

AFRICAN INSPIRATION

Re-inventing what's ours

Designs from the continent are making a global splash, writes **Rea Khoabane**

MAY is Africa Month, a month of cultural exchange across the continent that includes activities centred on music, literature, theatre, visual arts, film, cuisine and fashion. Africa Day is on Monday.

In celebration of all things African, four designers speak about the success of their brands internationally.

AKOSUA AFRIYIE-KUMI — AAKS FROM GHANA

Akosua Afriyie-Kumi is the woman behind AAKS, a range of handcrafted handbags produced by weavers from a small village in northern Ghana. Her bags have featured at Africa on the Catwalk; South Bank, London; on the pages of Vogue UK and Le Matin Dimanche newspaper in Switzerland; and on Daily Life, the Australian online magazine.

The bags are woven using organically sourced raffia and leather for the handles. "Attention to detail,

authenticity of technique and ethical value in production shape a truly unique product," Afriyie-Kumi says.

She studied in London, where she learned about art and incubated her ambition to bring weaving skills from Ghana to the world.

Her styles for the bags maintain the spirit and durability of their



GOING SOLAR: Taibo Bacar is putting Mozambique on the map

ancestral counterparts.

She also pays homage to the power of social media.

"Our brand is a niche, which appeals to a lot of people around the world. By telling our story of how we source our material through social media, we offered transparency and this has been celebrated."

LISA FOLAWIYO — JEWEL BY LISA FROM NIGERIA

With her own custom luxury prints, Lisa Folawiyo has converted her label, Jewel by Lisa, into a luxury brand.

What started as a desire to redefine the Ankara print in 2005 is now trending among international celebrities such as singer Solange Knowles and actress Lucy Liu. Now Jewel by Lisa is worn

from the shores of Lagos to the borough of New York.

Folawiyo attributes her recognition to strong relationships with celebrity stylists.

"The women who wear the brand are on journeys that have taken them far and wide. They truly are global, as opposed to Eurocentric," she says.

"From art to fashion and politics, Africans are beginning to have a say in the global sphere and I believe this has positively affected the interest in African fashion and design."

SINDISO KHUMALO — SOUTH AFRICAN BASED IN LONDON

Sindiso Khumalo is a South African textile designer living and working in London and combining the best of African and European influences.

Making her own fabrics in London and manufacturing her designs in Cape Town makes her clothes different from others, she says.

"I have followers from Africa who are based in London and love that my clothes are contemporary with a feel of Africa."

Her latest collection is in keeping with her minimalist silhouettes and neutral colours — white on white print and black on white. "This collection is for working mothers who want to look cute," she says.

Her work has featured at the Africa is Now exhibition at Design Indaba Expo 2014, the Royal

This collection is for working mothers who want to look cute

Festival Hall in London and the Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washington.

Her label has been featured in Vogue magazine, The Financial Times and UK Elle.

"I use screen printing and textile designs to create modern, sustainable, contemporary textiles," she says.

Born in Botswana and raised in Durban, the young designer believes it's time for African designers to make quality pieces that meet international standards.

"Designers coming out of Africa have a new self-confidence. We're reinventing what's ours and taking charge of our designs."

TAIBO BACAR — MOZAMBIQUE

During Milan Fashion Week in 2011 Mozambican Taibo Bacar presented a collection that made the European market take note.

His label first attracted local attention at Johannesburg's Mercedes-Benz Africa Fashion Week in 2012.

"After Milan Fashion Week we had great feedback from the European media and we were featured in magazines."

When he started designing there was nothing in the fashion industry in Mozambique. He made people there believe it was possible to make a living from fashion.

"I create traditional African designs fused with modern Western design."



PRINT REVIVAL: Sindiso Khumalo and Jewel by Lisa



HIGH PROFILE: AAKS from Ghana designs hand-woven handbags

ON THE BALL

Fans in football frocks

REA KHOABANE

THIS year's Nedbank Cup Football Fashion was themed "Making things that really matter happen".

Sixteen top designers, 16 soccer fans and 16 fashion students produced an epic finale to the fashion show last week.

Gavin Rajah opened the proceedings at the Museum of African Design in Maboneng, Johannesburg, with his chic tight pants and voluminous jacket ensemble getting a standing ovation.

Rajah's team, Supersport United, are known as "Matsatsantsa", or swanky boys. They did not reach the Nedbank Cup final but the designer made them heroes on the catwalk.

Rajah scooped the best designer award for his peacock-inspired garments and dramatic headpiece representing the phoenix-like rise of his team.

Rajah said the garments were

inspired by the success of the team and their progress in the league.

"We wanted to show this transformation in the outfits," he said.

Dressed like a warrior, Kaizer Chiefs superfan Fefe Sonti was kitted out in a magnificent gold and black dress singled out as the "grand design of the evening".

Created by Terrence Bray and student Tamlin Bergoff, the explosion of confetti in a kaleidoscope of colour made Sonti feel like football fan royalty.

"We specifically chose all sportswear fabrics and fabrics that made a noise reminiscent of the roar of the crowd at a game," said Bray.

Representing Polokwane City FC, Safiya Noor Mahomed from the Durban University of Technology — mentored by Kathrin Kidger — won the best student category with her orange and black sleeveless maxi dress.



PEACOCKING: A Supersport-inspired outfit that earned Gavin Rajah the best designer award



SUPERFAN: Fefe Sonti in the 'grand design' by Terrence Bray and Tamlin Bergoff
Pictures: MARISKA VAN DEN BRINK