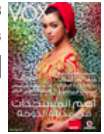


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feature

Design Indaba So impressive that you may be tempted to buy everything on offer

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In living colour

Design Indaba, the hands-on, break-out [fashion](#) and lifestyle expo, keeps the youth, energy and optimism of the “new South Africa” relevant nearly two decades into the country’s new era, reports **Elyse Glickman**

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SYDELLE WILLOW SMITH/THE IMAGINARIUM

SOUTH AFRICA’S booming wine and spirits industry (Amarula Liqueur and Distell wines in particular) made it possible for me to make a journey I had wished for since the ’80s. My interest in visiting this enigmatic country was piqued 25 years ago when a South African Jewish family involved with the anti-apartheid struggle with kids my age moved into my suburban Chicago neighbourhood. Right around that time I developed a crush on a movie-star-handsome guitar player (Trevor Rabin) who, by the way, happened to be from Johannesburg and whose family was also active in the movement.



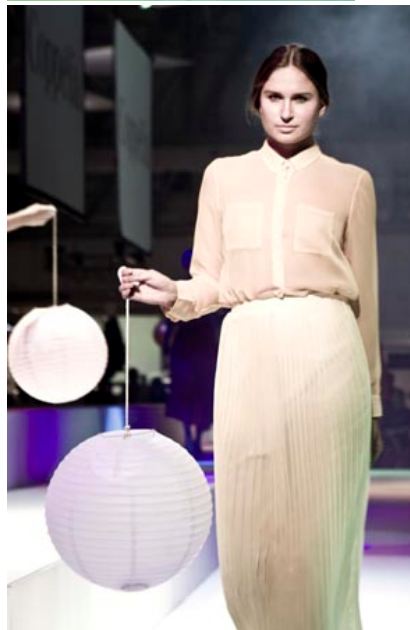


Moving on to college five years on, I not only engineered a surprisingly substantial interview with the future Hollywood A-list composer, but interviewed other compelling SA [artists](#) such as Johnny Clegg and Savuka, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and an up-and-coming group called the Dave Matthews Band. I also hit the theatres to see plays *Sarafina!* and *Born in the RSA*, and feature film *Cry Freedom*.



Even with my exposure and inquiry into South Africa's "story", however, I still expected there to be surprises. Many of those came while on safari at Kapama (see our 'Volante' feature) and eating and drinking my way through exquisite meals at a variety of wineries and restaurants. While fashion and home accessory acquisition is another one of my obsessions while on the road, I had very little time to shop. Therefore, I found myself surprised, delighted and seduced by various "what's on" announcements trumpeting [Design Indaba 2011](#), a week of shows, film, seminars and an expo providing figurative and literal one-stop shopping for fashion, accessories and home design.

Once I arrived, fresh from a morning safari, in Cape Town on the second-to-last-day of Design Indaba, I bee-lined to the Convention Centre where the Expo portion of the multimedia meets multicultural event sponsored by Grolsch was still in full swing and the ambiance was quite carnival-like. Better still, my US\$8 admission ticket literally put the best of Long Street and some of Cape Town's trendiest fashion and home shopping right at my feet.



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What struck me about the beautifully arranged spreads of furniture, home accessories, jewellery and clothing sectors (besides the fact that I wanted to buy practically everything) was how well every global fashion trend from international shows and runways had been digested by many of the 60 exhibitors, reconstituted and put back out with a uniquely 21st-century South African spin: unapologetic mixes of colour, pattern, form, shape, and (yes) function. The themes carried over deliciously to the Earth Fair Market, showcasing a selection of organic and locally produced food ranging from Asian curries, to homestyle-baked goods to local fare.



So, what exactly defines South African style? An interesting mix of western European minimalism, rustic tribal crafts, mixed media and modern, genre-defining uses of metal and gems (in the jewellery), fabrics (particularly in the home textiles), wood and ceramics. The clothing, meanwhile, is all about wearability and function. Most of the designs are decidedly unfussy, but punctuated either through dramatic hits of tailoring or a single, striking accessory. It almost recalls the aesthetic of 1980s fashion design, but what makes clothing styles timeless are that they are hewn with enough restraint that you can be as comfortable wearing many of the items to the office as you would to a club or a fashion function



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11.06.09

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like Design Indaba itself.

Highlights included John Bauer's ceramics, locally produced and curated items offered by Jabulani Jewellery, textiles at the Kamma Trust [artist](#) collective, Anthi Voyatjes's oversized-but-delicate silver "lotus" earrings and pendants, Yda Walt's hand-printed textiles, and sleek, ambitious ready-to-wear by Cape Town fashion label Christopher Strong.

While Design Indaba is just beginning to find fans outside of South Africa (including Martha Stewart, who attended in 2010), you can expose yourself to this fantastic, innovative fashion experience via its website—especially its [shopping segment](#), which has truly special finds for women, men and children. •



Elyse Glickman is US west coast editor of Lucire.

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