

SA fashion showcase to capitalise with new seasonal calendar

In a move welcomed by local designers and retailers, the country's premier fashion design showcase, the Sanlam South African Fashion Week (SSAFW), has aligned its show calendar with the retail sector's forward planning cycles to capitalise on the growing appetite for local design.



Stoned Cherrie Summer 08 Collection launched at SanlamSA Fashion Week in August 2008.

Credit: Visual supplied courtesy of SanlamSA Fashion Week. Photograph by

Ivan Naude.

It will therefore host the annual summer collections in April 2009 and the winter collections in October, a departure from its tradition of showing the collections at the onset of the season and predominantly with exclusive private customers in mind.

“The new events schedule will accommodate the retail environment which requires a three-month planning and production process at minimum to function optimally. By introducing longer lead times between showing a seasonal collection and having to deliver it in-store, designers will now be able to seriously engage with the formal retail sector and bring a stronger offering to the market, both in terms of range assortment and structure as well as logistical production and delivery,” says director Lucilla Booyzen.

“Since the inception of the SSAFW twelve years ago, we have seen a deepening maturity within the design community. Designers are ready to tap into the potential of real business growth presented by broadening their markets beyond a select group of private clients.”

Local on a large scale

Her sentiments are echoed by Nkhensani Nkosi, whose Stoned Cherrie signature pioneered the Afro chic aesthetic and who successfully supplies the Woolworths group, in addition to her own outlet in Johannesburg's The Zone: “The industry will only grow meaningfully if it is driven and disciplined by commercial objectives and the rigours of large scale production and retail.”

According to Jean Oldknow, ladieswear buyer for Stuttafords, the 18 store national chain has long

recognized the potential for local designers to introduce an 'it' factor into its merchandise assortment and thus became the first retailer to introduce a local designer label, Hip Hop, in key stores twelve years ago.

"We recognize the advantages of having a broader selection of high caliber, fresh and smaller collections readily available. The more excitement, signature variation and interest we can add to our retail floor, the greater the likelihood of enticing consumers to buy, particularly during tougher economic times.

"Designers are also perfectly positioned to respond quickly to a trend against shorter lead times which is vital to retail success," she said.

Chain engagement

Industry commentator, Dion Chang also believes that bringing the designers in line with retail production cycles will inject new commercial vitality into the local environment: "This will enable designers to finally be able to sell and produce, not only for a wider range of boutiques, but also start engaging with local chain stores, who have never been able to buy local designers clothing because the collections have always been shown for the season. South Africa has never really had a design industry that could supply and support the local commercial, retail industry - until now. The designers (and their businesses) have matured over the last 5 years and are now ready to engage commercially, with larger retail groups and not just private clients."

Principal sponsor, Sanlam's head of group marketing, Nandi Scorer, said that the financial company welcomes this stronger focus on commercial viability that will undoubtedly contribute to unlocking greater business opportunities for the fashion industry.

Added support and mentorship programme

In turn Sanlam has undertaken to extend its involvement with designers by introducing a dedicated business support and mentorship programme for export-ready designers to assist them with capacity-building, here and internationally.

The first event that will mark the Sanlam SA Fashion Week's new schedule, will take place from 2 - 4 April in Johannesburg and will show the Summer '09 collections of 34 new and established designers such as Black Coffee, Klûk CGDT by Malcolm Klûk and Christiaan Gabriel de Toit, Stoned Cherrie, Mantsho by Palesa Mokubung, Ephymol by Ephraim Molingwana, House of Olé by Olé Ledimo, Abigail Betz, Amanda Laird Cherry, Colleen Eitzen and Tiaan Nagel.

The key sponsors for the 2009 event are Sanlam, Department of Arts and Culture, 5FM, Sunday Times, eTV, Samsung, M.A.C and Redken.