



Postcard from Zanzibar

After stints in Europe, fashion designer Doreen Mashika returned to Zanzibar to launch her brand in a boutique in the heart of historic Stone Town. Here, she shares her go-to textile markets and favourite places for a drink

YOU SPENT SOME TIME ABROAD BEFORE RETURNING TO TANZANIA. WHAT DREW YOU BACK HOME?

I studied and worked in Switzerland, but with time I knew that my heart lies in Africa. I'm inspired by a deep sense of affection for the cultural heritage and wealth of design possibilities in Africa, and I returned to Tanzania and settled in Zanzibar to pursue my passion of design while building a successful company.

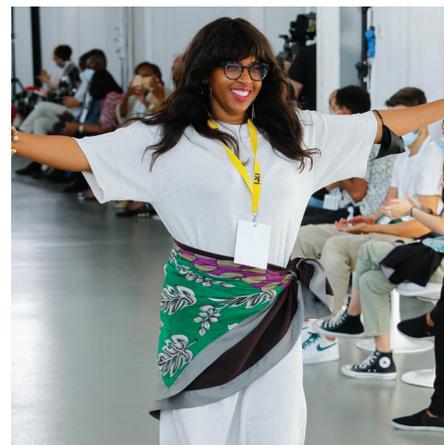
YOU'RE ORIGINALLY FROM DAR ES SALAAM, BUT WHY DID YOU CHOOSE ZANZIBAR?

Life is certainly slower than the commercial city of Dar Es Salaam, and the Swahili way of life

here is about taking more time to cook, dressing up, going to places and connecting with people. Here, there is more soul than any other place in my country. Vivid memories of colourful prints on women, sand, turquoise waters and sounds of nature and waves is what followed me into adulthood, and this is how I knew Zanzibar is where I want to settle.

HOW DID YOU COME TO OPEN YOUR BOUTIQUE IN STONE TOWN?

I wanted to support women who migrated from villages into urban Zanzibar, to promote and preserve their skills. When women migrate, their weaving skills get lost as they embark into unskilled jobs that sometimes expose them to



Clockwise from far left: One of Doreen Mashika's designs; historic Stone Town; the rooftop at Emerson Hurumzi; Mashika at a fashion show in Portugal



danger, so I decided to start a business that would give back to my community as well. I believe fashion is such an effortless way to communicate your individual style, as well as your views and ideas. So we opened our doors in 2008; today we are in Shangani Street in the heart of Stone Town, the UNESCO-protected site.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE HOTEL ON THE ISLAND?

I love the interiors and the architecture of the Park Hyatt Zanzibar, and the fact that you can enjoy the vibe of Stone Town from the beautiful terrace. Locals enjoy watching the sun go down, and children play football while fishermen start sailing out for night fishing in traditional boats called dhows. At this moment you truly feel Zanzibar.

WHERE DO YOU LIKE TO GO OUT FOR A MEAL OR A DRINK?

Forodhani Gardens is a food market where you can taste Zanzibari deserts. I like the Beach House Restaurant because the location is just magic; the ambiance is contemporary Swahili, intensively tiled and print-rich and beautiful.

Sometimes their drinks are mixed up with Zanzibari spices. I also like Seyyida, especially when the Belgian chef makes the drinks himself. The balcony offers a glimpse of Stonetown with the backdrop of the ocean. Another not-to-miss place is Emerson on Hurumzi. You're served in Swahili-style with floor seating and Swahili food. The view to Stone Town is almost 360 degrees, and you will see how the church and mosque stand next to each other. It's always been peaceful.

ARE THERE ANY BOUTIQUES OR MARKETS YOU LIKE TO FREQUENT?

I like to visit the former slave market – there is an overwhelming amount of shops selling traditional materials, which is my obsession. Great places to shop are on Gizenga Street, Kenyatta Road and Shangani Street, which is more of a quiet street but with rather cute jewellery boutiques and clothing.

WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR A DAY TRIP?

Snorkelling in Mnemba island is definitely fun, but a visit to the spice farm can be very informative, as you get to see the trees and

plants of each spice. They can organise a lunch made out of Zanzibar spices.

WHERE CAN WE GO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ZANZIBAR'S HISTORY AND CULTURE?

There are different cultural tours which involve learning how to cook with locals, and there is the museum in the former slave trade market at the Anglican Cathedral – this is a must-see, because you will delve into the history of Zanzibar. Otherwise, beautiful strolls are also a way of getting to know Stone Town.

HOW DOES ZANZIBAR INSPIRE YOU AND YOUR WORK?

I don't think you can find originality that easily around the world, and it's what Zanzibar offers. With its cross-winds and old colonial trading routes, it has for centuries been a cosmopolitan and multicultural melting pot. And it is precisely this essence of combined flavours – with my global design philosophy melding beautifully with African traditions, patterns and techniques – that results in contemporary pieces which are intriguingly unique and perfect for the woman who appreciates fashion made in Africa. ☺

INTERVIEW: SARAH KHAN