

Pick n Pay Futurewear: Accessible designer fashion made in SA

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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More and more South African retailers are proudly promoting their locally-made goods. This is particularly prevalent in fashion as clothing retailers commit to boosting localisation efforts to stabilise supply chains and help contribute to the revival of South African apparel manufacturing.



Pick n Pay Clothing x Matte Nolim collection. Source: Supplied

Pick n Pay Clothing is targeting 60% locally-sourced products by 2028, and according to Hazel Pillay, general manager for the brand, the retailer has grown the percentage of locally-made products by 12% over the last three years, despite Covid-19 challenges.

Speaking to *Bizcommunity* in an interview, Pillay commented on the role of businesses in stimulating apparel manufacturing in SA. “I think that the retail community of large corporates has joined together in wanting to make a difference in growing more jobs locally, and we are successfully doing that. It’s not a quick win, but it’s possible.

“All businesses, small or large, corporate or entrepreneurial, need to have an intentional plan and desire to build society from an economic perspective. We’re obviously very challenged by the high unemployment rate, but if we want our businesses to grow, we also need to be helping with strategies and initiatives that can drive more local job creation.”



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Fostering growth of local design-led clothing industry

Beyond sourcing and manufacturing more locally, Pick n Pay Clothing introduced its Futurewear initiative in 2020 which

has the added goal of nurturing emerging fashion talent and fostering the growth of the local design-led clothing industry by introducing designers to the commercial retail segment.

The project, run in partnership with respected South African fashion designer Gavin Rajah, sees talented young creatives mentored to create a limited-edition, locally-made commercial range in collaboration with Pick n Pay Clothing to be sold at the retailer's stores.

Throughout the development of the collaborative collection, the designers gain valuable know-how and practical skills equipping them to be successful in a commercial environment and to sustainably expand their own operations.

Merging creativity with commercial sensibility

For consumers, the initiative provides affordable access to designer fashion – the likes of which can be too expensive and, at times, too unconventional for the average Pick n Pay Clothing shopper.

The retailer has already collaborated with a handful of local designers since launching the Futurewear project - among them Julia Buchanan, Katekani Moreku, Sipho Mbuto and, most recently, Siyethemba Duma who trades under the label Matte Nolim.



The designers are paid to create a fashion collection of between six and eight pieces that showcase their creativity while being underpinned by the commercial sensibility of a large retail chain like Pick n Pay.

Commenting on shopper response to the Futurewear designer collections so far, Pillay said, "They are excited and passionate about it. Firstly, I think the philosophy around Futurewear being local to South Africa, customers want to support those initiatives. Secondly, even though it's designer ranges, we make sure that while the work stands out it's still a commercial product that consumers feel comfortable wearing.

"The third component is that it's affordable. The collections are priced between 10% to 20% higher than our regular Pick n Pay range, so they're within the price bracket that our customer is able to afford."

She added, "The dichotomy of South Africa is that you're serving through one brand multiple different customers, and while price is very critical to people who are struggling to put food on the table, there are consumers who are wanting to support local initiatives."



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High-end designs made accessible

The Pick n Pay Clothing x Matte Nolim range launched last month in 40 Pick n Pay Clothing stores nationwide and on the retailer's dedicated e-commerce site. The inspiration for Nolim's 'Bloom SS' collection stemmed from his desire to make high-end designs accessible to everyday people.

"The collection is inspired by bold florals reminiscent of my lush birth town, Pietermaritzburg. The collection's silhouettes are feminine and flattering to the feminine form, with bright combinations of Hilton daisies and summery poppies," said Nolim.

As Nolim moves into the commercial space, he is living his dream of creating an affordable range for those who want to wear his designs but couldn't afford it. "Collaborating with Pick n Pay makes this possible. I have learnt so much so far, including how to work with a bigger team."

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