

Get to know Katlego Tshuma: Nando's HYD Talent Search 2020 winner

Katlego Tshuma's standout Sangu bench design [earned him the overall prize](#) in the 2020 Nando's Hot Young Designer (HYD) Talent Search, an annual competition that aims to unearth new local talent.



Katlego Tshuma

Here's what the up-and-coming designer had to say about his process, what design means to him, and his plans for the future.

Tell us a bit about your background?

I am a self-taught, multidisciplinary conceptual artist with an emphasis on design as a vehicle for driving ideas, solutions, conversation and messaging in public and private spaces.

I started my creative career in 2013 after quitting my job at the airport and taking up photography. Six months later, I published my first body of work, titled: *Seeds, A Township Monologue*.

While working on *Seeds*, I launched and ran Shots011.com between 2015 and 2018. This was a photography website geared towards helping emerging artists navigate the South African art industry, which I closed down after moving into the advertising space.

In advertising, I worked on The Market Photo workshop, Corium Skincare, Telkom, Vodacom, Mondelez and other well-established brands, and with agencies such as Wunderman Thompson and Joe Public as an art director, motion graphics designer and 3D artist.

Why did you become a designer?

“I enjoy problem-solving. I think creativity is all about problem-solving and through design, I get to play with problems and solutions by seeking new and innovative ways to solve everyday problems.”



What design projects have you worked on previously?

The Sangu Bench is the first product/furniture design project I have worked on. Before that, I worked in the advertising industry.

What motivated you to enter the Nando's HYD 2020 competition?

It was an open call to someone who could solve a problem and who could do it well enough in a competition space. That was what was important to me, to show the rest of the world how well I can solve problems. So, when I saw the brief and what it entailed, I was certain I could give it a go.

What was your inspiration behind the winning Sangu bench?

Being Tsonga myself, I wanted to show my heritage and who I am. Sangu is the Xitsonga name given to the traditional African grass mat. The Sangu Bench is inspired by the organic forms found in the movement and shape of traditional African grass mats, which are used across various African cultures as carpets, mats, screens and room dividers.”

What was your favourite moment during the entire experience, from being listed as a finalist, to participating in the finalists' workshop hosted by Nando's, to being announced as the winner?

Before the winner's announcement in Johannesburg, the finalists were booked into The Home Suite Hotel in Rosebank and we spent the night there. That was my best experience. Being in a space with such a high standard of design solidified my conviction that I could tackle furniture and product design and I was excited that Nando's would be a stepping stone in helping me achieve that.

How did you feel when you were announced as the winner?

By the time I was announced as the overall winner, I realised that I just had a lot of homework to do. I had to now start figuring out how the bench would become a reality.

I am glad that Nando's will be holding my hand through that process through their business development programme and mentorship, which will help in ultimately prototyping the Sangu Bench and making it a reality.



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What advice would you give to other young, aspiring designers?

This is a hard question to answer since this was my first design project and being a young, aspiring designer myself, all I can say is: design isn't art. It's problem-solving. So, start learning as many skills and tools as you can to create authentic and innovative solutions. Do not limit yourself to the knowledge you acquire at school or in your specific industry. Venture into other industries and see how they are solving problems and then bring that back into your design process.

The best course I did that shaped my understanding of the design process was a free course on edx.com offered by Harvard called The Architectural Imagination. It is by far the most important piece of problem-solving knowledge I have acquired, and to this day it continually shapes how I think about problems and how to find novel or innovative solutions to those problems.

What would your dream design project be?

The ideal design project doesn't exist since every problem is unique to itself. What I do dream about though is running a business such as Ideo, Frog Design or Fahrenheit 212. I think these companies have pushed what design is and what design-thinking can do in helping shape businesses, the world and the products we interact with on a day-to-day basis.

I would, of course, like to work in certain industries such as architecture, building modular homes and restaurants, interior

and product design, or working in the customer experience space designing user and customer experiences.

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