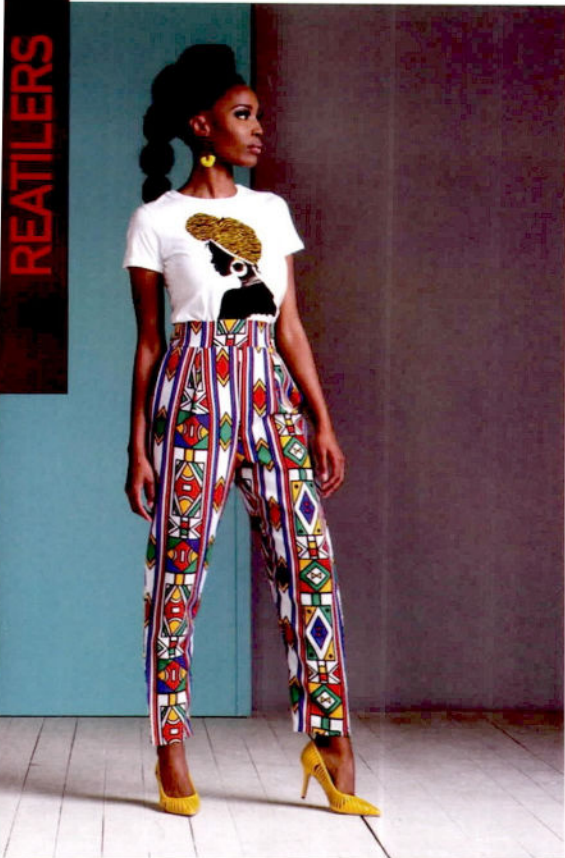
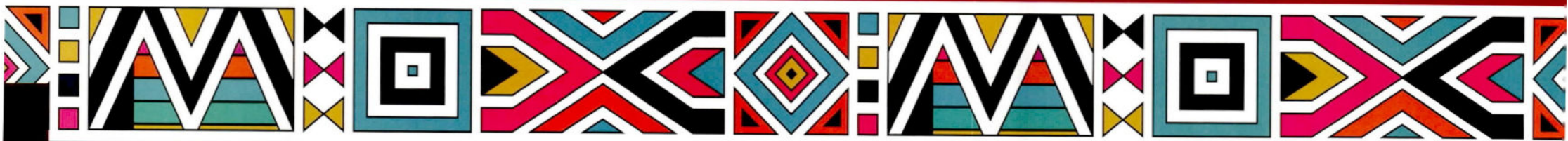


Publication		
SHOPPING SA		
		
Page	Date	AVE (ZAR)
32	Fri 01 Nov 2019	16756.31



THE BURGUNDY FLY FAIRY TALE

 Estimated read time: 5 minutes

Burgundy Fly, a fashion brand that has grown from virtually nothing to paying more than R20 million to local designers over the past 11 years, has joined forces with retail stalwart Foschini as part of an exciting collaboration aimed at putting local design talent on the retail map.

Nobesuthu Ndlovu, who started the business with her husband and co-owner Nhlanhla Ndlovu in 2008, admits that although the business may have started as a way to escape the corporate rat race and to be her own boss, it soon evolved into far more.

The couple was completing a business course through the Gibbs School of Business when they spotted a gap in the market. At the time it was difficult to find quality, locally-designed garments, but the designers who produced such items also lacked a viable commercial platform.

"Over time, as we grew, it became about creating sustainable mass scale employment. Each designer has five to 10 people working for them. At the moment, we have 20 designers supplying us, which means that we have a minimum of 150 people who are benefitting from the Burgundy Fly value chain. That really gets me up in the morning and keeps me going. We have an opportunity to make real change, to contribute to create a sustainable economy in South Africa," Nobesuthu says.

Burgundy Fly – named for the colour, its association with velvet and royalty, and incorporating the colloquial expression "you look fly" – started out with a single store in Soweto.

Nobesuthu prefers not to categorise her customers along standard LSMs. Instead, she describes the women who support the brand as being between the ages of 25 and 65, looking for pieces that are sophisticated without being snobbish.

"Burgundy Fly is for women who are on trend. They want to stand out without being loud or feeling uncomfortable," she points out.

The designers who supply Burgundy Fly are handpicked. "Our business is based on a one-on-one engagement and an intimate relationship with each and every one of our designers. That's because our business model is geared to making designers commercially viable. That's the challenge. But it's certainly doable."

She admits, having the stamina to stick with it when things get really tough and to find creative and alternative ways to respond to business challenges have not been easy. The brand quickly gained traction, and within four years Burgundy Fly had opened a store in Rosebank. A rapid roll-out of five more stores followed.

However, as a tight economy saw consumers' purse strings tightening, the Ndlovu's were forced to shut them again. The biggest blow was closing the doors at the brand's Rosebank store earlier this year.

"We were ambitious when it came to what we thought the brand could do. But things didn't turn out as anticipated, especially in a difficult economy," Nobesuthu explains.

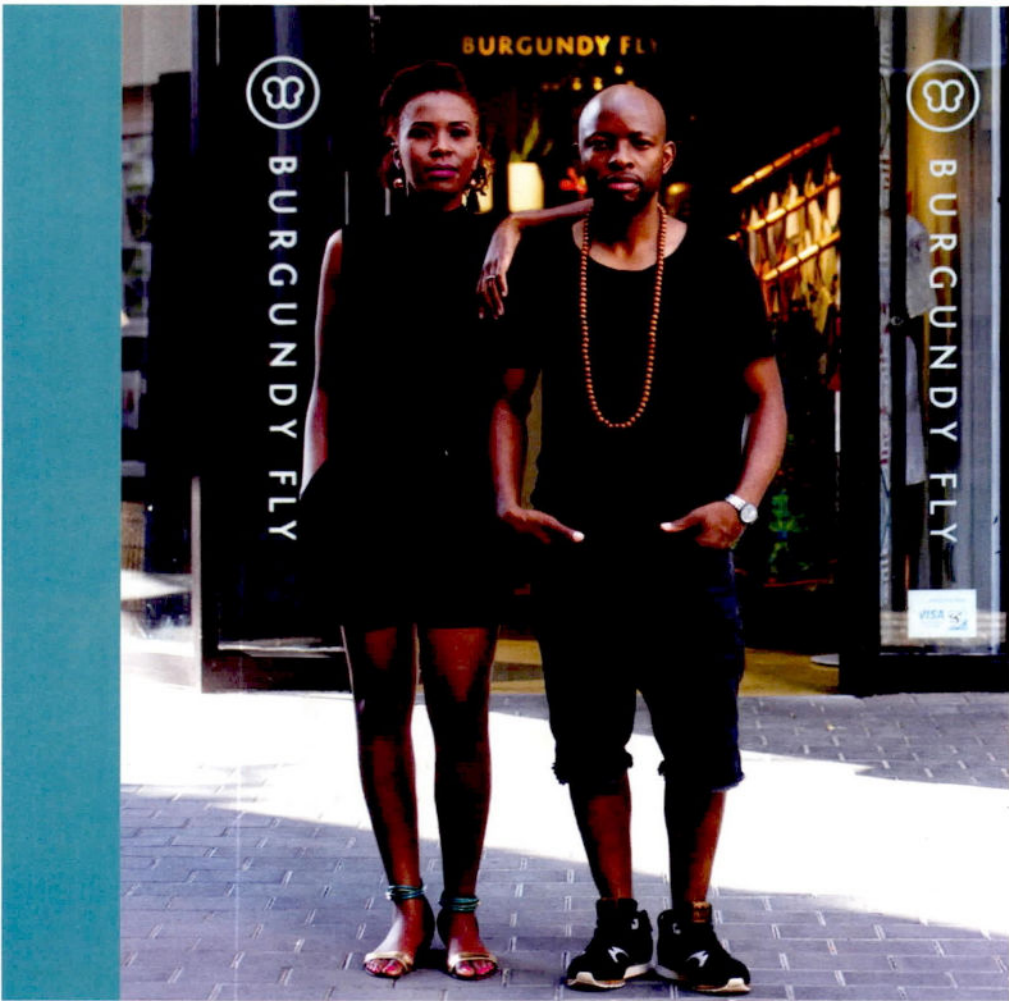
But this wasn't about failure, it was about learning. "We were passionate young entrepreneurs who were highly optimistic. It turned out that opening all those stores was necessary as it transformed the brand from being a mom and pop shop to a company with six stores. It gave us credibility."

It also served as the perfect foundation for the Foschini collaboration.

Both brands share the same ideal – making South African fashion commercially viable and accessible.

a partner that shares that objective with us and can enable mass scale. From the Foschini side, they were looking for a partnership with an authentic local brand. We share the same mindset," she says. Nobesuthu believes there will be significant benefits in working alongside a solid partner with a strong and long track record in retail. She believes Foschini will be a key enabler in realising the broader Burgundy Fly growth strategy.

"It's quite an organic relationship and there's definitely more to come. This is a relationship that is unfolding and geared towards ensuring that everybody benefits. Foschini benefits, we benefit, our designers and our staff benefit. It is an exciting relationship and we are carefully monitoring how it unfolds," she explains.



Initial discussion started in 2016 but didn't go any further until March this year when exciting ideas were put on the table and quickly actioned.

Nobesuthu credits Foschini – where 50% of the summer collection in shops is sourced locally – with completely overturning the cliché of slow corporates where potential partners need to jump through multiple hoops and results are sluggish. All possible roadblocks were quickly swept aside and, in just over a month, the first store in Sandton is up and running. A second has been added in Fourways.

Both are stores within stores in the "Foschini space". The Burgundy Fly brand will remain undiluted and true to itself with Nobesuthu and her designers providing the same sought-after creations, only on a far larger scale.

"Foschini is serious about growing South African brands. We've always been looking for

For Foschini, it will also be the first of many endeavours, uplifting quintessentially South African fashion brands and providing a retail platform for local designers.

Nobesuthu advises, if you have an additional income, save enough money to last you for at least a year. Worrying about how to survive, stands in the way of finding proper and sustainable solutions. She also values a strong support structure, "Keep friends and family very close. Those are the ones who will ground you and help you stay focussed in the toughest of times."

Burgundy Fly is on a mission to empower South African fashion businesses actively and support them through the creation of an ecosystem of thriving entrepreneurs.

