

Courtney Hodgson chats founding quirky SA brand Kiffkak

 By Ruth Cooper

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Twenty-two-year-old Courtney Hodgson chats about founding [Kiffkak](#) - a tongue-in-cheek, proudly South African apparel and product range - at such a young age, winning a Loerie and her advice for aspiring creatives.



Courtney Hodgson

What was the inspiration behind Kiffkak?

Growing up as the only white person in a school in Crystal Park, my passion for other cultures grew from a very young age. Before every formal school event, braiding my hair in cornrows was a must! Moving to a school in Benoni later on, the unique humour we have as South Africans (especially when making a small town like Benoni the brunt of our jokes) became a big part of my creative outlook on life. Going to varsity in Pretoria, surrounded by Afrikaans culture, I quickly realised that I don't identify with any single culture; at the core of it, I'm a South African. As a young creative, South African culture has truly become my biggest inspiration. We have such an amazing mix of people in this country, all working and living together to create the ultimate ubuntu! I started my business Kiffkak to represent just that – presented through a wide range of proudly South African products.

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

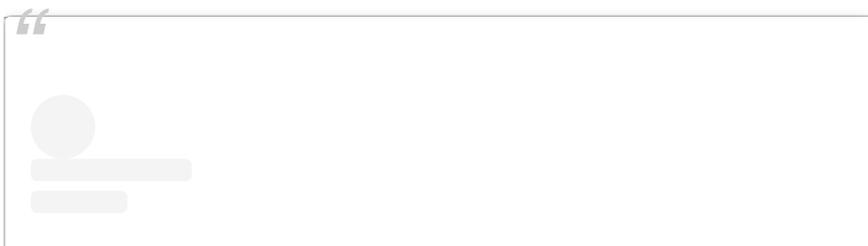
The use of South African slang, the spirit of our cultures and communities and my unique sense of humour all play a major role in my work. A lot of the products I create rely heavily on the use of typography. In these instances, my typographical work is heavily inspired by the hand-painted letterforms that can be found on signage in township areas. When using imagery for my products, I try to include a quirky, childlike, nostalgic quality in my illustrations. With a lot of the products I create (such as the Kiffkak lucky packet, enamel mugs, iron-ons and sticker book) I am trying to bring back those products that we used to engage with as children. Who says you can't still make fun purchases when you're all grown up? If Kiffkak can bring that nostalgic feeling – along with a little giggle and smile – to a South African's day, that's a pretty *lekker* thing!





■ **What has the response been like since launching?**

I'm sure that every business owner would share a similar sentiment, but I truly have the 'kiffest' customers! Besides the odd 'tannie' and 'ouma' who get offended by the name (and some of the colourful language on the products), the response from my fellow South Africans has been nothing but encouraging! When people see the Kiffkak stand at the markets that I do, there is usually a specific series of reactions that follow: 1) a pointed finger at the name, 2) a big smile and giggle, 3) the sentence "Kiffkak!? That is so South African!" If Kiffkak can continue to make people smile, laugh and celebrate South Africa – then I know that the brand is headed in the right direction.





[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Kiffkak (@kiff_kak)



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

To date, some of my career highlights have been the following:

- Winning a silver Loerie award for the Kiffkak brand identity
- Ranking fifth-best creative student in Africa and the Middle East (according to the Loeries 2019 official rankings)
- Becoming a Design Indaba Emerging Creative in 2020, where I got to showcase the Kiffkak product range in Cape Town
- Getting invited to talk about the brand on The Home Channel show *Africa Modern*.
- And being interviewed for an article in *The Sunday Times*, where Kiffkak was referred to as "the quirkiest local brand you'll ever find."

I would also have to add that every single time someone places an order, my heart does a little happy dance. Without the customers that have supported the brand, Kiffkak would not be able to continue growing. Every new order is not only a career highlight but also a highlight of my day as well!

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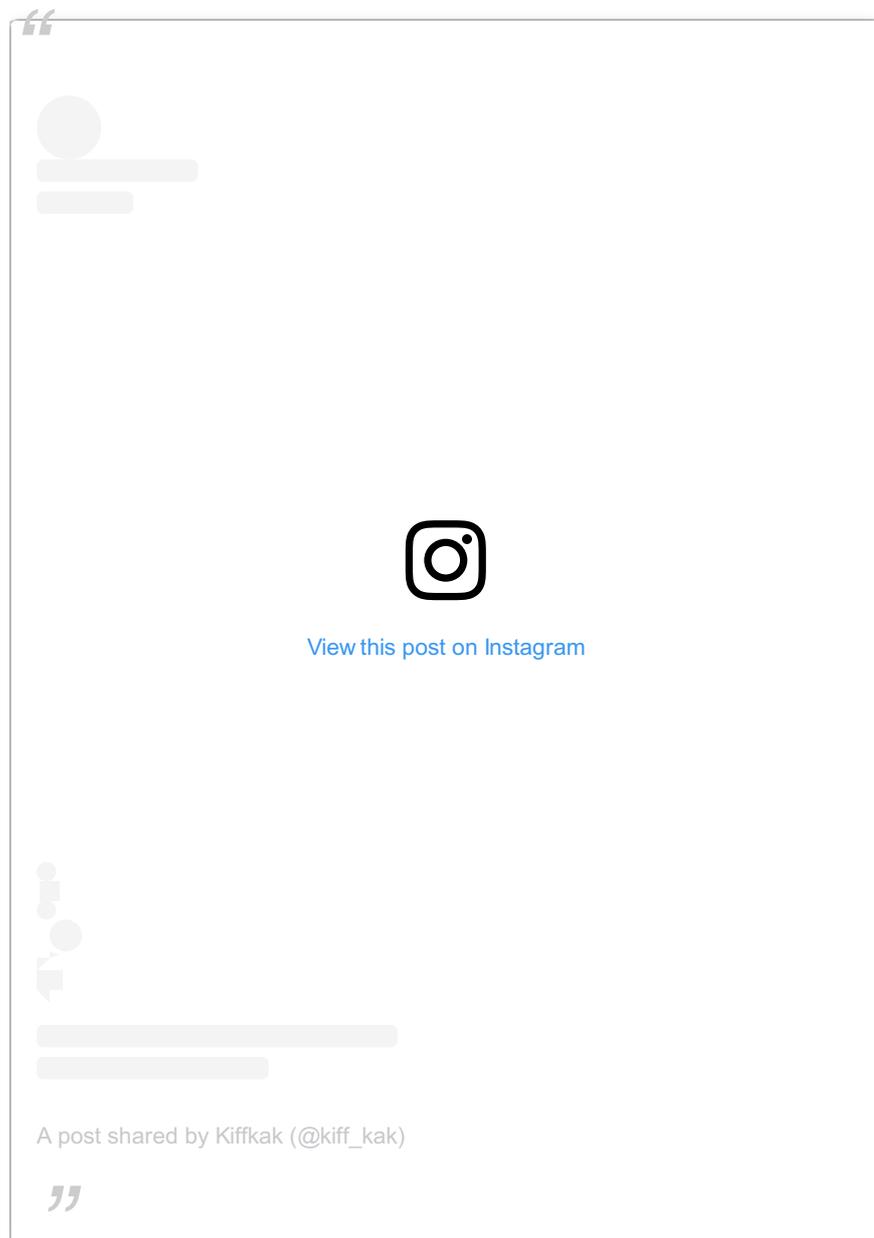


■ **Can you tell us more about your plans for expanding the brand to Kiffkak Cares and Kiffkak Collabs?**

A little background for those who may not be familiar with the business structure, I plan to grow in the coming years: Kiffkak, at its core, is a celebration of South African culture. The long-term dream is to open up a chain of Kiffkak stores in South Africa that directly serve the local market by providing access to proudly South African gifts and merchandise while helping communities and aiding job creation within the BBBEE spectrum. The plan is to have three distinct sections in each store, namely Kiffkak Cares, Kiffkak Collabs and the Kiffkak product range.

Kiffkak Collabs will serve as a monthly initiative where an up-and-coming South African creative will have the opportunity to work with the brand to create a selection of products that will be sold in Kiffkak stores. Often the same (already well-established) creatives are chosen to work with South African brands. Because of this, it becomes increasingly difficult for young creatives that are trying to establish themselves to break into the industry. Kiffkak Collabs will hopefully bridge this gap by helping unestablished creatives get their name out there. Kiffkak Cares aims to serve South African communities. South Africa has a large thriving informal economy (particularly within the scope of the arts and crafts) that provides many opportunities to unemployed entrepreneurs. When Kiffkak isn't working to bridge the gap between the informal and formal

sector by selling these goods in the store (and giving all the profits back to the communities where the products come from), I will be creating products that are specifically made to raise funds for local NPOs.



Because both Kiffkak Cares and Kiffkak Collabs rely heavily on having a physical Kiffkak store in place, these business models are mostly in the planning stages. I am, however, extremely excited to announce that Kiffkak Collabs' first-ever project "Lekka Lunchboxes" is being released at the end of June! Kiffkak has partnered with the amazing NPO Ladles of Love to raise funds for their Munch Club school feeding scheme initiative. Kiffkak will be releasing three individual lunch box designs for this project and, for every lunchbox sold, a portion will be donated to Ladles of Love.

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

My biggest piece of advice to young creatives would be: Never discount the importance of celebrating your own story through your art. Personally, the reflection of one's story always draws me to a creative's work. By presenting an unapologetic, unique perspective on how you see the world – your personality is really able to shine through, solidifying what you can offer as a brand. There are so many eclectic mixes of people in South Africa, and so many personal stories yet to be told. When it comes to owning a brand (whether your brand is you as an artist or something you start like Kiffkak), something I have found is that people are much more likely to become invested in your craft when they also have a story to invest in.

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

Because I am only 22, I am sure there are a lot more lessons to come. But If I had to give my younger self some advice from where I sit today, it would be the following:

- Always be ready to lend a helping hand, but don't overextend yourself and neglect your own dreams in the process.
- Stop worrying about what everyone thinks. They're all too concerned about the same thing to notice what you're doing.
- A handful of good friends is better than a collection of acquaintances. Friendships are about quality, not quantity. Surround yourself with like-minded goal-orientated people, it will only make you more comfortable and motivated to succeed.
- And above all, don't be kak – be kiff.

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

In five years' time, I would love for Kiffkak to be a household name! In order to achieve that, I hope that the next few years allow the dream of having Kiffkak stores around South Africa to be realised. Along with having stores, I hope that in five years Kiffkak is making a significant contribution to South African NPOs, creating jobs in the BBBEE spectrum, helping young creatives get their names out there and allowing entrepreneurs from rural areas to sell their goods and help their communities thrive.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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