

The continent's fashion agenda is about more than just beads and shweshwe prints – and it's being led by innovative entrepreneurs. By Daniel Scheffler

The stamp of Africa



African fashion has much more to offer than just a series of Fashion Weeks: it's a vast, dynamic space with plenty of untapped creativity, and that's exactly what people like Folorunsho Alakija – a wealthy businesswoman with investments in oil – and Taibo Bacar, an inspired designer, have decided to explore. Both believe firmly that the future of fashion on our continent is a bright one.

Nigerian-born Alakija, who dethroned Oprah Winfrey on the *Forbes* list as the richest black woman on the planet in December, is now worth a cool \$3,3 billion, according to *Forbes*. But the 61-year-old glamour puss seems unaffected by her wealth and uses it to boost communities in desperate need of a new-age Helen of Troy. Although her riches came from oil investments, she's always been closely involved with fashion, having studied it in England. Upon her return home in 1985, she launched an award-winning fashion institution called Supreme Stitches.

Flo (as she's known to her English chums) was living in an apartment in Lagos when she started the business, designing

couture for the rising society women of Nigeria's capital. For 15 years she used the label to express her creativity and invested in using local fabrics like aso-oke and ankara. As President of the Fashion Designers' Association of Nigeria, she also used her authority to educate and inspire a new generation of Nigerian designers. The seeds she sowed are now evident, with a significant number of them heading to New York and London to showcase their unique concepts

ABOVE AND LEFT: Taibo Bacar and his designs
ABOVE RIGHT: "Flo" Alakija with designer Nancy Nwadike and her husband Mik

of African style.

Mozambique-born Bacar (27) is another hot ticket in Africa, according to iconic street photographer and blogger Scott Schuman (aka The Sartorialist). He's conquered his home country with two labels (a ready-to-wear range called Amalia's Garden by Taibo and a couture range called Taibo – A Touch of Glamour), and has dressed every society woman in Maputo.

The awards he's won, including Mozambique Fashion Week's Best Established Designer and Fashion Week Africa Emerging Designer of the Year, may not mean very much in a large industry like SA's, but they're helping him break into the European (and, hopefully, the American) markets.

With designers like these taking Africa's flair to the world, there's a lot to look forward to. 🇳🇬

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