

“Local is lekker! This is home and I’m needed here to fulfil a purpose and be part of the growth of our fashion economy,” says Kopman. As the founder and Director of men’s fashion label and consultancy Naked Ape in Johannesburg, he’s built on his reputation as one of SA’s most respected fashion authorities.

Born in Pietermaritzburg (a place he calls “Sleepy Hollow”), Kopman was grounded by his small-town upbringing. Yet he was destined for big-city living, moving with his mother to Johannesburg at the age of nine.

Having started out as a model, Kopman developed a love of the fashion industry. “The understanding I gained of basic lighting, photography and marketing is important in fashion design,” he says. Building an international career as a designer, stylist and fashion director, he grew both personally and professionally. “There’s no education like travelling. Observation is stimulating. All the places I’ve lived and worked in have their own particular quality and have been equally important to my development and growth. Johannesburg’s very

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Written by Gillian Klawansky



## UP IN THE AIR WITH... *Shaldon Kopman*

Designer, stylist and entrepreneur Kopman has worked in fashion capitals like New York, Paris and Milan, but his roots are firmly planted in SA’s soil

special, though: its people are very progressive and creative, and that feeds my own creativity.”

Kopman started Naked Ape in 1998 as a fashion consulting service through which he channeled his styling work. “The label came about in 2005, when my frustration at not finding suitable clothing to fit my physique and budget needed serious attention,” he says. “The design and production of finely crafted attire aren’t for the faint-hearted, but the journey’s been absolutely amazing.”

While producing clothing in SA has its challenges, he’s motivated by the joy his clients experience from his company’s creations. “Staying true to ourselves and the ethos of our brand is imperative. As specialists,

we aim to please a minor percentage of the market. We choose to set trends, rather than follow them, which is riskier – but we’re a young fashion market with a huge amount of creativity.”

Kopman advises men to look for comfort in garments, valuing quality over quantity and dressing for the occasion. “Wear clothes

that fit your physique without compromise,” he says.

Having just launched Naked Ape’s flagship store at The Firs in Rosebank (which offers a complete ready-to-wear wardrobe and accessories, as well as a full bespoke wardrobe service and a mix-and-match corporate corner), Kopman remains focused on growing his brand. “Europe stamps its authority on the industry through the power of marketing. Yet in SA and Africa as a whole, it’s time we also got up and reinforced our identity.” 🌈

### *Kopman on travel*

- “I currently travel about seven times a year. The worst part of that is the rush: no matter how well you plan, you always end up rushing, which is exhausting. The best part is getting to know different nations, smelling different air, feeling different textures and enjoying new spaces.”
- “My favourite international destination is Thailand, as I love having a daily Thai massage and interacting with some of the most welcoming people in the world. The country’s also affordable for South Africans: we can experience a bit of five-star treatment on a European two-star budget!”