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AI Overview

Cape Town's fashion history is a blend of 18th-century European elegance, Southeast Asian textiles, and indigenous African influences, evolving into a modern ethical design hub. Historically a "Little Paris" in the 1700s, the city grew into a 20th-century manufacturing powerhouse, now characterized by creative, sustainable designers, the vibrant Kaapse Klopse costumes, and a rich legacy of bespoke tailoring.

18th & 19th Century: Early Influences and Elegance

- "Little Paris" of the South: In the 18th century, Cape Town was known for its luxury, with VOC (Dutch East India Company) elites and wealthy settlers adopting European trends, supported by enslaved labor.
Fabric and Style: Influences included Indonesian and Malaysian textiles, along with Asian silks and cotton.
Early Philanthropy: The Cape Town Clothing Guild, a charity organization that sewed clothes for the needy, was founded in 1889, tracing its roots to England.

20th Century: Manufacturing and Industrialization

- Growth of Industry: Following the 1925 implementation of protective tariffs, the clothing industry in Cape Town grew rapidly, becoming the leading manufacturer of clothing in South Africa.
Key Manufacturers: By the 1930s, factories like Rex Trueform in Salt River (1937) and others in Maitland flourished.
Garment Workers and Tailors: The industry was characterized by a strong culture of sewing, with many Coloured and Malay tailors operating workshops, particularly in the District Six area.
War Effort: During WWII, the clothing industry was a massive employer in the Western Cape.

Cultural and Modern Fashion Identity

- Kaapse Klopse: The annual Cape Town Minstrel Carnival, or Tweede Nuwe Jaar, features flamboyant, brightly colored costumes, blending 19th-century military uniforms, minstrel outfits, and contemporary fashion, acting as a major, living historical fashion expression.
Post-Apartheid Fashion: Since 1994, designers have used fashion to express cultural identity, frequently referencing South Africa's diverse history and promoting ethical, sustainable, and local production.
Contemporary Scene: Modern Cape Town is considered an African fashion capital with a focus on ethical fashion, utilizing local artisans, and supporting the "circular fashion" movement with a rise in vintage and thrift stores.



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