

WHAT'S NEWS.



SOUTH AFRICAN STYLE

A new generation of designers is making the country's fashion industry into a powerhouse of creativity and chic.

BY MARY HOLLAND PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENT ANDREASEN FASHION EDITOR LIZZY WHOLLEY

MODE MOMENT South African labels like Maxhosa, Thebe Magugu, Viviers, Rich Mnisi and Sindiso Khumalo are revolutionizing the country's fashion scene. From left: Maxhosa dress; Thebe Magugu dress, Githan Coopoo earrings and stylist's own belt, shoes and socks; Viviers top, jacket and pants and Country Road shoes; Rich Mnisi dress, Lorne Jewellery earrings, Coast & Koi shoes and vintage tights; Sindiso Khumalo dress, Sindiso Khumalo x Crystal Birch bonnet, Yellow by Jeslea earrings and American Apparel shoes.



LATEST LOOKS

Clockwise from above: Thebe Magugu top and pants, Githan Coopoo earrings and Jimmy Choo sandals; Maxhosa top, pants and shawl and model's own earrings; Viviers jacket, top and pants and Yellow by Jeslea earrings.



CLOTHES CALL
Left: Sindiso Khumalo top and pants and model's own ring.
Below: Rich Mnisi top, skirt and necklace and model's own rings
Models, Antonia Julies, Michaelyn Van Der Vent and Megan Woolley at My Friend Ned, and Dami Oni and Lisa Philander at FanJam Agency; hair and makeup, Alet Viljoen. For details see Sources, page 146.



FASHION IN AFRICA is often reduced to stereotypes, such as wax prints and beaded necklaces. It's also rarely separated by nation. Instead, the continent's 54 vastly different countries get clumped into one "African fashion." But in South Africa, there's a new wave of designers challenging these preconceptions and finding their place in the global fashion industry, with their own e-commerce sites and online retailers such as 24S and Koibird allowing them a wider distribution than local sales. "The digital age and social media have put the power back in the hands of the makers," says Johannesburg-based designer Tiaan Nagel, 37, who after getting his start in 2007 has been an influential force in South African fashion.

Thebe Magugu's LVMH Prize for Young Fashion Designers win last year—the first time it was given to an African talent—brought serious global attention to the South African scene. "[We] aren't trying to portray the exotic view of what 'African fashion' is," Magugu says. "A lot of the youth grew up with their traditions and cultures, but they grew up watching MTV as well." Magugu, 27, established his namesake Johannesburg label in 2016. He uses his clothes as a vehicle for social critique; for instance, in his fall 2018 Home Economics collection, his "girl seeks girl" dress, featuring two downcast women embracing, addresses the country's

devastating femicide rate. "I want to express my thoughts and politics and talk about history and culture through my collections," Magugu says.

Commentary and narrative run through the collections of many South African designers, as does a commitment to craft. South African fashion, says Nagel, "is rich in ingredients that are appealing to the design community. Texture, color, materials, handcraft and most importantly, storytelling."

Lezanne Viviers, 31, who set up her Johannesburg label, Viviers, in 2019, works to emphasize local makers. "South Africa has a heritage of artisans who have always created beautiful objects and textiles from handweaving, beadwork and embroidery," she says. In her latest offering, a floral kimono-style blazer and wide-leg pantsuit are hand-embroidered and hand-beaded with over 1,000 recycled-glass beads.

When Johannesburg-based designer Laduma Ngxokolo, 33, launched his Maxhosa brand in 2012, he wanted to work with mohair produced in his native Eastern Cape. Ngxokolo first created his premium knitwear, with geometric shapes woven from bright threads, for *amakwala*, the young Xhosa men who dress elegantly as a sign they have completed their initiation ceremonies. The line has since evolved to include womenswear and home goods. "It's important for me to preserve our culture," says Ngxokolo, who

uses Xhosa beadwork as an inspiration for his slinky dresses and cardigans striped in typical Xhosa colors of yellow, red and blue.

Rich Mnisi, 28, who launched his namesake Johannesburg line in 2015, found it challenging to break into fashion at first, when classic African prints were still the global expectation. "If you didn't fit into that idea, then sorry, you weren't African enough," says Mnisi, who often creates gender-fluid pieces. One of Mnisi's best-known looks, worn by Beyoncé, is the patchwork Rhundzu (which means *love* in Xitsonga) blouse and a white half-pleat skirt. "Everything is layered," says Mnisi, who often channels his mother and late grandmother, both fans of pleated skirts.

"It's up to us to define the term 'African fashion' or 'African designers,'" says 2020 LVMH Prize finalist Sindiso Khumalo, 40, who launched her textile-focused label in 2014. With an intricate print of *inkhelis* (hats worn by married Zulu women), cows and villages, Khumalo's white ruffled midi dress tells a story about her own wedding. "There's a beautiful rebelliousness about the spirit of design we have," says the Cape Town designer, who worked under architect David Adjaye and studied at London's Central Saint Martins. "When the personal South African narratives come through, it's so potent," she says. "I think that's the renaissance we're going through at the moment."