

A Foundation's Founding

Though she's worked on hundreds of interior design projects during her lengthy career, Trisha Wilson has a clear favorite: The Palace of the Lost City Hotel in Sun City, South Africa. That hotel, which her firm created in the early 1990s, resembles a fairytale palace, filled with mosaics, frescoes and hand-painted ceilings depicting that country's wildlife and culture.

Securing that contract "was a pivotal point in my career," Wilson says. For one thing, it was the firm's largest contract to date by far—over \$2 million. It also put Wilson Associates on the map with high-end hospitality operators. "We were credited in the media for 'changing the face of design' in Africa," she says. On a global scale, the project ushered in a wave of sophisticated, adult-oriented fantasy hotels and resorts that are the precursors of such "ultra-immersive" resorts as Atlantis, The Palm, in Dubai, which Wilson's firm worked on and is opening this month.

Beyond that business-related boost, the Sun City project touched Wilson on a more personal level. "It was the beginning of my love affair with South Africa and its people that has only grown over the years," she says. That ardor, in turn, moved her to take action: To help overcome the poverty that she saw in South Africa, she created The Wilson Foundation in 1997. The non-profit organization mainly works to improve the lives of children in that country's impoverished Limpopo Province, by funding a variety of educational and health programs.

In all, the foundation has raised \$2.1 million since its founding. Its South Africa education initiatives include providing school tuition for disadvantaged school children; financial and in-kind support and services for local public and independent schools; and funding for teacher salaries and after-school tutoring. Its healthcare initiatives include care and counseling for children and family members affected by HIV/AIDS; funding for antiretroviral (ARV) therapy and other medications for HIV/AIDS patients; operational support for an area clinic and a mobile clinic; and, through a partnership with UT Southwestern Medical Center, funding to send U.S. physicians to South Africa to deliver health-care services.

For more information, go to www.thewilsonfondation.org

above right | Creating the Palace of the Lost City Hotel in South Africa catapulted Wilson Associates onto the global design stage. It also led to Trisha Wilson's love affair with that country and her creation of a non-profit foundation to assist its populace.

right | The Wilson's Foundation's crown jewel is the Waterberg Academy in South Africa's Limpopo Province, which provides schooling and boarding to area students.



PETERVALE SANTA FE INN PALACE OF THE LOST CITY HOTEL. COURTESY OF THE WILSON FOUNDATION (WATERBERG ACADEMY)

