

A season for risk-taking and the return to fashion as craft

 By [Cyril Naicker](#)

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The global pandemic has been laden with lessons. For one, that change is guaranteed and inevitable. Humanity was on an all-consuming treadmill when our world stood still in early 2020.



Cyril Naicker is CEO at Imprint Luxury, country coordinator of Fashion Revolution SA and chief sustainability executive at Plain Tiger. Source: Supplied

Hard lockdown's silence was uncomfortable for many, impossible for others whose businesses folded, and devastating for those who lost jobs. Closer to home, this virus claimed lives. I've personally lost numerous friends, so much so I grew weary of yet another online funeral.

We've each, in our own way, grieved the loss of something significant over the past months – and so what I hope most is that Covid-19 has taught us the greatest lesson of all: the dire need for more kindness.

We still have no idea when this pandemic will end. Almost 24 months in, albeit exhausted, we must officially concede to a new season of taking risks. This concession is crucial for those in business because, without question, what worked in the past does not work in the present. Risk really is the new norm. Despite our heightened resilience, it's our improved creativity in uncharted waters that's sailing us toward a better world.



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Great strides in local manufacturing

My 2017 forecast [Fashionably Conscious: Made in South Africa, it's Not Just a Movement](#), dissected and encouraged local manufacturing. Five years later I'm pleased to note significant growth in this sector, partly (and ironically) thanks to the global pandemic.

Swimming against the tide, leading national retailer TFG's strategic shift to invest in sustainable local manufacturing is already paying off. According to Sactwu's Etienne Vlok, TFG is presently the largest apparel manufacturer in South Africa with TFG Africa now sourcing upwards of 72% of its apparel onshore.

"TFG's investment in local manufacturing confirms localisation as a viable strategy to fight unemployment. The retailer's import replacement will significantly increase TFG's local production, resulting in more local jobs and upskilling. Unusual for South African retailers, TFG is creating thousands of jobs within its in-house manufacturing base," said Vlok.

Wholly impressive since just five short years ago, nearly 80% of all TFG merchandise was sourced abroad.

TFG has strategised a diversified and agile local supply chain with our government's Department of Trade Industry and Competition (DTIC) over several years. Reducing its reliance on China and other international suppliers, this focused strategy has increased local retail brand manufacturing. The retailer's import replacement strategy results in more local jobs and upskilling. Following the launch of three additional hubs, TFG's Prestige plans to employ an additional 5,000 workers by 2026.



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True fashion: new ideas that last

With local manufacturing top of mind, considering the environment is equally critical. Modern fashion is sadly driven by disposability. Our I-can't-be-seen-in-this-twice attitude is draining natural resources and polluting the planet. True fashion is about new ideas that last. We ideally need this concept enforced during design – but more importantly, embraced when we go shopping.

The recent COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference placed emphasis on a better future. Beyond 2021, one can't mention climate change without including the clothing industry. Fast fashion is poison. Our work at Fashion Revolution highlights the impact fast fashion has on the planet and the myriad people that make our clothing. The big question is, "How do we cultivate a culture of continuity?"

The answer lies in our speedy evolution to circular design and manufacture, nurturing a circular economy by considering how garments can be designed for better longevity, durability, upcycling potential or better re-integrated as inputs into the supply chain.

Covid-19 has also highlighted the value chain's human impact. Fashion's return to its true state can only be achieved by reconnecting with its humanity – and must no longer be about mass production meeting demand. Craft means clothing constructed with great care by those passionate about their skill. A case in point is designers like Thebe Magugu, Sindiso

Khumalo and Lukhanyo Mdingi, who promote Mzansi fashion on the global stage; in my opinion, currently undercelebrated on our shores.



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True craft endures. It requires sustainable systems and conscious values built into our businesses, communities, and homes. Thinking about sustainability tomorrow is no longer viable – we need to act today. Fashion as craft must become a way of life.

It's time to engage. To risk more. In the face of Covid-19 uncertainty, all those lost lives must not be in vain. A better world can only be brought about by better people making better choices.

And when we find ourselves with our backs against the wall, we should no longer indulge our instinct to fight. We need to match opposition and adversity with sustainable human values – courageous traits like kindness, compassion, and empathy. In this new season of risk taking, these are the only real solutions to the insurmountable.

ABOUT CYRIL NAICKER

Cyril Naicker is the Chief Executive at Imprint Luxury, an events, PR and marketing company. He is also the country coordinator of Fashion Revolution South Africa, an international fashion activism NGO addressing the clothing and textile crisis, and he has been appointed as the Chief Sustainability Executive at Plain Tiger, a global platform for sustainable and ethical luxury.

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