

The secret Fassler faux pas

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Someone at Woolworths clearly bunked Marketing 101.

One of the greatest fashion coups of the year had happened on the quiet.

It was my sister-in-law in Cape Town who first alerted me to the news last week: "Woolies has got a limited edition range of Marianne Fassler designs. There's a dress with your name on it."

Minutes later, a friend reminded me that a couple of magazines had made mention of the fact that one of South Africa's most legendary designers had, indeed, designed a once-off collection for Woolies and it was only going into select stores.

I was gutted: How had I, who liked to think that I kept my ear to the fashion ground, forgotten about this one?

So I went into a little frenzy, desperate to lay my hands on some affordable Fassler before it was sold out.

I had heard that only 200 units of each item in the range had been produced so I did the calculations: If the range went into store around Tuesday, surely it would be gone by the weekend?

In fact, the leopard print dresses in Marianne Fassler's trademark style were probably being ripped off the rails as I contemplated my shopping strategy — I didn't have any time to waste.

There had been similar fashion happenings in the US and England, when fashion designers identified the "mass vs class" phenomenon and produced affordable fashion, with their names on it, for mass-market chain stores.

On target

When American designer Isaac Mizrahi launched his range in Target (the US equivalent of the Hypermarket), it was such a success that he promptly gave up his ready-to-wear business and focused only on his Target and *haute couture* ranges.

And when the king of Chanel, designer Karl Lagerfeld, agreed to design a range for high-street fashion chain H&M, women camped outside the stores the night before to ensure that they made it into the shop first, to own their little piece of Lagerfeld fashion history.

Since Fassler is undoubtedly one of South Africa's top and most iconic designers, I was pretty certain there would be

similar hysteria about her designs for Woolies and that they would sell out in a second.

But I needn't have panicked.

Classic, beautiful - and no one else in sight!

At the Hyde Park branch of Woolworths I found the Marianne Fassler collection right at the entrance to the clothing section — but not another shopper in sight. There was plenty in my size to choose from and no one fighting me for it.

While the collection is pared down to fit the Woolies budget, it has classic Marianne Fassler touches and is beautiful.

I drove home, delighted to have a Marianne Fassler dress to hang in my cupboard, But why, I wondered, was Woolworths not swamped by other women like me who certainly can't afford to buy full-price Fassler every day of the week?

Then I looked around me. The roads were empty; half of this big city had left town. For some reason best known to them, Woolies had waited until two weeks into the school holidays, when most of their market would have left for the coast, to launch one of the most exciting ranges into their top stores.

I had not seen a single shop window, advert, billboard or poster announcing the launch. And there had been no in-store hype with Marianne Fassler herself appearing to unveil her Woolies range.

One of the greatest fashion coups of the year had happened on the quiet and I hope someone is having their ears boxed for missing such a brilliant marketing opportunity.

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