

My Day

Christiaan Erasmus, director and designer of the eponymous menswear label

Here in Istanbul, the day starts very early, and in summer it begins with sunlight on my face and the view of the Bosphorus. This is followed by an hour or more of morning meditation, yoga and journaling. Without it I would not be able to keep up with the pace of Istanbul and the fashion industry here.

While based in my home country of South Africa, the production of my menswear label takes place in Turkey, and I divide my time between these two countries. I specialise in bespoke tailoring using a range of luxury fabrics. I have provided the formal wear for the South African cricket team since 2006, and also dress the South African football captain Aaron Mokoena.

The factories and studios in Istanbul open at 8.30 am, and normally if you need anything done, early appointments are the only way to guarantee it. To get from A to B involves taxis, the metro system and good old fashioned walking, so muesli, yoghurt and lots of fruit is the breakfast of champions here.

At every meeting, Turkish hospitality precedes business, so a lot of cay (tea) is involved. Through the years I have identified emergency WC facilities throughout the city.

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I recently discovered an amazing craftsmen here who uses his embroidery machine like a paint brush. Within five minutes he magically created special detailed pieces that were needed for a top architect and artist for a bespoke suit, and this resulted in another last minute order for me. He is having his first art exhibition in two days and decided that he needed a new look. Some of my top clients are also in the creative field and as such I have a lot of emergency orders.

I also work closely with my shoemaker, a gentleman of the old school who insists on doing everything by hand. This might mean longer production time but it also guarantees absolute exclusivity.

In a city of more than 13 million you have a number of options for manufacturers. This means a lot of experimenting and research. To keep track of who is doing what sometimes feels



overwhelming. Organisation has taken a far distant second place to creativity. The studio needs a total revamp. Trying to consolidate my collection and my raw materials involves carpenters, shopfitters and a new way of organising all the boring paper work. A very good friend of mine pitched up a few days ago and as she is such a practical woman I have given myself over to her merciless organisational skills. She also happens to be very handy with a drill and other power tools. Heaven provides

Turkey is one of the world's great food capitals. Freshly squeezed carrot, apple, orange and pomegranate juice can be found on every corner. Lunch consists of one of these fruity delights and dried figs, fresh apricots and hands full of almonds.

The 360 Istanbul restaurant and night club is one of the top venues in the city. From the terrace on the eighth floor, you literally have a 360-degree view of the city. Foreigners, locals and creative wannabes all use this magical

spot to meet, greet and be seen. The owners are among my clients, so I can combine business with pleasure here, such as meeting up to discuss updates to the product range that I have designed for them.

The relationship between designer and bespoke client needs a lot of nurturing. It has to be a personal relationship as you are responsible for allowing your clients' character to shine through whatever you design for him. I believe that you should wear what you are. I have been lucky enough to turn my clients into friends and share in their private lives.

The clients in South Africa also expect my undivided attention. The best place to communicate with them via mobile phone or e-mail is on a bench next to the Bosphorus. Maybe not the best place to concentrate completely - life is too vibrant here to shut it out for long. Yet this is one of the reasons for me being here. It gets my creative juices flowing. I send quotes while watching the fisherman cast their lines with the rest of their families congregating around them.

A quick plate of soup at a cosy little restaurant and then off to the studio again to plan for tomorrow and get some designing done. Coffee, the miracle drug of deadlines.

But what a buzz. I can't think of anything I would rather do. The satisfaction of creating makes even the boring bits seem glamorous. I will be dreaming of crocodile skins and tweeds, and will need to sleep with a cucumber facepack.

After all you need to live up to your brand, and dark circles under the eyes will never be sexy. ●

● cee@cee-style.com