



AFROPOLITAN STYLE

SHALDON KOPMAN'S NAKED APE LABEL IS THE CRADLE OF SARTORIAL STYLE. THAT'S WHY HIS IS A MUST-SEE SHOW AT THIS YEAR'S SA FASHION WEEK. BY DEBBIE HATHWAY

One doesn't have to be sussed about fashion to spot style a mile off. A beautiful stitch, a tailored silhouette, a perfectly tied tie, a cashmere silk yarn that begs to be stroked... these are the things that turn heads if you're a gent who appreciates the classic nuances of bespoke attire.

But exclusive menswear goes beyond fashion in the hands of Shaldon Kopman, director of the Johannesburg-based Naked Ape, who creates garments for 'captains of industry, business mavens, and individuals with social currency as unique as their signature'. Kopman is part of a high profile group of young designers who use their international experience to market African fashion. 'Because Afropolitans are aware of global fashion trends, we can apply them to the local context and develop a style that honours us as individuals as well as our culture. Then fashion becomes less of a foreign, untouchable concept,' he says.

At the start of his career, Kopman indulged his passion for travel to find his groove as a stylist and fashion director in cities like New York, Melbourne, Amsterdam, Paris and Dubai,



PHOTOGRAPHY: DARRIN CHATZ

returning home to make his mark as fashion editor on *Elle*, *Tribute* and *Y* magazines. He was a finalist for the Sanlam SA Best Fashion Editor Award 2007 and *GQ*'s Best Dressed Man of 2006/2007.

Now his Naked Ape brand extends to the label officially launched at South African Fashion Week in September. The collection is inspired by the neat grooming synonymous with pantsula culture – 'South Africa owns that look!' It features worsted wool fabrics blended with cashmeres and silks, and will be available online.

The Naked Ape bespoke suiting and ready-to-wear range is driven by love and passion, and coupled with increasing demand from a discerning market. 'I'm very meticulous when it comes to detail and quality. I didn't want to simply put out a range, so I've taken four years to complete the designs and put the right resources in place,' says Kopman.

It's trial and error when creating patterns and testing textures, wearability and functionality to meet the international standard. Naked Ape tailors take time to craft the perfect garment – count on no less than five days for one flawless suit. 'Fine tailors are rare in this country, but they're essential to our service,' says Kopman.

They apply traditional tailoring techniques to the finest luxury fabrics such as those from the French house, Dormeuil, carefully handcrafting the finishing touches from his studio-showroom in South Africa's Soho – the Milpark business district. It's the location where Kopman consults to fashion aficionados who enjoy expressing personal style with understated panache. 'It's about looking good and feeling good. We advise our customers to invest in a few luxury items and show them how to wear them,' says Kopman. 'It's that experience that the Naked Ape customer loves. Grey from head to toe looks great when you combine textures, or add an understated flash of colour that pulls socks together with your jacket lining. Our bespoke collection enhances pride in appearance rather than vanity or flamboyance,' he says.

'SA Fashion Week's concrete foundation has allowed designers to build themselves over the years, refining and redefining their collections over the seasons under the continuous motivation of the architect Lucilla Booyzen,' says Kopman. It's been highly successful in showcasing contemporary designers with traditional crafters in collaborations that expose the country's heritage and raise the status of homegrown

fashion – not just as an art form, but as a means of cultural expression.

Booyzen, event director and 2010 Shoprite Checkers Woman of the Year category winner, says local designers' imaginations continue to be fuelled by the insight of crafters, ready to make their mark on African fashion through handwork skills that defy convention but satisfy tradition. 'South African consumers need to be aware of the vast creative resources available to them through our emerging design industry and the unlimited opportunities to create thousands of jobs through building SMMEs and luxury brands. That is the future of fashion in Africa,' she says.

And when you raise your glass to the South Africans who rise to meet the increased global demand for luxury with embellishment, pattern or weave, make sure it's filled with Jameson Gold. It forms part of The Jameson Reserve Collection by SA Fashion Week co-sponsors Jameson Masters. The limited range also comprises Jameson 12 Year Old and Jameson 18 Year Old, celebrating a different kind of collaboration between artistry and craftsmanship. **i**

For more information, call 011 726 8018 or visit www.nakedapestyle.co.za.