

New *Elle* New Talent Designer highlights mohair

Kelly Esterhuyse is the winner of the *Elle* New Talent 2011 Designer Search, in association with Mr Price, for her interpretation of 'Show me Your Pattern' in mohair. She was selected from eight finalists at the opening show of SA Fashion Week, held at The Rosebank Hotel in Johannesburg, late last week.



Winner Kelly Esterhuyse

Photo by Ivan Naude, supplied by
CooperPR courtesy of SA Fashion Week.

At the hotly anticipated opening, the designer hopefuls watched while their ranges graced the catwalk to much appreciative applause and tweeting. "The level of entrants was high this year and the judges faced an enormous task to choose one winner," said Dion Chang, trend analyst and chief judge of the competition.

"Ultimately what made her range stand apart was her ingenious use of a much underutilised resource in South Africa, mohair. Knitwear has not appeared in a major way in this competition before and we liked her use of a local, indigenous textile which needs to be promoted," he added.

Mohair not prized in South Africa

South African mohair is highly prized around the world, except in South Africa where it has yet to be tapped into as a valuable local resource.

"Coming from Port Elizabeth, which is known as the mohair capital, I was introduced to the use of mohair at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, where it is a compulsory part of our studies," explained Esterhuyse, who went through a steep learning curve as she created her range entirely from mohair and leather. She kept her accessories in soft muted tones to complement the simplicity of the natural wool. "Colour can make knitwear kitsch, so I kept it simple and natural."

"There was freshness to Kelly's range that we loved and the fact that she hand-knitted each jersey also showed her versatility and skill," said Chang. "When judging we looked for three components: commercial viability, a certain 'wow' factor and the possibility of a future - which would we want to see more of? She answered all three criteria."

"She took a home grown textile and gave it a viable platform," said *Elle* editor, Jackie Burger. "She also tapped into a huge trend - craft. By knitting her range she showed innovation and initiative."

Burger added that competitions like this helped shift the perception of fashion today, by showcasing ranges that are both commercially viable and artistically conceptualised.

"I think the finalists have realised that you can make a commercially viable range without compromising on your artistic vision. International buyers would love Kelley's designs and so would Li Edelkoort, the renowned trend analyst who has been heralding the return to craft industries for a while now."

Mr Price marketing director Louise Holmes believes the choice of theme, 'Show me Your Pattern' allowed entrants to go on a lateral probe of what this meant to them individually. "In the past we've had more commercial themes, this year the idea of pattern could encompass creativity on a much broader level," she explained. She also believes the level of execution, skill and interpretation from entrants has skyrocketed. "The calibre of talent has grown on an exponential scale and the fact that the competition was so close shows its evolution."

Runner-up decided by swing vote

Kutloano Molokomme was named as the runner up in the tight competition, which was decided by a swing vote. His vibrant range in red, inspired by the East, used pleather and pattern in a striking way. "Although this is my second year as a finalist in this competition, my strategy was to approach it as a new venture and experiment with a new material - pleather. I think my artistic and experimental approach gave me an edge. I like to approach unconventional designs with conventional skills," he added.

Joining the likes of previous winners David Tlale and Tiaan Nagel, winning the competition will boost Esterhuyse's career to new heights. She will be flown to Mr Price's headquarters in Durban to undertake a two-week mentorship and be given the chance to design a range for Mr Price.

"This has been the most incredible experience and the exposure is awesome," said an elated Esterhuyse after receiving her award. "I finish my studies this year and I can't wait to start my own label, Ulijana, which means creative spirit in French. I am so grateful to *Elle* and Mr Price for this opportunity."

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>