

Tristan Shaun Henry celebrates queer youth culture through fashion

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Tristan Shaun Henry is among the talented cohort of young designers forming Design Indaba's [class of Emerging Creatives for 2021](#). Supported by the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, the programme aims to nurture new talent and acts as a launching pad for the careers of each year's crop of young creatives.



Tristan Shaun Henry

Henry deservedly stands among the 40 creatives selected this year. The enthusiastic recent graduate holds an Advanced Diploma in Fashion Design from the Cape Town College of Fashion, and is raring to add their unique point of view to South Africa's contemporary fashion landscape.

As a member of the LGBTQI community, Henry aims to recognise and celebrate queer youth culture through fashion brand Saint Shaun Henry - a label the designer describes as "for queer kids by a queer kid".







We caught up with Henry to chat about their design journey, the legacy they'd like to leave in the fashion industry, and how brands get LGBTQI representation wrong.

▣ ***Congrats on your selection for the Design Indaba Emerging Creatives programme. How do you feel about it?***

I was thrilled. I remember going to the Design Indaba when I was in high school and I said to myself, “One day I’ll showcase here...” and a few years later it happened. I’ve been told I’m not cut out to do fashion, so it really was a special moment for me, to be one of the selected few out of the country. It made me feel like I’m being taken seriously as a

designer.

■ ***When did you first know you had an eye for fashion, and what led you pursue design as a career?***

Growing up, I always expressed myself through a variety of things, drawing was one of them. You could always find me doing something creative. I really enjoyed visual arts during my school journey and I spent those years learning skills and techniques. It wasn't long after I discovered that fashion can be used as another medium to express myself.

I took Visual Arts as well as Design as subjects in high school and even with the workload and pressure, that's when I decided to pursue a career in fashion.

■ ***Tell us about your brand Saint Shaun Henry – who's it for, what's its brand philosophy and aesthetic...***

Saint Shaun Henry is a brand for queer kids by a queer kid. The brand philosophy can be summed up as 'celebrating queer lives'. Choosing comfort and convenience, without having to compromise on style. Saint Shaun Henry stands for equality, self-expression, individualism and LGBTQI rights.

“ Saint Shaun Henry is for the individuals who never fitted in anywhere, it's for the kids who were told 'oh, you'll never amount to anything'. Those kids who thought that there isn't a brand that caters and stands for them, now will have something that will allow them to live out their dreams and fantasies. ”

■ ***Where do you draw inspiration from for your work?***

I draw a lot of inspiration from the personal stories of myself, family and friends. It gets to a point where I reflect on myself and others. I then look at what's happening around me, whether it be socially, politically or economically.

For the current collection, I looked at a newfound side of me, queer culture and how it shaped contemporary menswear today. A revolution is happening in menswear and I'm glad I get to witness and be a part of it.







■ ***As a recent Advanced Diploma in Fashion Design graduate, how do you plan to go about making a name for yourself in the industry?***

I want to start in the retail industry first. I think it's so important to learn the corporate business world if you want to make a successful fashion brand. One thing I want to learn more about is the business of fashion.

Networking and collaborating with other creatives is something else I love to do, from all disciplines. I'm always pushing my brand as a lifestyle; I plan to do more than just garments. For queer kids by a queer kid, I always say. It brings authenticity.

“





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❑ ***How would you like to see South Africa's fashion retail industry support more young creatives like yourself?***

Don't steal from us and pay us for our work. I've seen and experienced firsthand bigger companies stealing ideas from smaller independent designers. The first thing would be to create more job opportunities in the retail industry. An internship that will allow you to gain experience is a must since jobs today require years of experience with a tertiary qualification.

I'd really like to see more of that being implemented in the industry. I also want to be a part of that, leading the way for a career in fashion.

❑ ***As a self-proclaimed queer kind, what missteps do think brands make when trying to appeal to or align themselves with the LGBTQI community?***

“ We aren't clowns, so slapping a rainbow on everything isn't going to appeal to us. ”

Getting a month for us out of a year for big operations to cater to us isn't enough. It can be patronising sometimes and done in poor taste if you don't have a member of the community leading the campaign.

We aren't a trend, we're humans. The sooner brands realise that this isn't a fad for a period of time, they'll open up to an

untapped target market.

▣ **Could you name some fashion designers, local and/or international, who you look up to and admire?**

Local I'd have to say, Rich Mnisi, Thebe Magugu and Nao Serati. International I'd have to say, Tomo Koizumi, Peter Do, No Sesso, Nicola Formichetti, Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake.



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▣ **What would you like your legacy to be in fashion?**

I'd like my legacy in fashion to be summed up in one word and that's 'trailblazing'.

“ If what I've done has opened doors for the next generation of designers to do what I've done and better, it's worth it. ”

▣ **What's next for you and your brand?**

For me, I'd love to intern for a brand that's at the forefront of the queer community. An internship at Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu would be such a surreal dream.

For my brand, I'd have to say I'd love to do a collaboration with a bigger company to get people talking about who I am as a designer. Who knows what the future holds for me and my pen, that's where it all starts.

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