

Sustainability - an overriding trend in fashion

 By [Lucilla Booyzen](#)

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Fashion has largely been viewed as a frivolous industry, dominated more by who's wearing what designer at which social event, rather than the powerhouse industry that it is: a major contributor to GDP in many countries.



Lucilla Booyzen, CEO at SA Fashion Week. Source: Supplied

Trends are newly defined each season by the luminaries of the fashion world and are introduced, lavishly, on the platforms of the world's fashion capitals, greedily absorbed by the large-chain retailers who will have their copies displayed, worldwide, on the rails of their stores within days. This was the norm until Covid-19 appeared on the scene and the great reset clicked in.

Turning point towards consciousness

The onset of Covid proved to be the turning point towards a new consciousness that brought to the fore issues like climate change, food security, supply and trade blockages, energy shortages and political turmoil culminating in Russia's invasion of Crimea. In a matter of two years, the thinking around the future of humanity on earth was turned on its head.

These changes also impacted enormously on the traditional rules that have determined fashion trends for decades. Sustainability became the overriding trend of anything goes.

“ Unsustainable practices in the production of clothing had already become a huge issue with the climate lobby before 2020 and the reality hit home during Covid when changes simply had to be made to keep the fashion industry viable. ”

Design had to be informed by sustainable, responsible or compostable fashion design; a trend focused on the move forward.



Local designers at the forefront of sustainable fashion

In South Africa, social, economic and geographic circumstances which had previously been viewed as being negatives, in the current climate of sustainable fashion, may be turned around to the advantage of our designers who have long had to work in an environment of:

- Smaller design studios where they supply smaller quantities thus consuming less energy and practising slow fashion.
- Less automation concerning their design methods and processes resulting in lower energy consumption.
- Practicing Fair Trade as a result of being fully invested in women empowerment, utilisation of local labour, fair local wages to their employees and supplying at going rates.
- Their production teams are smaller and localised, with more focus on educating and upskilling – no exploitation of their workforce.
- The designers build strong, reliable, long-lasting and personal relationships with every link in the supply chain.
- Most of the designers' price points are competitive – they either use local natural fibres or compostable fabrics that they can print on creating their own identity.
- Building a client base is close to their studios - allowing for a limited carbon footprint.
- They are close to their communities so they are building job opportunities and wealth from within.
- Their collections are easily traceable - their supply chain is limited.
- They are fur-free.
- They don't drive over demand – they manufacture only when required rather than in large batches, which cuts down on every level of the value chain. This puts them firmly into the camp of the slow fashion movement which reduces impact on the environment.

These factors place South African fashion ahead of international designers in terms of the driving trend of sustainability.

In terms of marketing South African fashion, the main role of SA Fashion Week remains to guide the vision of the designers and to provide a discernible and vibrant media platform that gives exposure to African, and ultimately, international markets.

ABOUT LUCILLA BOOYZEN

Lucilla Booyzen is the CEO at SA Fashion Week.

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