

Q&A with Chris Viljoen of Spree

Chris Viljoen, fashion Director of Spree chats about new Spree Boutique and his trend forecast for the Summer/Spring collections.

■ ***Spree is a pioneering force in terms of local fashion and appears to be moving South Africa more in line with international fashion practice. Why the decision to host a Lookboard event as opposed to a traditional fashion show?***

Chris Viljoen: At Spree we always opt for a fresh approach and a new way of doing things. By inviting people to a Lookboard-style event we are offering a look at the 'Spree' perspective on the 2014 summer trends - and it coincides nice with our belief in offering people a carefully curated selection.



Marianne Fassler

■ ***Spree is South Africa's first online shop to offer a 'magazine-style shopping experience'. Do you believe Spree's offering is changing consumer buying behaviour in the SA fashion space?***

Generally, online shoppers head to a website with a fairly good idea of what they want to purchase. Their buying behaviour is categorised by getting 'in and out' as quickly as possible and their relationship with the online brand is largely functional. This is not what we're seeing with Spree. Whereas the Clicktale Web-Analytics Benchmark study indicates that users spend on average between 70 and 200 seconds on e-commerce sites, Spree surpasses those averages by up to 100%.

By merging great content with e-commerce, Spree has been able to create a playground for fashion, beauty and décor shoppers. We've noticed that by presenting shoppers with a Spree-specific point of view, via curated selections, style advice and editorial content, we've increased consumer engagement with our brand and store, and made our website more 'sticky'. Although some customers may still be coming to the website to quickly scan what's new or purchase a particular item - the magazine-style experience draws them in, inspires them, gets them to linger for longer and consider more products. By tracking browser behaviour we can see that Spree shoppers' engagement is continuously growing, which is resulting in higher basket sizes and great conversion rates. South Africans are telling us they understand and enjoy our offering and they're thanking us by being loyal customers.

■ ***You talked about the Lookboard event acting as a 'point of view' for Spring Summer 2014 - can you tell us your thoughts on how the South African fashion public receive and translate international trends?***

Trends are universal and everyone in the retail arena follows them in some way or form, so the decision was made to look at the trends from a specific Spree point of view. Our decisions were based on trend analysis, on an understanding of our audience and shoppers, as well as what's happening in fashion on a global and South African scale. In South Africa we always have a very specific uptake of trends; which is not always the same as the European or American market. Our

climate needs are very different, we embrace colour more and, therefore, trends need to be tailored for our market.



Gert-Johan Coetzee

■ ***Spree inspires online shoppers through editorial-style lookbooks, fashion stories and the Spree Journal, making destination to visit to do more than just shop. How do you feel that the Lookboard event will bring Spree's fashion vision and offering to life?***

The vision is that you can come to Spree every day and find something fresh and new. So not only to shop for something you already want or need, but to inspire you, to pique your interest and enhance your wardrobe in new and unexpected ways. We help you make your life look fabulous. The Lookboard event is an edited vision of Spree's point of view and showcases the most exciting products available at the start of this new season.

■ ***Why the decision to work with Katryn Kruger?***

She is possibly the most famous model South Africa has produced in recent years and she is spectacular. We took a chance with her extremely busy schedule and by sheer luck she was available. She has been the face of numerous international fashion labels, such as Chanel, Prada, Dior and Oscar de la Renta and we are honoured to have her represent Spree.

Trends

■ ***Your top five trends for the 2014 season?***

- Florals: We are obsessed with flowers in every shape and form, and on everything from dresses to separates
- Art-inspired Prints: We love bold brushstrokes, paint splatters and anything reminiscent of an artist's studio on our clothes this season
- The Tropical Holiday: Jungle motifs, large leaves and anything Tropicana serves as a retro lookbook this season, with an emphasis on our favourite colour, green
- The 'ugly' shoe: For the first time comfortable shoe trends are all the rage. Stilettos have been replaced by sliders this season
- Matchy matchy: Match your tops to your bottoms this season to amplify your separates

■ ***Your top spring/summer menswear trends?***

- Blues: From cobalt, indigo, ink all the way to light blue is definitely the colour you want to wear this summer
- Shorts: Shorts are back in a big way. We advise you to invest in pleats
- Tropical: Everything from micro dots to Hawaiian motifs and dark flowers
- Colour blocking: Whether it be colour blocking, texture blocking or panel blocking, it's definitely something worth investing in this season
- Street Active: Sportswear has been taken to the streets. Think gym staples like sneakers paired with your trusty chin

■ ***Which of these trends do you feel cross over between men's and women's fashion?***

Men's and women's trends have aligned well this season, but are interpreted very gender specifically. Tropical prints and inspired looks (more whimsical for women, more graphic for men) can be worn across the divide.

■ ***Which of the SS trends best suits a fuller figured woman?***

We are of the opinion that anyone can wear the trends and that size has nothing to do with it!

Spree Boutique



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■ ***You have been working closely with South African designers to create capsule collections for Spree Boutique - how did you go about selecting the designers? And how do you feel the designers enhance Spree's offering?***

The South African fashion landscape is one that is as diverse as it is ever evolving; an industry that celebrates beauty, creativity and, most of all, the talent that is constantly appearing from all corners of our country. It is with this talent in mind that the Spree Fashion and Buying teams focused on fashion events, appearances, exhibitions and news to select designers from all over South Africa who needed to be showcased and celebrated. All aspects were taken into consideration, from impeccable craftsmanship, flawless fabrication and unique design; but most of all we looked for that special 'something'. That something that sets a designer apart, a fresh way of looking at clothing, at lines, at colours and at trends, and interpreting them in a way that creates beautiful looks that can be worn by every woman. The designers featured are as transient as the seasons; as fashion evolves and shapes itself, so will the collections that are spotlighted. The Spree Boutique aims to showcase the incredible quality of design that can be found locally, and best of all: it can all belong to you.

■ ***Why have only select Spree Boutique designers been included in the Lineshowing itself?***

The Spree Lookboard event is a curated selection of what we consider the most important trends for the forthcoming season. While some of the pieces featured in the Spree Boutique do reflect fashion's penchant for certain trends, many of the other looks are a showcase of timeless style and craftsmanship that transcends across all seasons and trends. Simply put, the Lookboard is a reflection of what awaits ahead during SS15, while the Spree Boutique makes covetable items by local designers accessible to all.

■ ***What's the dream for Spree Boutique?***

To have a transient collection of the most exciting South African design available.

www.spree.co.za