

SOMEONE TO WATCH

Fashion's new darling is a 24-year-old Capetonian called Errol Arendz. His dramatic dresses are seen in all the best places, and even copied, which is the surest sign of success. His isn't a rags to riches story but it is a tale of sheer persistence, the triumph over prejudice of a talent which couldn't be kept under wraps

ERROL ARENDZ has the look of someone who has definitely arrived. But the sumptuous, tented salon still smells of new paint, the venture is in its infancy and Errol is the first to say that this is only the beginning.

It's actually the end of many beginnings. When a child in Cape Town he loved designing fashions but it was only at the age of 17 that he decided to try and do something about it. Gathering his courage (and his sketchbooks) he went to Johannesburg to see Ivor Kirsten who runs a school of dress design. Mr Kirsten was impressed with his efforts, but as his school was not multiracial, took Errol on as a private pupil.

On completing the course, Errol came home and had to search desperately for a job. Finally he took a position at a factory making children's wear. 'It was hell,' he said, 'because my designs were basically so adult and the garments came out looking as though they were designed for midgets.' After two months he gave this up and decided to try and make a collection of his own. Without capital he had to use cheap materials. 'The styles were very wild,' he admits. 'In those days I just let my imagination run crazy and created totally unwearable garments.' But in spite of this the collection had an enthusiastic reception when he took it on tour with six models for charity showings to the coloured communities in Cape Town, Mossel Bay and South West Africa and he got good newspaper coverage especially for the more outrageous dresses. They were virtually unsalable so he was left with a critical success, no cash and no job.

He decided to visit Europe to see what the fashion world was really

like, and after taking it all in he returned home for a few months to prepare a sketchbook of his designs. Armed with this he returned to Europe and managed to get a job with a small French designer, Alain Lalou.

He was also befriended by a baroness who not only knew everyone, but was convinced that Errol had real talent. She introduced him to Marc Bohan at Dior, Yves St Laurent, and other couturiers and he was very favourably received. In spite of their interest there seemed no hope of working in France because of the difficulties of obtaining work permits for foreigners so he took off for London.

In London he went to see Ossie Clark. Here he was offered a job as a cutter, but turned it down as he felt it was a step backward. He also managed to meet Bill Gibb, Jean Muir and Zandra Rhodes and earned enough to live on by doing modelling jobs. Finally he decided to come back to South Africa and try working for private clients.

Working on his own from home without the capital for fabrics was a struggle but he soon found many good clients, one of whom, Vicky Kelller, was so enthusiastic about his work that she asked him to design a special wardrobe for a holiday in the Seychelles. She was so captivated by the collection he designed that she bought them all. She also suggested that he do a show for a local charity. 'She gave me a great deal of inspiration and courage,' he added. 'I suddenly realised that there were some people in Cape Town interested in my work.' He showed his Spring Collection at a spectacular presentation at her Constantia home. After the show he had such a good reaction that he decided to open his own salon, and since then he has been inundated with orders.

Barbara Barnard's decision to wear his clothes for her latest modelling assignment at the lush new Maharani Hotel in Durban has created great excitement among existing Arendz clients. And as we went to press the papers were full of the latest Arendz show organised by long-time fan Adele Searll with spectacular success. Errol still can't believe it's all happening to him at last, and is so busy he 'hasn't had time to celebrate'.



Barbara Barnard with Errol Arendz choosing clothes for the FAIR LADY fashion feature

JOHN PAISLEY