

David Tlale chats about his Nelson Mandela centenary celebration showcase

 By Ruth Cooper

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Renowned fashion designer David Tlale showcased his biggest collection yet - a 100-model, 100-look runway, to celebrate the centenary of Nelson Mandela - at the recent AFI Joburg Fashion Week. Titled *Azania* the show featured celebrities, D'Banj, Tumi Voster, Savita Mbuli, Refiloe Modiselle, and Lalla Hirayama as well as performances by DJ Heavy K and Vusi Nova.

We chat with him to find out more.



■ ***Can you talk us through the Nelson Mandela centenary celebration showcase at Joburg Fashion Week? What events and inspirations did you use from his life and legacy?***

Firstly, I looked at his (Mandela) fashion stature. I think a lot of people didn't see him as a fashionable persona because he was a politician, but when you looked at him - every time he was out - he was always very well put together and well styled. He could master everything from a trench coat to a bomber jacket - even during a time of unrest in communities. Then, he came out with the iconic Madiba shirt. The influence of other politicians and their style also played a major role in the collection.



▣ ***What goes into executing a 100-model, 100-look runway?***

We started planning for this production four months ago. It takes a lot of time and planning and we had to make sure that the narrative of the collection was not lost during this time. It was great to have Black Motion play at the event – they really elevated the show beyond what anyone was expecting. It was clear to see that whole story was well thought through.



▣ ***What would you say is the best lesson Nelson Mandela taught us?***

Perseverance is paramount. Don't ever give up on your dream or lose vision, things may not be easy but you will achieve it.

▣ ***If you had to describe your design aesthetic in one word what would it be?***

Timeless.



■ ■ ■ ***What have been some of your career highlights?***

Showcasing at New York Fashion Week as a solo designer on schedule for seven seasons consecutively and being one of first South African designers to be showcased at Arab Fashion Week. Debuting the *Azania* collection in New York while on tour with Courvoisier was the most fulfilling collection we have ever done and of course the Madiba centenary showcase.

■ ■ ■ ***What would be your top trends for spring/summer fashion this year?***

Prints, prints, and more prints. White blouses are also very important, but more than anything else, the Toga dress and the yellow and black Madiba quote-printed skirts from my collection are must-haves and my personal favourites.



■ ■ ■ ***What advice would you give to up and coming African designers?***

Education is key. Believe in your heritage and stand your ground. Resist the temptation to conform to American trends and tell your story and excel in your craftsmanship.

▣ **What still needs to happen when it comes to the support of African fashion designers?**

Making sure that we are able to understand the business of fashion in Africa and introducing fashion made in Africa to the international market while ensuring that the international market understands our aesthetics and what we are all about.



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▣ **What are you currently working on and what's next?**

We are currently working on the ready to wear items from the *Diffusion* line; we have also just launched the men's underwear range so watch the space. There is a lot is in store for the David Tlale brand as we are prepared to showcase in Nigeria, Morocco, and Uganda.



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Photography by Reze Bona and Blaq Smith

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

Ruth is the production manager at Bizcommunity. ruth@bizcommunity.com

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