

Mpumalanga FASHION WEEK

Creativity has no country, innovation no flaws, inspiration no boundaries. This is the bold premise behind Mpumalanga Fashion Week, one of the youngest South African Fashion Weeks to arrive on the scene, but one that nonetheless is confidently making its way down the red carpet to set trends and inspire innovation within SA's multifarious fashion world.

Held over 1–5 September 2010 in the province's lush capital city of Nelspruit, at the Mercure Inn, this is the second-ever annual Mpumalanga Fashion Week. The Fashion Week's theme this year is Ace of Spades, Autumn/Winter Collection 11/12 with the tagline 'Feel it, It is Black!'. The stars of the show are 12 Mpumalanga-born fashion designers whose new collections will be hitting the ramps: Cheryl Arthur of Cape Town-based Hip Hop Fashion, John Sithole of Earthquake, Simphiwe Hlophe (Sym-P-we), Patience Letswele (Patience), Moses Khoza (Moskos Couture), Lettie Mashabane (Lettice Designs), Zodwa Mnisi (Zodwa), Isaac Sithole (Eruption Designers), Nokwakha Qobo (Qobo Qobo), Tinyiko Dlamini, Melissa Paulus and Busi Ngwenya.

Highlights of the second-ever Mpumalanga Fashion Week include 20 evening fashion shows by local designers, with exhibitions and fashion retail outlets set up during the day, and the inevitable after-parties wrapping up the nights. A theme has also been designated to the musical side of the fashion affair – Remember the Titans – as a tribute to the South African music that took us from our democracy in 1994 through to 2010. Songs that are bound to be playlisted as the models hold sway of the catwalk include kwaito favourites by acts like TKZee, Boom Shaka and Bongo Maffin, and new hits by a sample of hot new African musicians like Lira, Black Coffee, Winnie Khumalo and Kwela Tebza. And to liven up the after-parties, top South African R&B artist Loyiso Bala will be performing his debut album written by Grammy Award winner Robin Thicke, supported by a host of other local acts and DJs. Acting as media partners, one small seed will be there too, filming the event to bookmark its spot in South Africa's fashion annals.

In the past, Nelspruit has been best known as the gateway to Kruger National Park and for being a manufacturing and agricultural hub for northeastern South Africa. With 2010 seeing it as one of the nine host cities for the FIFA World Cup, and now in September playing host to this boldly emerging Fashion Week, Nelspruit – and the entire province of Mpumalanga, 'the place where the sun rises' – is certainly basking in some well-deserved moments of glory.

Introducing three of Mpumalanga Fashion Week's freshest fashion designers, to give you just a snippet of the fabulous flamboyance that's the order of the week!

Sym-P-we

Sym-P-we is derived from the designer's name, Simphiwe Hlophe, and is merged with the elements of what the designer and the brand love most: music, nature and drama. Simphiwe was born, bread and buttered in the small town of Secunda in Mpumalanga. Since studying Fashion Design at the Vaal University of Technology, Simphiwe has earned several impressive accolades, the most notable being winning the Vodacom Durban July Young Designer Awards in 2008. Sym-P-we caters for both male and female clients, and is known for his intricate patterns, meticulous use of colour, and high level of workmanship.

Note of This Earth (NOTE)

Spearheading NOTE are three male designers, Elias Sibata, Mokotjo Mohulo and Tello Maema, inspired by everyday life, music, fashion and urban culture. Their range consists mostly of menswear, which they say is aimed at "top business moguls who dare to be different". For the Fashion Week, NOTE has taken the theme of Ace of Spades to relate to the consequences of gambling – lavish lifestyle and greed that can lead to grudges and even death – translating this into the concept 'mourning the gambler' and naming it Umgwabo, or Black Funeral. Look forward to elegant, colourful men's coats with fur, hound's tooth, swirl, tweed, soft fabrics, formal pants, fitting denim jeans, a blend of fitted shirts and tuxedo shirts.

Earthquake

An earthquake is a movement that disrupts everything in its path. Nothing escapes impact. Designer John Sithole sets out to create the same effect with his label, Earthquake – a fashion label that has been causing something of a tremor amongst Jozi's fashion-savvy set. A third-generation Swazi fashionista, John Sithole grew up in Malelane, Mpumalanga. Clothing, he says, runs in his blood: his grandfather started the family trend as a salesman of tracksuits and jerseys, plying his trade to men in Soweto, and further afield in Carletonville and Westonaria. John's uncle later started a corporate clothing company in Mpumalanga. It was here that John joined the fashion forces at age 11, learning the ropes as he helped out every day after school. Since then he has lived and worked in Melville, Johannesburg, until very recently relocating to Cape Town. John works across fabrics but his preferred ranges have always been denim and canvas, with seasonal colours, patterns and styles mixed in. Not governed by the seasons, denim and canvas are well-suited to both everyday and office-wear and give him the freedom to inject cutting-edge style into the ordinary. His range pictured here shows off his amazingly innovative work with Converse – crafting entire garments using the same materials as Converse takkies, with lace and eyelet details – to create some of the most show-stopping afro-chic designs on South Africa's runways. Expect to see more in this vein from Earthquake at the Mpumalanga Fashion Week 2010.

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