

Bringing quality manufacturing home with HOM

 By Leigh Andrews

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Does the phrase, "Shirts made in Salt River, Cape Town will be worn in New York," sound a little ambitious? It shouldn't, as the recent House of Monatic-Stenströms partnership means good things for the local manufacturing industry...

Tuesday, 17 March, dawned bright and sunny, perfect for a day that focused on giving a sneak peek into what goes into classy clothing production. Cape Town's well-heeled members of the media streamed into House of Monatic's offices in Salt River. We were there for the official announcement that Stenströms of Sweden, a leading Swedish fashion label and supplier to the Royal Court of Sweden, had approached House of Monatic, to manufacture Stenströms shirts and blouses right here, at the House of Monatic factory in Cape Town.



Anders Bengtsson

But it wasn't just the glossy fashion writers in attendance - as Anders Bengtsson, Managing Director and CEO of Stenströms, announced that the new co-operation is a result of Stenströms' decision to move production from Europe and Mauritius to South Africa, creating new jobs in Cape Town. Many other parties were in attendance, including the directors of House of Monatic, as well as buyers of Stuttafords, as the official (and only) brand distributors throughout the country. They were thanked for supporting South African manufacture and brands in an industry where job opportunities have been 'under siege' for many years.

As a result, SACTU was also in attendance, as the trade union representing House of Monatic's existing workers. Mike Maurer, Managing Director of House of Monatic, also spoke of a planned R3m investment in new shirt manufacturing machinery, to be funded by the Productivity Incentive Scheme of the DTI.

Wesgro was also there, as the announcement was an important one for advancing development in the Western Cape. Howard Gabriels, COO of Wesgro, confirmed they are excited that this well-known global brand will be produced in Cape Town, as "The investment will contribute significantly to our efforts to create new employment opportunities. We are keen to work with House of Monatic and Stenströms of Sweden to build the sales on the African continent."

Bengtsson called this a key point as the deal brings with it the prospect for future growth in Africa, especially as South Africa is seen by many as "the gateway to Africa".

Gabriels added that Cape Town is "the most beautiful city in world", and that this partnership may bring more European tourists to the country. It's an opportunity to build the Stenströms brand across the continent and to build the people behind the brand and for it to grow from strength to strength. "All the big brands that open a store locally, if they buy a pen here, that's it," said Gabriels, adding that Stenströms investment of time and money locally has already made this worthwhile for all parties involved.

Wondering where House of Monatic came from?

Well, House of Monatic is a subsidiary of JSE-listed Brimstone Investment Corporation, Brimstone. As a result, Brimstone chair Fred Robinson, named [Southern Africa's Entrepreneur of the Year](#) at the CNBC All Africa Business Leaders Awards last year, also said a few words at the event. He hopes this will be a long-running partnership, and that it has already swung a big vote of confidence South Africa's way. He spoke of how Brimstone bought House of Monatic in 1998, back when everyone said clothing was a dying business, and it has flourished since then. As a manufacturer at the top of Africa for

European, U.S. markets the employees get a big vote of confidence too, especially with unemployment so high in SA, as having work is linked to personal dignity.



Stenströms clothing

Sticking to the basics of clothing people, Robinson confirmed that it's not just about producing top-end labels - they're also big on raising money from community, and sharing profits among "the poorest of the poor", through many charity partnerships and well as the company's ever-growing amount of shareholders, because "We believe very firmly in partnership. If we don't have jobs here in South Africa, we don't have people to buy the products we create."

It's not just lip service, as Stenströms looks to 'social values beyond the balance sheet' as it supports StreetSmart SA, a registered non-profit and a public benefit organisation that distributes raised funds to selected beneficiaries that work with street children and those who are vulnerable and at risk of becoming street children. So it seems this announcement was a massive cause for celebration all round, as buying a Stenströms product means also giving to good cause.

But what exactly are you getting, when you buy a House of Monatic piece?

Bengtsson calls the Stenströms brand 'slow, sustainable fashion', meaning it's more than just flash-in-the-pan single-season wear - the clothing's design and quality ensures it can still be worn well into the next season, and possibly the season after that.

And Laura Stewart, Group Marketing Executive of Stuttafords, says Stenströms was an important supplier when Stuttafords decided to introduce more premium labels a few years ago, have many loyal customers and expects "the South African production combined with European top quality fabrics to add a new dimension to the product that would go down very well with our customers."



Some of the fabric swatches...

We got to see the quality fabrics used and just how the shirts are made - a first for many, even the long-time fashion writers. Maurer says the factory tour was intended to dispel any thoughts that clothing manufacture is just turning on a tap; we got to see that roughly 200 individual components go into creating a high-end jacket. All in all, a most insightful day.



Finished product, neatly packed and ready for distribution

For more information, visit the [Stenströms website](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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