, and modern windows are made to metric measurements, all the sizes were wrong. I ended up with a meranti window in that beautiful old house next to my exquisite old windows, and it just looked wrong. I cried my eyes out for weeks, even though at the time I hardly knew the difference between Meranti and Oregon pine, but I simply knew it

wasn't right. Another thing - the thought of having cut down a tree to make a window for my house really got to me, because I love trees so much. You know, all the wood that was originally used for flooring, roof beams, doors and windows in the old houses was imported from overseas. In the early diamond and gold rush years there were no forests in South Africa that could be used for logging operations, so all the building materials had to be imported. Those heavy wooden beams came from America and the intricately patterned door handles were imported from England. The common name for Oregon Pine comes from the state of Oregon, but the name of the tree is actually a Douglas Fir. When those

Douglas Firs were cut down for building materials during the 1800s, they were cut into beams 15-odd metres long – for the trees to have grown to such a great height, they must have been about 200 years old! Just think about it, the wood I am using in my business today has probably been part of someone's house that is about 100 years old, and then you realise that I'm actually using wood that's roughly 300 years old for making my windows and doors. Another thing to consider is that in those days the wood was dried naturally in someone's roof or someone's cellar underneath the floors, not put into a kiln to dry, so it's totally stable.



TOP LEFT: Front of Orejen prior to renovation. TOP RIGHT: Orejen windows made to measure.  
BOTTOM LEFT: Front door during renovation. BOTTOM RIGHT: Orejen 3 months later - the finished product.



Anyway, I realised there had to be a market out there - other people who owned beautiful old houses like mine, who would need windows if they ever renovated or added on extra rooms and probably would experience same problems. So that's how Orejen started, in Greenside, in my own house. The name derives from Oregon for Oregon Pine and 'Jen' for Jennifer. I ran my business out of the double garage at my home for eight years, until eventually all my clients threatened to divorce me if I didn't move out of the house and get a real showroom. I hummed and hahed for probably 3 years because I never had the capital. I drove past number 17 Gleneagles in Greenside and saw that it was to let, and I made it my mission to have that building. What attracted me was that I knew it was right for my business and it was in my own area. Anyone who needs my windows and doors is generally situated within 10km of Greenside. Anyway, I signed the lease and started Orejen in Greenside with R400. I used to go around early in the morning and distribute pamphlets in letterboxes in Parkview so that people would get to know where my business was, what I did and how I did it. And still to this day, twelve years later, people phone me as a result of those early contacts.

So there we were, in our rented premises in Gleneagles Road in Greenside and the house was lovely. It simply glowed with the warmth of the beautiful old Oregon flooring, and I believe in its day it had the old wooden windows as well, which had unfortunately over the years been taken out and replaced with steel. In order to be able to showcase my windows and doors to best advantage, I removed those steel windows and manufactured wooden windows to fit the existing openings. That was really the only way that I could show customers what I did. Orejen operated from those premises for three years.

As time went by, my customers ended up getting more frustrated with not being able to find parking than they had ever been when I was working from the constraints of my own double garage. They wanted to come and see me, but they couldn't get there because there was nowhere to park. I started looking around for premises that would suit the needs of a very vibrant and growing Orejen. We also needed our own premises and I spotted an ad in the newspaper: house for sale in 5th Street, Linden. The moment I saw the photograph in the paper, I had a vision of how it would look, in fact exactly as it is now. I signed an offer to purchase and it was accepted. I knew it was right for Orejen, because Linden is growing with new young people moving

in and has vast potential to become the next Greenside. It has massive properties and lots of restoration work to be done on all the old houses, which will all need my windows and doors! Access is no problem, the stand is large and I've provided ample parking space, and I've planned everything from the perspective of conserving the environment. When I took out a privet on the pavement, I made up for it by planting four *Celtis africana* (White Stinkwood) trees. There was also a large pine tree in the front garden, which I replaced with an 8½ and 2½ year old *Celtis africana*. I adore trees, my pride and joy is the huge old oak tree behind the house, it has an all-pervasive presence.

I obtained the premises on the 15th September 2003 and my husband started doing the renovation work, which was the only way we could get such major work done so perfectly and in such a short time. We carried on working from our Greenside premises until the day we moved into the Linden premises on the 1st December, without closing down at all. The entire relocation process happened seamlessly, something we're very proud of.

And the Linden showroom, nearly one year on? Well, I've loved every moment of it. I love being here, and I am absolutely passionate about what I do. You know, I've built my business up through networking. My husband was in the building industry for many years until he joined me in the business when I opened the shop. During his years as a builder we realised how great the demand is for beautiful wooden doors, doorframes and windows, as well as ceiling boards and floorboards. Discerning people who care about their old homes want the best and don't want to compromise. I've supplied wooden floors, windows and doors for many renovations in our older suburbs and of course I've also done a lot of new developments, such as a house at Hartbeespoort Dam, Kudu Game Lodge in Lydenburg and well as the beautiful old Drill Hall in the centre of Johannesburg. I see every project as a new challenge, and what I love most is seeing the joy on my customers' faces when they go away satisfied with a job well done, and I know they'll always come back again. I've set up this showroom in such a way that everyone can come here to get great ideas and inspiration for making their homes as beautiful as they possibly can be.



TOP: Back of Orejen prior to renovation.  
 MIDDLE: Back of Orejen after renovation.  
 BOTTOM: Replacement trees being delivered.