

Four key trends of African design in 2017/18

WGSN, a London trend forecasting company for fashion and creative industries, held a [recent press event in Cape Town](#) to unveil the four key trends that will be at the forefront of African design in 2017 and 2018.



WGSN press event in Cape Town

Hosted by the company's chief content officer, Carla Buzasi, and brought to life through series of experiential installations, it included contributions from photographers and creatives Trevor Stuurman, Ed Suter, Gabrielle Kannemeyer and Travys Owen and fashion designers Chu Suwannapha, Nicholas Coutts and Cleo Droomer.

"The African retail value chain has been significantly disrupted over the past few years and retailers and suppliers need to have a clear point of differentiation and confidence in their design execution," says Hannari Slabbert, WGSN regional director for Africa.

"Added to that is a complex consumer mix who are increasingly influenced by international media and expect a contemporary offering in-store. In 2017, we are significantly expanding our trend content across Africa, focusing on the important social and style movements coming from this continent to help customers make profitable creative decisions to stay ahead of these challenges."

Nocturne

Winter always brings with it a darker mood and sense of melancholy. WGSN calls the 2017 season one of 'bittersweet beauty', with a blurring of the boundaries between night and day, a trend that will extend into autumn/winter 2018.

To illustrate how this will play out in fashion, WGSN showed Cape Town label Droomer alongside H&M's 2017 Conscious Exclusive collection. Droomer's loungewear suit and oversized gold sports-inspired garments give a cold-weather sense of luxury. H&M's black organic silk suit, showing that fashion can be sustainable as well as sensual.

Disruption and discomfort are central to this trend, which embraces the darkness that comes before light. The colours therefore are a palette of moody night tones and moonlit brights with inky blues, deep purple and berry tones at the fore.

The beauty of Xandre Kriel's Samosa Table and Night Chair/Nagstoel for the Southern Guild translated this blurring of night and day into décor.

Slippery Spoon's cocktail, 'Dragon's Breath' – Guinness, MCC, cocoa-nib ice and oak smoke – allowed guests to 'taste' Nocturne. An artwork by photographer Krisjan Rossouw provided a backdrop as did a video loop of New York nights and the streets of Cape Town set to Max Richter's music to bring home the juxtaposition.

Earthed Together

With an increasing tendency to turn to screens for everything, our instincts are kicking in and prompting an urge to reconnect with nature. This will play out in a variety of micro-and macroscopic designs and a preference for colours that can ground us. This trend encompasses the colours of the skies just before dawn or dusk as well as gold ochre, saffron, blue flame and dark berry.

Linking to the sustainable aspect of the trend, Slippery Spoon served truffled cauliflower soup made from the stems with cauliflower leaf crisps to demonstrate the focus on not wasting anything. Fermented porcini kimchi and aged parmesan powder further brought home the earthy palate with Ethiopian injera showing the trend's African roots.

"As the name 'Earthed' suggests, there is a strong link to the farm-to-table movement that now extends to fitting rooms too, as fashion becomes increasingly 'home-grown' and incorporates more and more local materials," says Buzasi. This mood was made tangible by an installation by Kraak that allowed guests to feel the soil beneath their feet, in addition to the natural bacteria and yeast used in Slippery Spoon's laboratory installation.

Youth Tonic

Come summer and renewed youthful vigour always sets in; come summer 2018 and we will be reminded that youth is a

state of mind. As the world population ages and Gen Z, Gen X and Boomers live longer than previous generations will, we will see eras blending in new ways. Different generations will break the rules of what applies to them and remix styles and lifestyles. It is about the random, about striking out and finding what fits you.

Guests were invited to pick up a paintbrush and participate in creating art with David Brits to the sound of a remix of '90s club hits. Electric colours and neon pops are matched and clashed but beneath the surface zing, there are complementary tones such as blues that work in harmony with their poppy counterparts. The fierce '90s feel was expressed in liquid form in Slippery Spoon's shooters, a mix of Hope on Hopkins Esperanza (a tequila-like liquor made from agave), fresh lime juice and popping candy.

An installation of fake flowers and kitsch furnishings brought the trend into the home by embracing the unfinished and random to emphasise that art is the new fashion.

Kinship

Although this fourth big trend may appear to veer off in a different direction, the move to Kinship overlaps all three of the previous trends. It is characterised by an increased sense of community where art and design crosses borders around the globe.

Just like the disappearing generation gap, cultures and histories will meld, as people continue to move around the world, whether physically or virtually. Kinship is about cultures and collectives that forge an increased sense of community. The curves of the East will increasingly enhance the lines of the West.

Storytelling will play an ever more important role in connecting people around products and projects through vivid tales of places, histories and cultures.

The works of photographers Trevor Stuurman, Ed Suter, Travys Owen and Gabrielle Kannemeyer brought this concept home by placing traditional elements, such as Basotho blankets and ochre-covered Himba, in non-cultural settings.

Three fashion designers, known for spanning cultures, showed how they interpret this trend. Chu Suwannapha of Chulaapwho has been celebrating the prints and colours of Africa since the label's inception, mille collines who straddles Africa with contemporary, cosmopolitan fashions made in Africa for African women and Nicholas Coutts, who combines fabrics such as South African mohair and acid denim to take menswear in a new direction.

"The result is an upbeat palette that goes easy on the darks. Earthy reds ranging from red mulberry and dark orchid to more traditional summery hues like baked coral and rose madder are a defining feature. Dark ginger and golden spice lend intensity to the palette, while blue sage, washed indigo and horizon blue offer a calming balance," says Buzasi.

Women from Du Noon Weavers took this trend into décor by using traditional weaving methods and materials to create homeware that meets the pared-down aesthetic of Habitat, as well as more sculptural pieces in collaboration with Binky Newman from Design Afrika.

"Craft is a key influence in décor but it isn't about a folksy take on interiors. Instead, we will see a blending of textiles and design that shows an appreciation of global culture," concludes Buzasi.

WGSN will feature reports on African trends in womenswear, colour, materials, accessories and beauty. Specifically from South, East and Western Africa, it will focus on consumer insights, influencers, lifestyle & interiors, and menswear trends.