



# Lighting SA Fashion Week

Under a white pitched marquee on what was then Sandton Square and with just ten collections on the ramp, SA Fashion Week (SAFW) 1997 overnight became the premier and most talked about fashion event in this country; and this without the benefit of social media. For the first time South African fashion had been presented under one roof, impacting the country's entire fashion industry by bringing together designers and consumers. As showcased, it also led the way in which local fashion was to be presented. Paul Pamboukian has designed the set and lighting for all 21 SAFW Collections to date and in this article, Anthony Tischhauser tells us what is involved in this challenging task.

Asked about the lighting of SAFW, Director Lucilla Booyzen said: "Lighting is fundamental to creating beauty and making the audience feel safe and comfortable so that viewers see what you want them to see."

However, while lighting fashion in a studio is a task on its own; lighting fashion on a ramp is a story of constraints. Fashion on the ramp wants to be lit as in a fashion shoot; in essence, it is all about achieving the 'perfect image.'

The ideal space for viewing fashion is in a black box, like a photographer's studio, that permits full control of applied light in order to achieve the

'perfect image.' In planning the lighting of a fashion presentation, therefore, three factors have to be considered:

- First and foremost, lighting on the ramp has to be camera-friendly to guarantee a photographic, video or film image that is of exceptional quality for transmission to top class publications and TV studios worldwide.
- Secondly, the show needs to be an optimal vehicle for live viewing of the collection.
- Thirdly, the production and operation of the lighting need to be well rehearsed and seamless in execution.

A white ramp or set gives a lighter and more diffused feel and is generally used for Summer Collections.



All photographs by Ivan Naude and published courtesy of SA Fashion Week.

1. Sandton Square 1999 – Sister Bucks • 2. Great Synagogue 2005 – Clive Rundle  
3. Sandton Convention Centre 2006 – Clive Rundle • 4. Shine Studios 2011 Summer Collections – Lunar

The dark ramp or set allows isolation and stark contrast. Profile spot-lights enable one to shutter off and frame the ramp so that there is virtually no spill into the auditorium.



5. Sandton Convention Centre 2008 Summer Collections – Black Coffee • 6. Sandton Convention Centre 2008 Summer Collections – Earthquake • 7. Turbine Hall 2009 Winter Collections – Guillotine • 8. Crowne Plaza – The Rosebank Hotel 2011 Winter Collections – Colleen Eitzen • 9. Arts on Main 2011 Winter Collections – Clive Rundle

The palette is white light and shades of white. With light, the atmosphere of the venue is determined. The different moods result in a unique type of theatre, from the preamble before the show to when the music strikes and the lights fade up on the sparkling models in their designer garments. The front row audience is granted optimal viewing. They are separated from the models on the ramp only by the cut-off of the light. This is theatre, not only for the fashion press and buyers. The emphasis is on the clothes, where every detail in cut and stitch should be easily visible and the colours, crisp and clear. Individual designer ranges may

require the application of colour, projection, gobo effect, and differing lighting angles to emphasise the drama of the particular Collection. When the models reach the end of the ramp they switch to a pose or gesture for the benefit of the photographers and videographers clustered on a rostrum at the end of the ramp, jostling for the perfect shot that will find its way into the local and international fashion media.

This, in essence is what is going to give the Collection exposure and commercial value. It is the singular opportunity to capture the show in the 'right light' and launch it into the new season.

Projections with break-up gobos and the use of more saturated colour give theatrical mood and drama to the individual show.



10. Sandton Square 1998 – Nicola Freinkel • 11. Great Synagogue 2005 – Stoned Cherrie  
12. Great Synagogue 2005 – Clive Rundle • 13. Crowne Plaza – The Rosebank Hotel 2012 Summer Collections – Clive Rundle

The set is designed with lights integrated into the backdrop to give a particular lighting effect.



15. Sandton Square 1999 – Xuli Bet • 16. Sandton Convention Centre 2000 – Paul Munro  
17. Sandton Convention Centre 2001 – Black Coffee • 18. Turbine Hall 2009 Summer Collections – Clive Rundle  
19. Crowne Plaza – The Rosebank Hotel 2011 Winter Collections – Ephymol

For each season, SAFW provides designers with a different back-drop setting, with a particular atmosphere brought to life through light. Backdrops need to be neutral but at the same time appealing and impressive to establish the manner in which models enter and exit the ramp. The camera does not want to pick up too much visual activity behind the model which may conflict with particular garments. However, for the live aspect of the show, the set needs to provide interest and variety. Backdrops are sometimes black to absorb bounce light or define distinction or the whole set and ramp is white, to provide brightness and diffusion.

The entrance onto the ramp has its own proportions to establish a sense of space and depth-of-field. The ramp is the major element of the composition and it may be raised or flush with the floor, purposely covered in a light absorbing, deliberately reflective or coloured material. It contrasts, highlights or softens the model to create illusion, sparkle or a graphic statement. Light picks out the message. The set is conceived to be modified so that each consecutive day has its own specific feel and character. Critical to the 'look' is the control of shadow – shadow has to be avoided under the noses and chins of the models. This is controlled by the position and angle of the spotlights over the ramp. The lights are focused to illuminate the models, as close to a 45 degree angle as possible. Different venues with different heights create unique challenges in this regard.

The first two seasons on the Square were lit by PAR 64 1000W parabolic canister (parcan) reflector lamps with differing beam angles placed in selected positions in the marquee. The first shows were lit with 24 of these luminaires with their warm colour-temperature; colour-corrected by means of colour

correction filters to 'daylight.' For the next season, a ground-support-system, single truss and a row of parcans over the axis of the ramp were installed. Moving to Sandton Convention Centre (2000-2008), to accommodate the increasing number of designer collections and growing crowds, came the opportunity to blackout the space entirely, creating virtually ideal conditions. With sufficient height, the trusses were suspended from the concrete ceiling and a second row of lights introduced. ETC Source 4 and Philips Selecon theatre profile spotlights were also used which allowed the ramp to be framed accurately and to control definition and light spill. Doubling the number of fittings gave more intensity which allowed for a clearer and precise definition of subject.

Models are lit from either side, diminishing shadow and adding brilliance to their faces and dress. These lights too have to be minimally colour-corrected with filters to achieve 'daylight.' The lights are circuited in pairs and can be individually dimmed. Mood and effect are achieved via lighting 'dissolves' through theatrical gauze backdrops, silhouettes on backing cyclormas, washes of colour and intense backlighting techniques. Lighting equipment requires sufficient space for angle and throw, not to mention proper support for the suspension systems. Staging SA Fashion Week in different architectural environments for atmospheric reasons often has posed real challenges to the set and achieving the 'right light.'

Crowne Plaza – The Rosebank Hotel 2012 Summer Collections – Stoned Cherrie

