

Nigerian Designer Reni Folawiyo Pushes ‘Afro-Lux’ Onto the Global Fashion Stage

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In the heart of **Lagos, Nigeria’s economic capital**, sits **Alara**, West Africa’s first fashion and design concept store. With its striking architecture—defined by latticework inspired by traditional Yoruba *adire* textiles—the space is more than a boutique. It’s the **epicenter of “Afro-lux”**, a movement pioneered by Nigerian entrepreneur **Reni Folawiyo**.

For over a decade, Folawiyo has been redefining African luxury, blending **tradition with modernity** and positioning African designers alongside established global names. *“I felt very strongly that these objects and these people had value,”* she says, describing her mission to elevate African craftsmanship from rural handiwork to international acclaim.

? The Rise of Afro-Lux

Inside Alara, curated collections of upscale African labels stand next to international brands, books, and art—presented not as novelties but as equals. Designers like **Eki Kere** and **Salu Iwadi Studio** find space alongside global heavyweights, signaling a shift in how African design is perceived.

The architectural tribute to Yoruba heritage reinforces Folawiyo’s core philosophy: **celebrating African culture while making it globally relevant**.

? Music Stars as Style Ambassadors

West African design has been thrust into the spotlight recently, thanks to cultural ambassadors like **Burna Boy, Tems, and Ayra Starr**, who all made waves at the **Met Gala** in designs by British-Ghanaian couturier Ozwald Boateng.

But for Folawiyo, true recognition lies in sustainable representation. She emphasizes **strategic collaborations with global institutions**, pointing to Alara’s pop-up at the **Brooklyn Museum** and an exhibition with the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)**.

? Design Across Borders

While Yoruba aesthetics are her foundation—rich in textiles, color, and ceremony—Folawiyo's Afro-lux vision pulls from across the continent:

- The **rugged artistry of Senegal**
- The **refined sophistication of Ivory Coast**
- The celebratory spirit woven throughout African culture

Together, these influences shape what Folawiyo calls her own vision of “a celebration of Africa.”

? **Culture Through Cuisine**

Extending beyond fashion, Alara houses **NOK**, a restaurant led by celebrated Senegalese chef **Pierre Thiam**, who has been instrumental in introducing West African cuisine to the U.S. While Alara's retail pieces can fetch prices upwards of hundreds of thousands of naira, NOK offers a more accessible entry point into Afro-lux lifestyle, balancing exclusivity with inclusivity.

? **The Bigger Picture**

Reni Folawiyo's journey is as personal as it is cultural. Born into Lagos's elite, she has used her platform to craft a new narrative for Africa: one where **African luxury design is not just admired but respected**.

With Afro-lux, Folawiyo isn't just selling clothes or furniture—she's **building a cultural legacy**.

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