

Christopher Smith, creative director at 99c

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23 Feb 2022

This week we go behind the mask of Christopher Smith, creative director at 99c.



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■ *Could you briefly explain what your role entails?*

Over the last four years, I have been leading the creative team on our value retail client, Ackermans. As I am from the UK, I have spent my career working with high-end brands and so I was brought in to help develop a new brand strategy to increase their fashion credibility and production values into their creative and shooting styles.

We have worked hand-in-hand with the brand and various partners in developing a strong visual and communication identity across ATL and all digital channels. We have had great success in increasing market share, digital output, and sales.

■ *What's really behind your mask - literally and figuratively speaking?*

Literally, a well-groomed salt and pepper beard. Figuratively, an ever-present worry about the future.

■ *Growing up, what did you want to be?*

Growing up in London, I was always fascinated with style and clothing. I always wanted to do something in the fashion industry, and have done just about every job along the way, working my way up from factory floor to designer to creative director. London is the style capitol of the world, teeming with culture and the arts. The weather is generally colder so people really dress, layer and accessories there. The variety in the shops is extensive and affordable (on the pound) so you have easier access to stylish clothing. The humble "slip slop" is rarely seen in public.

■ *How did you end up working in advertising?*

It happened by accident really! I spent my whole career working in London as a creative director of a well-established

fashion brand. After many years of shaping the brand, I decided I needed a new challenge and moved to South Africa with my South African wife, whom I met in London. As luck would have it, my CV landed on the desk of 99c Group CEO Andrew Brand and the rest as they say is history.

99c has not only taught me so much about the industry but also about myself. My time in South Africa has changed me and the connections with people I have made along the way will stick with me forever.

■ ***What excites you most about your career?***

The wonderful and talented team of creatives and writers I get to work with!

“ I am blown away every time we work on new concepts and campaigns and the most rewarding part truly is watching the team grow and improve with each campaign. ”

Without these brilliant minds, we would not have achieved as much as we have in such a short period of time.

■ ***What has been the highlight of your career?***

To be honest, I am less focused on highlights and more so on the journey. It is also difficult for me to pick one as I have had the privilege to work with amazing people and a wide range of extraordinary brands from all around the world.

However, if I had to choose, I would say being given the opportunity to foster a work culture of experimentation, passion and ambition. I always say to my team “creativity is your ultimate resource” and so being able to produce work that speaks to that sentiment, will always be the highlight of my career.

■ ***What's the one thing about you that not many people know, but should?***

Looks may be deceiving but I am a good cook! I can probably prepare the best roast dinner in South Africa and also my roast potatoes are super crispy!

■ ***Do you have a theme song for 2022?***

Lovely Day by Bill Withers.

It reminds me of my good mate Alex back home in London and in today's current climate it always reminds me to stay positive and hopeful.

■ ***Are you watching any series? Reading any books at the moment?***

I have just finished watching *Ted Lasso*. It's always comforting to watch a show shot in your hometown.

■ ***Where are you based during lockdown?***

We live in Pinelands, a very sleepy and quiet neighbourhood. It's been both a challenge and a joy to work from home, having two kids makes it a juggling act, but I truly think we have been blessed to see so much of our children through this odd and testing time.

■ ***When you're not busy working, what do you do? How do you socialise these days?***

Having two small children means I'm always busy and generally asleep by 9pm these days. Most socializing is done at our house where we have created a home that's focal points are on entertaining, like our outside deck area where we spend many a Summer evening, the kids swimming or playing in the garden. Growing up in the "big smoke" I could never have dreamt of a lifestyle like this for my kids.

■ ***What's next for you?***

I have just finished my last campaign for Ackermans and have moved on to our new European sustainable fashion brand, called NU-IN. I'm joining at a very exciting time, as the brand is going through huge changes and are open to new and creative ideas. It's the best joining a project in its infancy stage, as you get to be a part of the change, and as things come together you witness it taking shape. I find this process so rewarding.

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