

THE NEW FACE OF BEAUTY

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> FOR HER GENDER NONCONFORMING ADVOCACY, TSHIAMO MODISANE IS OUR WOMAN OF THE YEAR IN FASHION & BEAUTY

An unexpectedly boisterous laugh fills the set. The origin of the commotion can be traced to the back of the studio, where the hair and makeup stations have been set up. Wrapped in a white robe with “Tshiamo” embroidered on the back is the source of the joyous noise.

Celebrity stylist and beauty ambassador Tshiamo Modisane began her climb to stardom in the fashion closets of True Love and Move magazines before joining The Citizen newspaper as a lifestyle reporter. Having received countless accolades — and with many more to follow, doubtlessly — Modisane is intentional about striking gold in everything that she can set her well-manicured hands to.

As a youngster in Daveyton township, Modisane was determined to make the best of herself. She used fashion as her all-access card to a world of colour and limitless boundaries, a world far away from her reality then. “I sought a life that was larger than my own,” she says.

“Growing up, I always knew I was different. I used to do my mom’s hair and makeup.

My mom was a real-life doll. I would get her dressed and style her hair. In a way, fashion gave me that nod of acceptance to be fully expressive, without any concerns.”

Surrounded by impeccably stylish and larger-than-life role models in her family, Modisane lapped up the lessons in personal style and demeanour.

“What I picked up from both sides of the family is that fashion and style and clothes are places of fun. My grandfather’s friends used to call him ‘Can’t Get’, because some of the stuff he wore you just couldn’t get,” she says. “And my grandmother was such a pure lady. She introduced me to the world of sophistication — of how a lady should look and present herself.

“Because I was brought up in a family where people wore the clothes and not the other way around, I embody that attitude, and it has become my persona. Whatever I am wearing must be well executed and carried out to its best. It [the outfit] looks good because it is on me,” she says.

“My mother taught me at a young age that you should never look like your frustrations,

and that is something I do to this day. I always tell people that, on the days when I look jaw-dropping, you must know that I’m going through the biggest hurdle ever,” she says jokingly.

As recognition of her contribution to the industry grew, Modisane’s brand scaled new heights. In 2019, she became the first non-gender influencer to partner with beauty brand Lux. Last year, she made her acting debut portraying a non-binary character in the SABC1 series African Dreams, and earlier this year she appeared in the e.tv soapie House of Zwide.

But her fame is not coincidental, nor has she been an overnight success. “Everything I’ve done has been intentional. I consistently push myself.. When I started styling, I made sure that I ticked all the boxes and would present the best of the best. When people speak of me, I want them to speak of my work rather than of me as a person. I never set out to be famous for the fame. Before Instagram, people knew of me because of my work. If Instagram were to die, I would still have a career. Styling is my craft and what I bring to the industry. It mustn’t just be ‘Oh, Tshiamo, that stylist.’ It must be ‘Tshiamo, the stylist.’”