

Phumelela Malinga of By Phume on filling a gap in the fashion market

 By Ruth Cooper

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Phumelela Malinga, the 27-year-old mechanical designer-turned-fashion designer, chats to us about switching gears, founding his androgynous designer apparel brand [By Phume](#) and being invited to be part of the 2020 Design Indaba Emerging Creatives Programme.



Phumelela Malinga - © Lawrence Symonds

■ ***What was the inspiration behind By Phume?***

By Phume is an androgynous designer apparel brand. The inspiration behind the brand is making eye-catching statements using bold design, quality, craftsmanship and colour. The brand originated from the lack of variety in the retail clothing market. Naturally, I saw the gap in the market and set out to fill it.

■ ***How did you transition from mechanical engineer to fashion designer?***

Growing up, I always dreamt of being a Formula 1 driver. However, getting into racing is very expensive and I could never quite get started. The second-best thing was studying mechanical engineering in order to be at least close to the cars.

While I was studying at the University of Pretoria, I really got into modelling and fashion.

“ Design was drilled into my DNA. I found it easy to conceptualise ideas and communicate them to people. This is how I fell in love with fashion design. What really catalysed the transition is how well my designs were received by my peers. ”





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■ ***How would you describe your aesthetic and style when it comes to your designs?***

I am really fascinated by Japanese fashion. I mimic their silhouettes a lot in my designs. But if I summarised the overall aesthetic, it would be hippie/punk.

■ ***Why the decision to focus on an androgynous style of clothing?***

Androgynous fashion is a massive trend. I initially made my designs for the stylish and progressive gent. However, when I launched my initial pieces, the ladies screamed the loudest. I could not ignore them. When I launched the brand, I added androgyny as my fundamental design principle.



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■ ***What have been some of your career highlights?***

Making my first sale was pretty satisfying! My career highlights in the fashion industry include being invited to be part of the Design Indaba Emerging Creatives Programme in 2020. Some of South Africa's most celebrated artists such as Laduma of Maxhosa have been part of that programme. So, for me, it was very encouraging to be considered as a talented creative on such a massive and inspirational platform.

■ ***What advice would you give to aspiring young creatives?***

Own race, own pace! Start small. Develop your craft. Collaborate with your peers. Have fun with it.





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■ ***If you could give a message to your younger self, what would it be?***

Life is lit young blood. Every single day is a blessing. Don't waste it on just anything or with just anyone. Be intentional.

■ ***Where do you see yourself in five years' time?***

Honestly, I'm prepared for my mind to be blown. That's what I am working towards.

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