

VANGUARD

NIGERIAN DESIGNERS :The New York Experience

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Nigerian fashion designers are making waves locally and internally. Recently, four of them stormed New York fashion week, triumphantly showcasing Nigeria's talents to the world. On these pages, we feature four designers who were at the New York Week.

HOUSE OF JOLA

House of Jola

Tell us about your fashion house? My fashion house is called House of Jola. It is a combination of my name and my husband's name. I actually started in 1995, when I used to make clothes and take them to the United States. I was running a shop called Euro Afrique in Wilmington, Delaware at the time. However, I returned to Nigeria and was doing other things like buying and selling until I decided, in 2007, to launch my line. I re branded and called it House of Jola.

What has the reception of Nigerians to your collection? Generally, the reception from Nigerians has been great, especially as we make clothes for the youth and the young at heart.

What encouragement have you received from Nigerians and the Nigerian environment to aid the promotion of your designs?



Nigerians will always encourage you but the environment to produce is very harsh. For example, the power situation is killing our work and it makes clothes expensive. It will be difficult to match other designers around the world.

You were at the New York Fashion Week to showcase your collection, how was the experience?

The experience was awesome especially when I told the producers that I want the Nigerian team to start off with our National Anthem. I was so proud when Nyanya, winner of MTN Project Fame, whom I took along with me, sang our National Anthem with pride and honour. When I looked through the screen and saw Prof. Joy Egwu, Nigerian Ambassador to the United Nations, with her hand on her chest, I felt proud of my motherland.

This was particularly so after watching the MSNBC Show the previous night which had to do with Nigerian scams. It made proud as a Nigerian that we are not all fraudulent and it is left to us, individuals, to prove to the world otherwise. I went to New York with the National Flag I made myself and knowing that I was going to display it with honour and pride, I was prepared to defend it right there.

What lessons did you come away with and how do you intend to bring that to bear on your operations in Nigeria?

For me, we have learnt so much from our operations from all over the world. I was at the World Fashion Week (Island of the World) in Bahamas, where four of my models were booked and, of course, they were booked for South Africa , Paris Fashion Week and New York.

In February, this year I took Bryan Okwara, Bunmi Ademokoya and Isi Atagamen. This September, I took five Isis models: Faith Amadi, Uzodinma Uguanyi, Omoye Eromosele, Isi Atagamen and Bunmi Ademokoya _ all from my agency;

And now, we can produce our own shows. The master of the arena, Bayo Haastrup, is on my team now and I am very happy that I am working with him; great make up artist and fashion producer. Also, Juliet Morgan, who trained in production Johannesburg and has actually assisted in producing a show in South Africa.

I have done South African Fashion Week, which is the premier fashion week in Africa. Everyone from David Tlale to Thula Sindi are products of South African Fashion Week. And, South Africa Fashion Week is endorsed by the South African government. So, is the British Fashion Council; all over the world from Bahamas to Milan.

No individual can do this by themselves. Lexy (Mojo Eyes) has done well _ just trying to pull this on his own. I wish we can all come together as a body to create a fashion council.

HALLERO

Tell us about your fashion house. HALLERO started about 5 years ago, in Nigeria. It is an outlet that specialises in ladies' outfits. We make things to bring out the beauty in people and we are not restricted to any fabric.



HALLERO

What is your main focus?

To make people beautiful and to bring out the beauty in them.

What is your reception of Nigerians to your collection?

So far, it has been amazing. We make most of our outfits in Western designs. That is, combining African and western fabrics. So, it's like we are getting two cultures in one outfit; which makes it unique and outstanding in its own way.

What encouragement have you received from Nigerians and the Nigerian environment to aid the promotion of your designs?

We are encouraged when we see our designs on people and that keeps us going. And for the Nigerian environment, there have been so much awareness on the fashion industry which has changed the perception of Nigerian people towards fashion.

You were at the New York Fashion Week to showcase your collection, How was the experience?

It was a fantastic experience for me, but then I feel the American Fashion Week was like an eye-opener to some areas for me and the fact that our outfits were catwalked on the runway has given us an advantage in the international market.

What lessons did you come away with and how do you intend to bring that to bear on your operations in Nigeria?

It has actually expanded my vision and a lot of things we used to overlook, I realize, are quite important.

Having showcased at the New York Week and other international shows, what do you think is lacking in our fashion industry?

We do not have a permanent run way venue for fashion shows.

How would you describe your designs and what inspires them?

I will define my design as simple with class. I am inspired by anything around me; balancing it with what is in vogue.

There have been criticisms that Nigerian designers are very arrogant and unco-operative. Some say that this is why they cannot come together to grow the industry. They are accused of charging exorbitant prices, especially when they use inexpensive ankara fabrics. What would you say to this?

That, I am not aware of. All the designers I have come across have been quite nice to me and I don't have any reservation towards any designer. The only thing I might just like to chip in is that, may be, designers can come together once or twice a year, sit down, brainstorm and discuss about style, vogue and colours for the new season.

Lanre Da Silva-Ajayi



Lanre Da Silva-Ajayi on the runway

Lanre Da Silva_Ajayi, one of Nigeria's foremost fashion innovators and trendsetters, will make her USA debut at Couture Fashion Week presenting her latest collection of inspired creations. The fashion show will be held at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 13, 2009 at the world_famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel on New York's legendary Park Avenue.

After studying Business Administration at Coventry University and earning her Master's Degree in Finance from the University of Leicester, Ms. DaSilva_Ajayi founded her signature fashion label, LDA, in her native Nigeria in 2005. Since

then her reputation as one of Nigeria's top designers has grown driven by her abundant talent and passion for haute couture. Her clientele includes a wide range of savvy fashion consumers both in her home country and abroad.

Ms. DaSilva_Ajayi's collections are distinguished by an eclectic fusion of art and history with many nostalgic elements reminiscent of the 1940's, '50's and '60's, yet simultaneously modern and appealing to today's contemporary woman. Her pieces include jackets, cocktail dresses, evening gowns and more.

LDA recently participated to rave reviews in Arise Fashion Week held in Johannesburg, South Africa and in THISDAY Music and Fashion Festival held at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Ms. DaSilva_Ajayi's vintage_flavored designs, intricate detailing and classic silhouettes have elicited similar accolades at the various catwalks she has graced and have won her awards for excellence in her field. LDA hopes to build on her international success with the launch of a ready_to_wear line in the near future.

Couture Fashion Week is a multi_day event showcasing couture and luxury fashion. It also includes exhibits of luxury brands and fine art as well as world_class entertainment and receptions. The event is held in top venues in New York City, Dallas, Palm Beach, Florida and other selected cities and is attended by upscale consumers, invited VIPs, the press and high-end store buyers. Couture Fashion Week offers unique branding opportunities for luxury products and services.

ZIZI CARDDOW

In her USA debut, award-winning Nigerian designer Zizi Cardow will present her latest fashion collection at Couture Fashion Week, 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 13, 2009 at the world-famous Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on New York's legendary Park Avenue.



ZIZI CARDOW

One of Nigeria's top fashion designers, Zizi Cardow launched her own fashion label "Zizi" in 2000 with a view to globalizing distinctive African prints. Within a year, Ms. Cardow began to win a number of prestigious fashion awards for her impeccable designs, including Best Designer Nigeria (2001), St. Moritz Style Selection (2002), and Fashion & Life Achievement Award (2008).

In 2002 she received the DAME Award for outstanding achievement in fashion at an event attended by Nigeria's President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. She has been named an Ambassador for Fashion by the Imo State Chamber of Commerce.

Also in 2002, her "Jungle Renaissance" fashion show was widely covered and acclaimed by media worldwide, including CNN Germany and CNN Italy. Her collections have been shown on runways in Paris, Milan, Cape Town and Israel, and her international clientele includes first ladies and A-listers on Nigeria's social scene. In 2005 Ms. Cardow represented Nigeria in the fashion and arts exhibition in Milan, an event attended by the mayor of Milan, dignitaries and foreign ambassadors.

In addition to her numerous fashion accomplishments, Ms. Cardow is greatly involved in various mentorship and youth programs. Her efforts in these areas have also been recognized with such distinctions as the African Role Model Leadership Gold Award (2007), Pillar of National Development Gold Award

(2007), Nigeria Enterprise Award for Excellence (2008) and Great Legend of Africa Gold Award (2008).

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