

[Home](#) » [News](#) » FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON

FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON

Written by Sharlene Khan - Tuesday, 14 April 2009



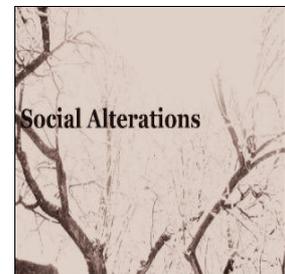
I remember first reading about the South African eco-conscious clothing label **LUNAR** in my monthly Glamour magazine early in 2008 (this is generally as close as I tend to get to the concept of 'glamour'). I vaguely remember a photograph of the designer Karen Ter Morshuizen and being very impressed with a black evening gown that they featured. Embarrassingly, it didn't occur to me then that I had passed their store many times as they were located in a trendy, yuppie ex-mill in Johannesburg called 44 Stanley, which housed ultra-chic lofts, restaurants, a gallery and a variety of furniture and clothing shops. I had even once or twice popped into Lunar's store, which, in keeping with the industrial feel of 44 Stanley seem dominated by grey and cream clothing and raw cement floor. What stuck with me about their clothing on the rails was that their garments seemed to be made for very tall people with very deep wallets.

When I started researching eco-conscious fashion in South Africa and inevitably started with Google, Lunar popped up as the preeminent label in this category. Looking at their summer and winter collections on their website, I was stunned by their elegant designs, their impeccable versatility in using monochromes as well as simple, striking colour, making Afro-urban chic look ultra-glam and more importantly, effortlessly easy. But, of course, it is Lunar's eco-ethics encompassed in every aspect of their design and production that truly sets them apart from other great names. Having started the label in 1995 on her own, Karen Ter Morshuizen's brand appears to have been ahead of its time, and yet, with an ever-growing worry about the state of the planet, it couldn't be more timely.

Karen graciously agreed to an interview, which inspiringly reveals a person whose modus operandi extends beyond work and profits to a lifestyle of eco-awareness.

EFW: Karen, you 'started' the Lunar brand in 1995 selling out of the Bryanston Organic Market in Johannesburg. Was the brand conceptualised as Lunar from its very beginnings, and could you give me a very brief trajectory of sitting in a flea market in 1995 to London Fashion week in 2008?

KTM: Yes it was always Lunar but the styling was never flea market - I was already making veg-dyed linen shirts, dresses etc. back then. Probably not the best introduction for the brand but everyone has to start somewhere. I then ended up making wedding gowns for 7 years, the first client coming from the market. She liked the feeling of the items we were selling and wanted that spirit captured in a wedding dress. After 7 years I was ready for a break and so I started lecturing fashion but I still wanted to keep the brand alive so switched focus to kids' clothes - LUNAR KIDS was the label and we supplied small designer kids' boutiques all over the country. In 2002 we did our first South African fashion week and as a result were offered a much coveted contract with Stuttafords at the time to retail from their Sandton store as part of a SA Designers pilot project (we were grouped with the likes of Jullian and Hip Hop who were very established brands at the time). It was a fantastic marketing opportunity. The same show also got us an agent who represented our brand and sold to boutiques all over SA - at one point we were supplying up to 30 stores - we then decided to give retail a go and opened our first store at 44 Stanley Ave and have never looked back. Our own store allowed us to merchandise and create a much more individual look and showed the brand as it was intended. We have done SA fashion week almost every year since and each year has brought new opportunities. Our first intro to London Fashion Week was as part of a 5 designer group called 'South Africa Unthreaded' which was curated by Adam Levin. Our product was so well received by the British Fashion Council that they recommended us for Estethica (LFW eco arm) and as a result we were invited to pitch for a slot on the very prestigious platform.


 Write for EFW? 
**subscribe to the
efw newsletter
and win!**

 Hand dyed silk/merino scarf
from Eco Napali by TDM
Design.

Email here...

Subscribe


 Connect
to eco
shoppers

 Advertise
with



 For our full media kit
please email
advertising@
ecofashionworld
.com



EFW: You've said that your use of organic material is one of your foremost concerns. Has it been and is it still difficult to source out organic material in South Africa and do you find a wide range of material/styles available?

KTM: This is our biggest challenge. Organic fabrics are very limited in SA as there are only 2 mills I know of that are producing organics. There is more to eco fashion than organics so sourcing naturals produced in SA is also a route we take - SA wools, linens and wild African silks are better than buying imported textiles.

EFW: The rather over-used words like 'flowing', 'elegant' and 'womanly' still eloquently describe your clothing, but other words like 'smooth' and 'free' also come to mind? How would describe your garments?

KTM: I like to describe our collections as natural, understated, contemporary and simple but not boring. I do like 'free' though - I'm a firm believer that your clothes should never squeeze your body in any way. If I could I would design everything without zips or buttons.

EFW: Many people still have the impression that eco-friendly garments are neutral or khaki-coloured, made for bush trekkers, overpriced... But your Summer 08 collection embraced beautifully cut, figure-loving garments, your Winter 08 collection consisted of garments in various teasing shades of grey, elegantly tailored, exuding sophistication. Do you have a philosophy that influences your garment production generally, or specific collections?

KTM: I think those views are widespread and unfortunately the biggest stigma holding eco-fashion back. Yes eco options are more expensive because they cost more to produce right from the farming to the finishing. Cheap clothes mean someone somewhere along the line is not getting a fair price for their work. In terms of our philosophy we try to make desirable cloths in natural colours that seemingly come from the earth - we use natural and eco dyes which will always give you a more natural shade. In terms of an overall look my inspiration always comes from the environment. I have a particular obsession with the Karoo and fynbos ['fine bush' - natural vegetation found in the Cape] so the common thread is most often landscape.

EFW: What was your inspiration for your Summer 2009 collection?

KTM: We used a botanical print of a rare protea, the "blushing bride". This inspired our colour palette, textures and shapes/silhouettes.

EFW: Black doesn't automatically come to mind as a summer item and yet your summer collections still tend to feature a few stunning black garments that are timelessly classic and elegant. Is this something that you consider for every collection?



EFW: Is there a specific garment that embodies all that Lunar stands for, or a favourite garment that you have created?

KTM: There are different ones in different categories but the "African Queen" is a bold evening afro chic statement in sky blue/green and charcoal to imitate a Karoo landscape.

EFW: What does the often used 'afro-chic' term mean to you?

KTM: I enjoy an African spirit in our designs but dislike the stereotyped reference to "Afro Chic". I

think Lunar's designs are very African i.e., they are natural, textured and the colour palette reflects the colours of landscape - why we have to have be put into a traditional African box to create this theme I don't quite get!

EFW: What has been your foremost difficulty in creating and sustaining an 'organic' brand locally, while reaching out to a global audience?

KTM: We are not an organic brand we are an eco and ethical brand. Fabrics are a huge factor as a market in SA. We almost had to look to a global market to sustain the business. SA has largely not woken up to eco options yet, the majority of our client base even in SA is foreign. The South Africans that do buy from us regularly are individuals (creative clients, architects, designers etc.) that buy because they like the aesthetic and the quality, the eco element is often a bonus - these people are not too concerned with following trends and more interested in starting them.

EFW: What advice that you would give to designers interested in 'going organic', as well as for the average consumer who doesn't know where to begin when buying green?

KTM: From a consumer point of view - read labels: some companies sell garments as organic when in reality they are only 5% organic. There is a term for this "green washing" which refers to a lot of PR and marketing around eco but not much follow through! For young designers: research, research, research! It has taken me many years to find organic/eco options that work for me and every designer will have different needs.

 [Email This](#)  [Bookmark](#)  [Set as favorite](#)

Comments (0)

 [Subscribe to this comment's feed](#)

 [Show/Hide comments](#)

Write comment

 [Show/Hide comment form](#)

 [BOOKMARK](#)    ...

[< Prev](#)

[Next >](#)

[Contact](#) [About Us](#) [Advertise](#) [Feedback](#) [Links](#) [Site Map](#) [Archive](#)

beta

