The rise of the African Fashion Industry

A youthful perspective on emerging African fashion trends, African Diaspora, the internet, designers and retail...
The year 2011 brought a reemergence of African motifs, prints and textiles on the global stage. Fashion houses and designers such as Burberry and Vivian Westwood produced collections clearly influenced by the various cultures and landscapes found in Africa...

Burberry Prorsum uses African Textiles for it's 2012 Resort Collection
Western fashion publications took notice of the frenzy surrounding

African influences in the fashion industry

Vogue Italia “Black Allure”
Arise Magazine’s editor Helen Jennings has been applauded for her book “New African Fashion”. Since her tenure as editor at Arise Magazine, Jennings has had the privilege of being exposed to many emerging African talents, African street style and trends that have been largely ignored by western media outlets.
At the same time young dynamic Africans in the Diaspora as emerged as ambassadors’ in particular two African women known for their fondness of African inspired wear; Ethiopian-born Julia Sarr-Jamois, fashion editor of *The Wonderland Magazine* and Nigerian-born Oroma Elewa, editor of *Pop Africana Magazine.*
Over the past few years, a host of fashion magazines created by Africans and around the Diaspora specifically catering to African fashion conscious youth, erstwhile promoting local, continental fashion.
In as much as most prominent African designers and buyers of African fashion are based in the west, African fashion entrepreneurs based in Africa are using tools such as regional and continental expos to showcase and sell their brands.
African fashion is booming, and so is its web presence. Ever-expanding numbers of websites, blogs, e-tailers, Tumblrs and online magazines dedicated to African-influenced style represent a field of fashion that is as fast evolving as the social and online media that shows it love. A new generation of African and diaspora designers have gained attention in recent years, and African styles are a perennial trend on international catwalks too. With so much information to filter, here are 10 places to begin your African fashion odyssey.

“The top 10 African fashion blogs” The Guardian. 29th August 2012 http://www.guardian.co.uk
Retail, consumers, entrepreneurship...

in the absence of many international brands, African chains are driving the development of the retail sector on the continent. “African retailers have stepped up to the challenge … They have decided to take this challenge head on to expand their businesses into Africa.”

“We will not fill a shopping centre at this stage … purely off an international retailer base,” he noted. “It is not going to happen from overseas, it is Africans that have to drive the retail environment in Africa, and that’s what is happening … It is our regional retailers that we need to support, and ultimately international retailers will enter into these markets.”

African chains to drive the development of retail on continent
The rise of the female consumer

• African women are becoming more independent and moving further away from their traditional stereotypical roles. More and more women are earning their own money and supporting families, according to Daphne Kasriel-Alexander, consumers editor at Euromonitor International.

• According to Carat SA's 2011 research, affluent, single women have become a significant consumer segment in South Africa. Between the ages of 18 and 44 years, 73% of women are single with 66% of them working. Out of the 73% single women, 51% believe that their career is more important than starting a family.

• While the e-commerce culture is only just starting to take off in Africa, women are turning to online shopping, especially online group buying. Group buying offers products at a reduced rate when a minimum number of buyers make a purchase.

Sub-Saharan Africa has seen the entry and expansion of fashion retailers in various countries. In 2011 Spanish fashion retailer Zara entered South Africa. This year Gap also opened two stores in South Africa. How we made it in Africa has previously reported that European fashion chain Mango aims to have a presence in each of Nigeria’s major cities. Mango opened its first outlet in Lagos in December 2009.

Woolworths and the Foschini Group – both South African fashion retailers – are also expanding their footprint in Africa. According to Kasriel-Alexander, in an effort to take advantage of the rising group of African female consumers

Female buying power on the rise in Africa
Far too often, in the view of Africa’s budding female entrepreneurs, their continent is characterized as the recipient of aid that enables residents just to struggle by, and as a place that mistreats and marginalizes its women. It was into this world, and against it, says Bethlehem Tilahun, that her shoe company SoleRebels was born. “I kept hearing over and over the phrase ‘poverty alleviation,’” said Ms. Tilahun, now a footwear mogul whose company grossed $2 million in sales this past year.

“The media, preoccupied with a singular narrative about ‘Africa’ that missed the story of Africa — part of a larger spectrum of endless entities that have monopolized Africa’s image, our brand.” With SoleRebels, she said proudly, “We’ve inverted the whole paradigm.”

Ms. Tilahun, 33, is one of a cresting wave of African entrepreneurs who are harnessing Africa’s businesses and brands as the continent enjoys its greatest economic success in generations.

Many of the new entrepreneurs of Africa are women. “In Africa, you see women working a lot,” noted Markus Goldstein, a development economist in the gender department of the World Bank in Washington. “They are very active in the labor market.” According to World Bank data, nearly two-thirds of women are participating in Africa’s labor force.

Women doing business in ways that support families include the myriad cross-border traders found throughout sub-Saharan Africa; women selling used clothes and tin kitchenware; hair stylists; and owners of fashion salons, small food stores and even watering holes (catering almost exclusively to men).

Women Entrepreneurs Drive Growth in Africa

An exciting line-up of some of Africa and the Diaspora’s most significant designers will descend on Melrose Arch, Johannesburg, from October 24-28 to unveil an array of captivating collections in Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Africa 2012. Apart from the runway shows, the associated Africa Trade Expo, endorsed by SA Tourism, will feature 28 exhibitors from South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and the UK, presenting a diverse showcase of the best collections of African men’s and women’s fashion apparel and accessories as well as retail concepts and fabrics.


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