

A pause to reflect on sustainable production

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Sitting Pretty is a local conscious fashion brand designed and manufactured in Cape Town. Its founder, Emma Longden, is an advocate of slow fashion practices that prioritise production methods which are kind to the environment and the people who make the garments. As such, natural and eco-friendly fabrics feature prominently in Sitting Pretty designs.



Sitting Pretty is known for its simple and relaxed pieces characterised by soft tones and light, loose cuts.

Stocked in a number of fashion boutiques around South Africa, as well as through the Sitting Pretty online store, the brand also re-established its own brick and mortar retail presence in [Gardens Shopping Centre in Cape Town last year](#).

As South Africa enters its third month under lockdown, Longden shares how the global crisis is impacting her business, from design to manufacturing and retail.

■ ***What was your initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and has your experience of it been different to what you expected?***

Luckily I have set my staff up at home over the years, so we all started working from home about 10 days prior to lockdown.

I was most concerned about them having to use public transport. We masked everyone and provided them with sanitiser.

I didn't have any expectations as this was a 'novel' experience and we have literally taken it day by day.

■ ***What impact is the Covid crisis having on Sitting Pretty, and how have you had to adapt operations under the various lockdown levels?***

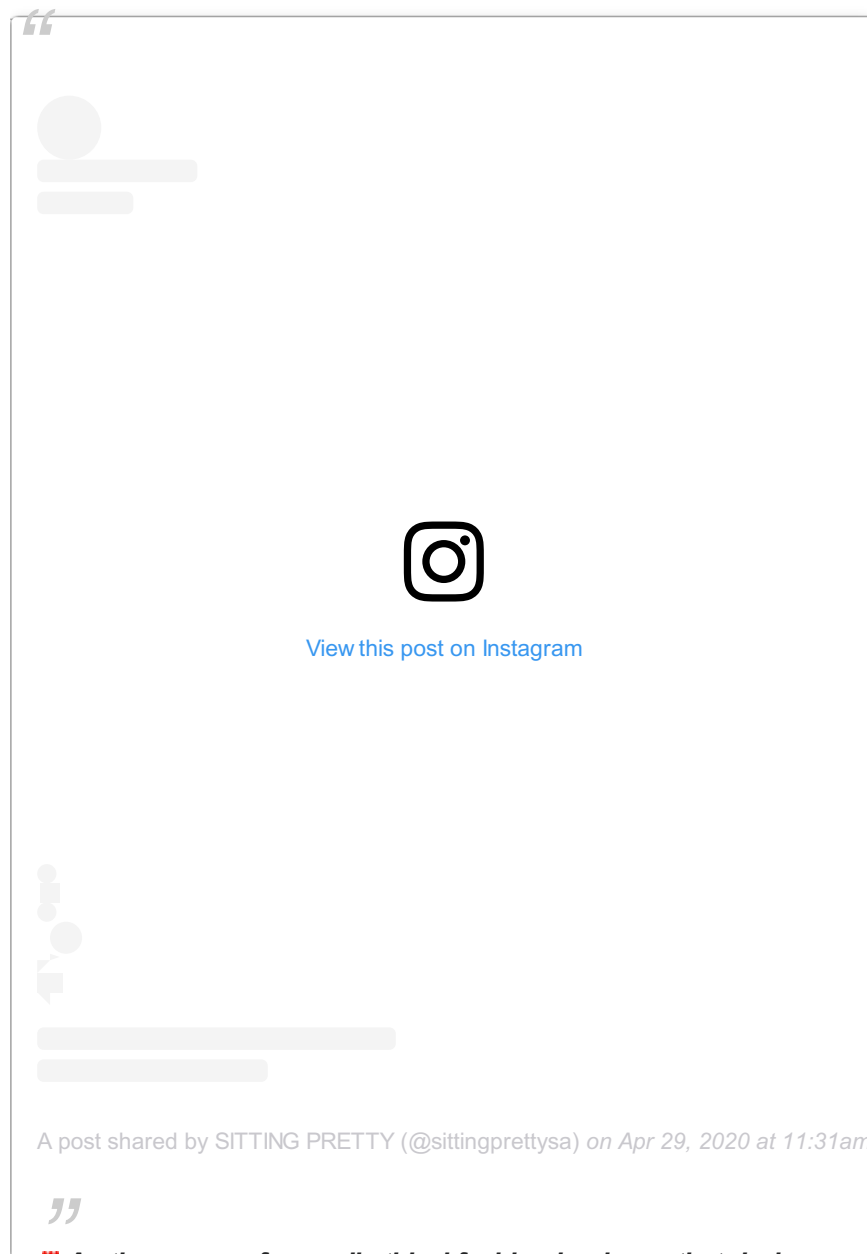
Well, we completely ground to a halt at the beginning of lockdown. Our store was obviously closed and all the stores we stock were closed too. Our online site was open but we couldn't dispatch anything until after Level 5, and I felt weird about marketing the brand during this time.



Emma Longden

We were meant to launch our Autumn Winter collection on 1 April, but at that point it felt strange to do a launch and push sales. It was such a strange time and I really did not know how to navigate it. With the end of lockdown looming (or so we thought) we launched mid-April and we did get some interest. In the meantime, our staff were working from home on Autumn styles.

Come Level 4 we were able to start making masks, we kept the price pretty low and donate 1 mask for every 10 sold and that really helped pay salaries. When we were allowed to open our store to sell winter clothing, we opened to the public. It has been slow, but our online store has picked up.



A post shared by SITTING PRETTY (@sittingprettysa) on Apr 29, 2020 at 11:31am PDT

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❏ ***As the owner of a small ethical fashion business that designs and manufactures locally, what are your biggest challenges/concerns right now, and conversely, are you seeing any opportunities?***

I am finding it incredibly difficult to predict what kind of summer we are going to have. I had plans to expand this year, and now those are off the cards.

We have cut our summer production by two thirds as much of our income over those months is tourist-based, and right now I feel like people are not going to be jumping on planes. I am currently approaching everything with caution.

In terms of fabrics, I managed to secure what I needed for summer before lockdown, but the continuity of fabric stock is possibly to be a challenge if we need to produce more.

■ In general, do you think the pandemic will accelerate or hinder fashion brands' sustainability agendas?

I am an optimist so I truly hope that this pandemic has made us reflect.

“ We cannot continue in the ways that we have been; over-consumption and unsustainable practices will hopefully become something of the past. ”

■ What are your thoughts on regulations gazetted during the lockdown so far, and how would you like to see them evolve moving forward?

Everyone's opinion on this differs, so I don't love getting into this conversation, but you did ask...

I think initially we needed to lockdown for our medical sector to set up and brace for this virus. I am far from an economist, so these are my opinions: we are not a first world country, much of our economy is tied to small business and closing the economy for this long has put so many people out of business and seen massive job losses.

Our huge informal sector is unable to making a living. I feel terrible for the poor of this country. Firstly, how is it possible to lockdown in a shack with eight people? To then have no income on top of that, it's a disaster and the effects of this will be seen long after Covid-19 is gone.

Yes, every life matters, however when will we see the numbers on starvation? We never get that information, we know that refugees and asylum seekers are getting no assistance from government. Do their lives matter less? And crime!

The future looks messy at this point. I think it's a case of the cure being possibly worse than the disease. Personally, I feel that we don't have first world choices; we need to mask up and take care, and we need to open the economy immediately. The laws are draconian and nonsensical at the moment.



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Emma Longden 15 Jan 2020



■ What changes do you expect in the global retailing environment post-Covid-19?

I'm expecting to see a slump. Less expendable income, less travel, it will affect us all for some time to come.

■ Many people are experiencing anxiety or 'Covid fatigue' right now. What helps you stay balanced and positive?

Yes, I think we are all experiencing it on some level. I've definitely had good weeks and absolutely abysmal ones. I think media fatigue is real and I try to limit what I watch/read. I exercise daily, and focus on what I can do as opposed to watching numbers and becoming fearful.

“ If we can focus on helping others we help ourselves so much too. ”

■ To conclude, do you have any encouraging words for fashion industry peers navigating business during these uncertain times?

I think we need to really step back and take a look at how we produce. Great design and innovation come out of challenging times, so now that many of us have a little extra time on our hands, let's use it wisely.

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