

Clout/SA is transforming creative entrepreneurs to sector-leading businesses

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Having launched in 2020, [Clout/SA](#) is on a mission to transform the South African design landscape and introduce the country's brightest creative talents to the world. But in business, creativity is nothing without nous, which is why Clout/SA has been helping designers to master the basics.



Tracy Lynch, creative director at Clout/SA. Image supplied

It's this gap in creatives' knowledge that Clout/SA, a purpose-driven creative agency and business-to-business market maker, is successfully filling.

"The promotion of South Africa's creativity, craftsmanship and heritage, as well as the creation of opportunities for collaboration between designers and makers, is at the centre of what Clout/SA does," says Tracy Lynch, creative director at Clout/SA.

Local goes global

The purpose-first creative agency's founding project was the Nando's Design Programme, and the latest is the Nando's Portal to Africa, an online shopping platform for designer furniture that has facilitated more than R80m worth of sales across 25,900 products since it was launched in 2018, making it one of the country's largest exporters of South African design.

Clout/SA has developed and facilitated one of South Africa's top design competitions, the [Nando's Hot Young Designer Talent Search](#).



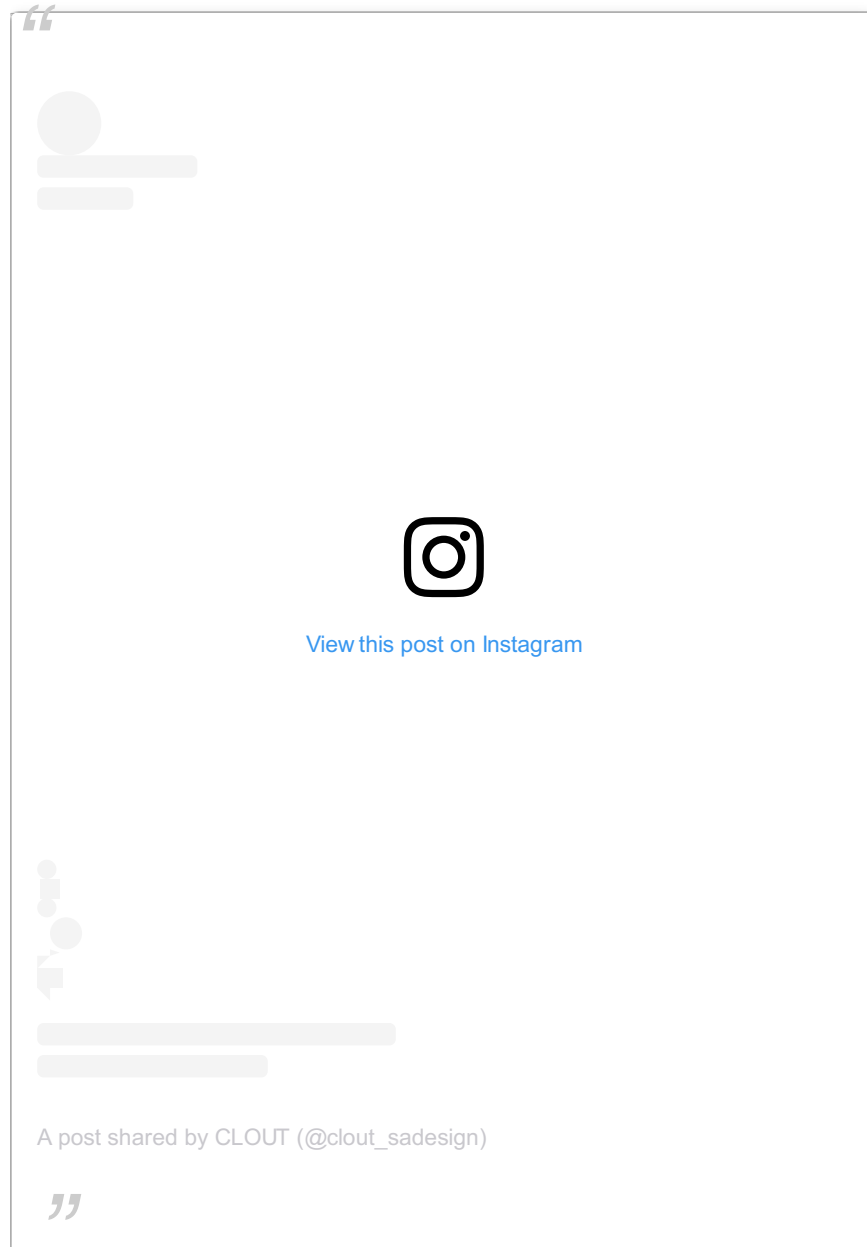
Durban design duo triumphs in Nando's Hot Young Designer search

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"Our design programme was seeded in the Nando's world, an incredibly visionary, proudly South African brand with stores across the globe. Local South African design is procured from our online platform and showcased in Nando's restaurants around the world," notes Lynch.

[Clout/SA](#) also shares creatives' stories and products on their social media platforms, and in addition curates local showcases at global design shows, including the Milan Furniture Fair.



Lynch adds, "We have plans to showcase on additional global platforms and are currently working on an exciting project that will be an excellent opportunity for our designers in the USA, but this project will only be revealed once completed."

The creative industry's impact on the economy

The creative industry generates dignified employment for many skilled makers, and links craft skills with contemporary furniture and lighting manufacturing processes. Creatives are innovators, and their resilience and commitment to this sector encourages a very positive opportunity for self-employment and the preservation of craft and manufacture in South Africa.

"The design sector gives a voice to young entrepreneurs and encourages businesses in South Africa to invest in local talent and innovation. Investing in the South African design sector awakens an authentic South African heartbeat and allows

people to experience and share the meaningful South African stories ingrained in every piece of design. Design is a visual language, and its solution-seeking focus gives us hope and builds confidence in what's possible for a future generation of entrepreneurs," remarks Lynch.

Business mentorship

An understanding of the business world is key, no matter what industry you're in. It's this gap in designers' knowledge that Clout/SA is successfully filling, as managing executive Nokuzola Jenness explains: "We recognised that many of [the designers we work with] have incredible creative talents, but they were missing foundational business principles and practices."

This led to the development of a business mentorship programme, which kicked off in 2019, in partnership with Enterprise Room, a business management consultancy. Participants receive on-site training, before embarking on an ongoing off-site training programme that includes being allocated mentors to help with finances, production and other aspects of running a successful business.



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Mpho Vackier, founder of award-winning furniture design brand TheUrbanative, says the programme helped her realise "that I am both a creative director and a business owner, and I have to wear both these hats". She says that the support she received helped her look at TheUrbanative as a business, because "you can't become a household brand if nobody's buying and they're just oohing and aahing; you can't pay [bills] with oohs and aahs".

Learning that she had to outsource the finance and marketing arms of her business was a key lesson for Bonolo Chepape, who took part in the mentorship programme after winning a spot as one of the Top 10 finalists in the 2018 Nando's Hot Young Designer Talent Search.

A textile designer by training, and a self-described multidisciplinary creative, Chepape founded Lulasclan, a textile and homeware brand, in 2016.

"For an entrepreneur, you're initially doing everything yourself. But now, as things have developed, I've been able to identify opportunities to outsource some of these departments within the business, so I can rather focus on product and clients," she says.

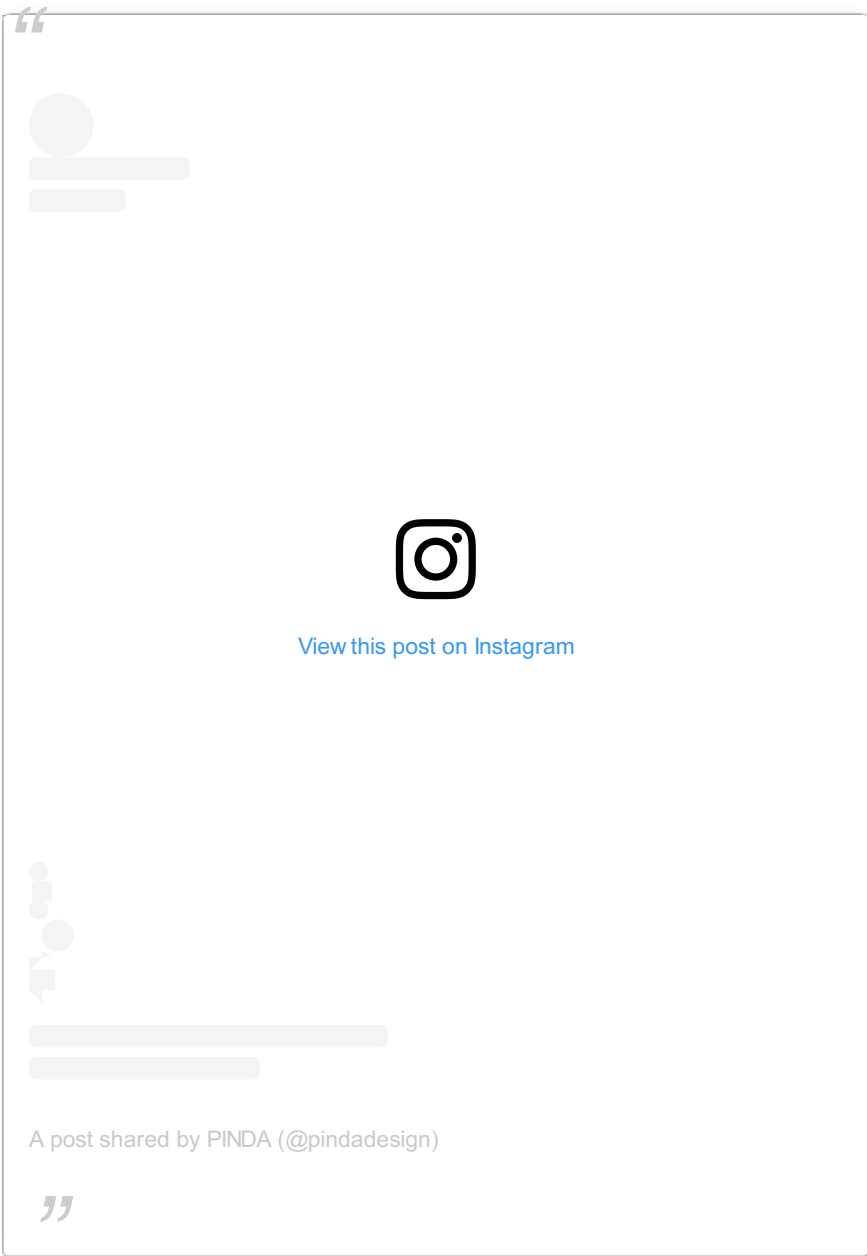
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For Siyanda Mbele, owner of Pinda Design, an interior design business and furniture design brand, the business lessons from the mentorship were a catalyst towards shifting his business offering. "When I started on the programme, my business was mostly product design, whereas now I've pivoted more towards providing a service offering as an interior designer, because I realise that the interior design service I was providing was far more profitable for the business," he says.



Bringing creative businesses to the fore

Clout/SA continues to create opportunities for designers and facilitate opportunities for corporate companies to support and collaborate with South African designers.

Adds Lynch, "A big part of what we do is about being able to recognise which Hot Young Designer finalists could deliver on specific opportunities, and then initiating collaborations and partnerships - recognising which designer-makers in our community of designers represented on the Nando's portal would be well suited to collaborate with one of the young designers."

The Hot Young Designer competition was founded to draw out new talent and to specifically focus on bringing opportunities to young Black designers in South Africa. The talent is there, and many have the necessary skill sets. What they don't have access to are commercial opportunities, funding for prototyping, and practical mentorship from skilled established makers.

Finding innovative ways to link young Black designers to creative and commercial opportunities that are income-generating is key if we are to create an inclusive design sector. It needs to be a conscious focus if we are to shift the status quo.



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Clout/SA has facilitated, directed and managed a successful and sustainable growth-focused partnership with Nando's and South African design over the last three years. During this time, they have created a network of support, helped shape a community, and built a reputation within the South African design and manufacturing sector as ambassadors and market access facilitators.

"Our ability to source, curate, mentor and bring to life new work by emerging South African designers with the intention of supporting these entrepreneurs to create sustainable businesses lies at the heart of our purpose-first business.

"In addition, our purpose is the facilitation of opportunities for collaboration between designer-makers and hospitality, retail and corporate clients that are wanting to deliver design-led interior solutions working exclusively with South African partners. Our goal is to garner local and global recognition for South African design and promote the sector as a category brand.

"Empowering creative economies focused on furniture, pattern and lighting design, and the production of these designer items in South Africa, is at the heart of our purpose-led business," concludes Lynch.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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