

Elle Rising Star Design Award embraces Africa

24 August 2015 – From the Mother City to Morocco, finalists in this year's ELLE Rising Star Design Award in association with MRP have embraced the power of 21st-century African fashion and of digital technology, says ELLE Editor Emilie Gambade. Entries for the competition have almost doubled this year, with a surge in entries from the rest of the African continent.

"It has been thrilling to see strong entrants from other African countries embracing the competition and lining up alongside the South African entrants," says Gambade. "There were entries from as far afield as Morocco, Mauritius and Nigeria."

This embodies the vision of revealing strong new African fashion talent to the world – a vision shared by the award's co-sponsors, ELLE and Mr Price (MRP). The sponsors' careful selection of the winner's prizes emphasises this commitment. The winner will receive: R30 000 from MRP to help the winner launch a fashion career; intensive two-week internships with both MRP and ELLE; the opportunity to redesign a predetermined range in collaboration with MRP to be sold in select MRP stores; and the opportunity to show a range at the 2016 ELLE Rising Star Design Awards.

From a strong field of contenders, the judges managed to whittle their selection down to the following eight Finalists: Cara Geach (24) of Cape Peninsula University of Technology; Daisie Jo Grobler (20) of Elizabeth Galloway Academy of Fashion Design, Stellenbosch; Diandra Haupt (27) of LISOF, Pretoria; Alexia Hechter (20) of Elizabeth Galloway Academy of Fashion Design, Stellenbosch; Blünke Janse van Rensburg (21) of Elizabeth Galloway Academy of Fashion Design, Stellenbosch; Bianca Messina (24) of Cape Peninsula University of Technology; Siyabonga Ntini (22) of Durban University of Technology; and Hamza Guelmouss (20) of Morocco's Casa Moda Academy, carrying the flag for the rest of Africa.

"We were excited to see the rise of individual stories and strong personal visions from contestants this year," says Gambade. "Limiting entries to digital seems to have given contestants outside South Africa more confidence to enter. It was fascinating to see how the aspiring designers found creative ways to overcome any challenges to display in a PDF everything from the fabrics to the inspiration of their range.

"They were forced to edit their ranges very carefully before

submission, combining creativity with precision in the way they sketched silhouettes and included fabrics. This emphasised visual story-telling and the cohesion of their collections."

Judges from both South Africa and the rest of the African continent came together to sift out the entries.

"Most of the entries were extremely exciting – what a pool of creativity, and such fresh points of view!" says Joanne Frédéric, Trend Director at MRP and a member of the judging panel. "The finalists we chose shone because of their flair, audacity, skills, love and care."

Finalists are busy preparing four completed sample outfits and four 85%-complete outfits from their ranges, which must all be submitted by 21 September. In addition each finalist will have an opportunity to attend a nine-week online business short course, Get Smarter, offered by the University of Cape Town and valued at R10 000. During this time, they will be empowered through gaining insights on starting and managing a small business, providing them with the business intelligence necessary to be successful in the highly competitive industry.

"This is the chance of a lifetime for aspiring designers to bring to life cherished dreams of their own fashion label," says Frédéric. "It's challenging because each finalist must sew at least 50 percent of their outfits. And, however wonderful their ideas, they may not exceed the funding of R10 000 each provided by MRP to develop their ranges."

"We shall be assessing skills and how the designs have been transformed into reality, as well as the overall coherence and inspiration of the range at the next judging round," says Gambade. "Ultimately, we're looking for creativity, technical skill and style."

All garments will be featured in a fashion shoot for ELLE magazine and also on the ELLE website (www.elle.co.za) from 28 September. Readers' votes for their favourite collection will be presented to the judges before they eliminate two finalists and select the top six. During AFI Africa Fashion Week at Melrose Arch, Johannesburg, on 7 November, all six finalists will present their ranges as they compete to be named the 2015 winner of the ELLE Rising Star Design Award.

Official hashtag: #ELLERisingStar