

taking back **OUR SAFE SPACES**

AS PART OF A COLLABORATION WITH THE ROCK GIRL'S **SAFE SPACES CAMPAIGN**, FOUR DESIGNERS CREATED DRESSES INSPIRED BY PUBLIC BENCHES THAT CREATE AWARENESS ABOUT **SAFETY ISSUES FOR YOUNG WOMEN**

WORDS SAMANTHA STEELE PRODUCTION HEIDI FINESTONE PHOTOGRAPHS ULRICH KNOBLAUCH

BEATEN-SILK STRAPLESS DRESS WITH DRAPED STRIPED SILK CHIFFON WORN WITH BELT, R4 500. NUDE MESH TIGHTS, R220. BOTH THABANI MAVUNDLA (073-224-9319); SHOES, MODEL'S OWN. ROCK GIRL BENCH BY MAKEKA DESIGN LAB (021-425-5211, MAKEKADDESIGNS.COM), SPONSORED BY CAPE TOWN PARTNERSHIP AND CCID. LOCATION CAPE TOWN IRT STATION.





t

his project started when a group of Grade 6 girls in Manenberg told human-rights lawyer India Baird they wouldn't join the after-school programme (initiated by the JAG Foundation in 2010) at their school. This wasn't because they didn't want to be there, but rather because, as Baird says, 'They didn't feel safe on the field, or walking to and from the field from school.'

Considering that the SA Police Service (SAPS) reported approximately 181 sexual offences a day in its 2010/2011 Police Report, and that rape and sexual assault are such huge issues in South Africa, it's unsurprising that the young girls felt this way.

They had a simple request for Baird: they wanted a safe place to sit, 'but somewhere beautiful'.

Baird, who started the Thuthuzela Care Centres (the first of their kind for rape survivors in South Africa), began a series of empowering workshops with the girls after this discussion. She gave them disposable cameras and asked them to 'document where they felt safe and where they did not.' This led to their simple request, and their collaboration with mosaic artist Lovell Friedman to turn their small dream into a practical reality.

Not only are the benches a physical safe space, they are also a link to other 'safety nets' depending on their locality. Each has a number to a local police station, or some other organization promising safety, in the area.

BLACK SEQUINED ONE-SHOULDER DRESS, R7 000, RACHEL DE MARDT (RACHEL.DEMARDT@GMAIL.COM); SHOES, MODEL'S OWN. ROCK GIRL BENCH BY JARED ODELL (072-556-7574, JAREDODELL.CO.ZA), SPONSORED BY FREEWORLD DESIGN CENTRE. LOCATION HAVEN NIGHT SHELTER, WOODSTOCK.



Design Indaba 2011 picked up on this campaign and funded the second bench, which is now at the Cape Town International Convention Centre and was showcased at the Design Indaba Expo in 2011.

The simple desire for a safe, beautiful space to sit 'has struck a chord around the country,' says Baird, and, with the involvement of the Mayor's office, Cape Town Partnership and others, the Rock Girl Safe Spaces Campaign was launched.

These 'beautiful, functional, educational benches' as Baird describes them, are located in public places around Cape Town and have sister benches in disadvantaged communities. Says Baird, 'This signifies Rock Girl's commitment to ensuring that women and girls are safe no matter where they live.'

Rock Girl, along with the Freeworld Design Centre, freelance stylist Heidi Finestone, décor stylist and author Sam Scarborough and Freeworld's Lauren Shantall, have taken this concept further, collaborating with local designers to interpret the benches as designer garments. Baird says that because the way women dress is sometimes linked, unfairly, to rape, extending the concept of 'safe spaces' into clothes is a necessary one. This also allows fashion to give back to women in need. 'The fashion world is also saying no to violence,' says Baird. 'It's about how beautiful things can speak about issues.' **mc**

MARIANNE FASSLER GREY LACE POLKA-DOT DRESS, R5 200, LEOPARD FROCK (011-646-8387, MARIANNEFASSLER.CO.ZA); SHOES, MODEL'S OWN. ROCK GIRL BENCH BY PAUL DU TOIT (021-790-1514, PAULDUTOIT.COM), SPONSORED BY TRAVELSTART. LOCATION ST ANDREW'S SQUARE, FAN WALK, CAPE TOWN.

how you can help

- ♥ Log onto Rockgirls.org and click on 'Create Change' to learn how to contribute funds to the charity.
- ♥ Attend a Rock Girl event. On 4 August, Rock Girl and Cavendish Square are hosting the Rock Girl Night Out 'where benches and fashion will again be paired to raise awareness and inspire others,' says Baird.
- ♥ In August look out for the Rock Girl T-shirts, available at selected Jenni Button stores countrywide.

GREY DRAPED SILK CHIFFON DRESS. R16 000, STEFANIA MORLAND (021-422-2609, STEFANIAMORLAND.COM); SHOES, MODEL'S OWN. ROCK GIRL BENCH BY LOVELL FRIEDMAN AND TIM LEWIS, SPONSORED BY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS. LOCATION LION'S HEAD TRAILHEAD, CAPE TOWN.

FASHION BEE DIAMONDHEAD HAIR AND MAKE-UP CARL ISAACS MODEL TRISAVVBASE MODELS

FOR A GOOD CAUSE If you know of a charity, organization or event that should be included on the 'Marie Cares' page, e-mail mariecares@assocmags.co.za. Tell us in no more than 300 words about the cause and we'll consider featuring it here.