

Joyful and inclusive SA-made fashion courtesy of Me & B

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Betina Swart and Kelly-Grace Gibberd form the delightful mom and daughter duo behind South African fashion label Me & B.



Me & B founders Betina Swart and Kelly-Grace Gibberd. Source: Supplied

Both coming from a fashion production and retail background, Gibberd and Swart saw a gap in the market for well-made, fashion-forward and proudly South African apparel that is size-inclusive. So, with daughter as head of brand and mom as head of design and production, the pair developed their own brand with the help of female entrepreneurs and suppliers from Cape Town and surrounds, and brought Me & B to life.

The label is driven by the belief that fashion should be inclusive, ageless and size less, and therefore caters to shoppers from sizes 32 to 46. Gibberd and Swart's joyful and positive attitudes are clearly reflected in Me & B designs, with bright colours, interesting prints and bold shapes the order of the day.



Source: Supplied

Having launched as a purely online brand in 2018, the founders have just opened the doors to their first store at 44 Stanley Avenue in Johannesburg, marking a new phase of growth for Me & B.

We caught up with Gibberd to discuss the inspiration behind the brand, the technicalities of production, and plans for the future.

■ ***What inspired the launch of your own clothing label?***

Like many other small business owners, our label was inspired by personal experience. We are not size 34s ourselves and we just found that every time we went to the mall we would struggle to find clothes that let us feel seen in the bodies we have, let alone express our personalities.

We knew there must be other women who feel the same way or who have had a similar experience. This was confirmed after having spoken to friends and engaging with our respective communities.

We knew there was something missing in the marketplace, and we wanted to address that gap. We also want to make fashion *fun* again!



Source: Supplied

■ ***As a brand that's championing inclusive fashion, was this a conscious decision from the start or a reaction to demand from your customers?***

This was a conscious decision from the onset. The power of fashion and how it influences how we feel about ourselves is a well-documented topic. According to Prof. Carolyn Mair PhD, a behavioural psychologist and author of *The Psychology of Fashion*, when we feel good in what we are wearing, we tend to be more confident which in turn impacts our wellbeing.

The inclusive size curve 32 to 46 was a conscious decision right from the start (I mean we wanted to wear everything). We wanted to make that feeling of confidence and fun that fashion gives you, accessible to every body shape!

■ ***Are there any particular complexities that come with producing garments in an extensive range of sizes? How do you manage this?***

Well, the cost of going through the grading process is a lot higher – you pay for every size you include. So having our eight different sizes for a small brand was a bit like starting on the back foot. But once we had such a positive reaction we knew there was opportunity.

In terms of the design process, it is all about comfort – something that fits a size 32 has to fit comfortably on a size 46. We make up a size 32 and a size 44 before going into production, and these are fitted on both a size 34 and a 44 size model – the feedback from those sessions is invaluable.

■ ***Congrats on your first Me & B store. What inspired the development?***

Thank you very much! We are so excited. While we are based in Cape Town, we know that women around the country have the same challenges, so we felt it was time to open in Johannesburg.

Of course, during Covid-19, being online was so important and the preferable platform with the need for low touch engagement. It was incredible to see the support of local brands during that time. However, now that we can finally see a silver lining as the country's vaccination rollout gains traction, we wanted to scale and grow.

The incredible space at 44 Stanley Avenue in Johannesburg became vacant and we jumped at the opportunity. We understand that finding high-quality, inclusive fashion no matter your size or age is something women across the country look for and of course Gauteng was the next big destination.

■ ***What value do you believe lies in physical retail, which online may not adequately address?***

I don't think it's a case of one platform addressing the retail experience better than the other necessarily but there are different benefits to each experience.

Online shopping is convenient and of course, was the safer option during the lockdown periods. With that said, there is something special about going with a friend or your mom or sister to a store to browse and try on clothes to model for each other. We love that experience as mother and daughter ourselves and wanted to create that space for our customers.

■ ***How do you think South Africans can be encouraged to shop more locally-made fashion?***

I think South Africans are already inclined to support local but a way to entice them further is to show the impact their support has. I think it's important to showcase how shopping locally improves people's lives and in turn their communities. For example, the women who we have worked with – local entrepreneurs and factory owners – have seen their own businesses thrive as a result of working with us.



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■ ***Me & B has actively sought out female entrepreneurs in Cape Town to work with in creating the Me & B offering. Can you tell us more about this and why it was a focus area for you?***

As women who run a small business, we know how challenging it can be and we wanted to support and empower other women.

We also believe that diversity drives innovation and of course women from different backgrounds with different retail experiences could help us create this brand journey authentically.

■ ***How would you like to see Me & B grow and/or evolve over the coming years?***

Of course, we are hoping to grow to become a household name associated with inclusivity, high quality, and style. However, we also believe in doing things properly which means getting the store here in Johannesburg up and running. Once we have accomplished that, we plan to expand further with a store in all of the country's major cities. It just must be the right space and make sense for the business.

Of course, we also plan to grow our online sales as e-commerce continues to gain traction amongst South African consumers.

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