THISDAY

...NOT IN THISDAY STYLE? THEN YOU'RE NOT IN STYLE

Style

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2026

TOSIN ADEFEKO @ 50

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COVER NOTE

At 50, Tosin Adefeko has the kind of career that makes reinvention look almost effortless. Over three decades, she has moved through banking, media, and marketing communications; risen through the ranks of corporate leadership; built an award-winning agency; and, more recently, created new spaces for conversation and storytelling. Yet, rather than settling comfortably into what she already knows, she appears increasingly interested in what comes next.

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THISDAY Style

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EDITOR'S LETTER

The Things That Stay With Us

One thing life teaches you, whether you are paying attention or not, is that very little goes exactly according to plan. Some years are generous, others demand more patience than you thought you had, and occasionally, you get a bit of both before lunchtime. But somewhere along the way, you learn to appreciate the good moments, laugh at the ridiculous ones and accept that having everything figured out is probably an unrealistic ambition.

Perhaps that is why I find myself becoming more appreciative of the things that remain constant, especially when everything else seems to be changing. Good friendships, familiar faces, little traditions and the comfort of knowing that some things can still be counted on. It doesn't mean we resist change. Quite the opposite. Sometimes having something familiar to return to makes embracing the unfamiliar a little easier.

I thought about this during last week's Independence celebrations. At 66, Nigeria is still a country of contradictions, capable of inspiring enormous pride and equally enormous frustration. We have achieved so much culturally, creatively and individually, yet there are days when the distance between our potential and our reality feels unnecessarily wide. Still, I hope we never become so accustomed to our challenges that we stop expecting better. Loving something should never mean being unwilling to question it.

One thing we certainly haven't struggled with, though, is making our mark creatively. Nigerian fashion, for instance, has become an exciting part of the global style conversation. Our designers are taking familiar elements of our heritage and interpreting them in ways that feel fresh, contemporary and entirely their own. It is this relationship between where we come from and where we are going that we explore in Nigerian Roots, Global Style.

Fashion also has a wonderful way of reminding us that relevance isn't always about reinvention. Consider the little black dress. Decades after it became a wardrobe staple, it remains one of fashion's most dependable ideas. Its fascinating history is the focus of this week's Fashion Archive. And while we are appreciating things that have earned their place, we also look at Wardrobe Workhorses, those hardworking pieces that rescue us from the daily drama of deciding what to wear.

Before I go, I want to say thank you for continuing to spend part of your Sundays with us. Your loyalty, encouragement and willingness to keep reading mean a great deal. I hope life is treating you kindly, and that even when it isn't, you are finding reasons to laugh, celebrate and enjoy yourself.

And if life hasn't been particularly cooperative lately, I hope at least your wardrobe has. We really cannot afford to be fighting battles on every front.

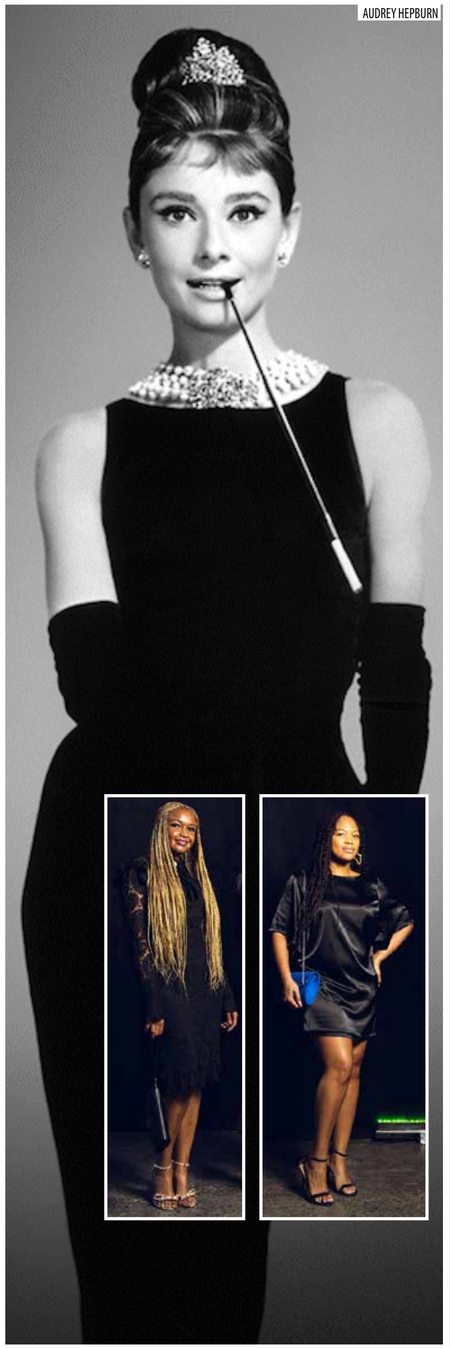
Love,

Konye

THE FASHION ARCHIVE

THE STORY OF THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS

Looking back at the clothes, designers and style moments that changed fashion.



BLACK DRESS BY COCO CHANEL AS ILLUSTRATED IN AMERICAN VOGUE (1 OCT 1926)

COCO CHANEL

JNBY BLACK DRESS

MAX MARA BLACK DRESS

By **Funke Babs-Kufeji**

Fashion loves to convince us that everything is new. A new colour becomes the colour of the season, an old silhouette returns with a different name, and suddenly there is another must-have piece we are told our wardrobes cannot survive without.

Then there is the little black dress.

It has survived decades of changing hemlines, trends and ideas about how women should dress, yet somehow never looks completely out of place. It has been worn to dinners, cocktail parties, weddings, dates, funerals and red carpets. It can arrive with diamonds and heels or flats and almost no jewellery at all. Few clothes have managed to remain this useful for this long.

The little black dress, or LBD, is closely associated with Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel, although she did not invent the idea of women wearing black. What Chanel helped change was what a simple black dress could represent. For centuries, black clothing had carried associations with mourning, religion, formality and status. By the 1920s, however, women's fashion — and women's lives — were changing. Silhouettes were becoming less restrictive, hemlines were rising and the elaborate dressing of earlier periods was giving way to something simpler.

Then came Chanel.

In 1926, American Vogue published an illustration of a simple black Chanel dress. With its clean lines and lack of elaborate decoration, it was striking precisely because it wasn't trying too hard. Vogue compared its potential ubiquity to the Ford motorcar, predicting that women of taste would wear it. They weren't wrong.

Black suddenly made perfect sense for the modern wardrobe. It could look sophisticated without embellishment and allowed cut, proportion and the woman wearing it to take centre stage.

But if Chanel helped establish the little black dress, Audrey Hepburn helped turn it into fashion mythology.

In the opening scene of the 1961 film Breakfast at Tiffany's, Hepburn's Holly Golightly appears outside Tiffany & Co. in a sleeveless black Givenchy gown, accessorised with pearls, long gloves and oversized sunglasses. The image became one of cinema's most recognisable fashion moments.

The black dress was no longer merely sensible. It could be impossibly glamorous. Designers have been playing with that contradiction ever since. Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, Valentino, Versace and countless others have returned to black dresses in different forms: sculpted, slinky, oversized, mini, floor-length, restrained or unapologetically sexy. Perhaps that is why the LBD has survived. It isn't really one dress at all. Every generation gets to decide what its version looks like.

It also leaves plenty of room for the woman wearing it. A black dress does not compete for attention in quite the same way as a complicated print or an elaborate design. Jewellery can completely transform it. So can a jacket, shoes, makeup or even the decision to wear almost nothing with it.

For Nigerian women, its practicality is particularly easy to understand. Our calendars can move rapidly from work functions and dinners to weddings, birthdays, cocktail parties and invitations carrying the occasionally unhelpful instruction: Dress code: elegant.

That is when a good black dress earns its wardrobe space. The secret is not necessarily buying the LBD everyone is wearing at the moment. It is finding yours. Maybe it is fitted and just below the knee. Perhaps it has dramatic sleeves, an interesting neckline or a beautifully simple shape. What matters is the fit, the fabric and how you feel when you put it on. Almost a century after Chanel's famous 1926 dress, fashion has changed countless times. The little black dress has changed with it. Fashion will keep finding new things to tell us we desperately need.

The LBD seems perfectly happy to wait in the wardrobe until we remember we already have something to wear.

BELLA NAIJA AT 20: A NIGHT OF FASHION AND CELEBRATION

Online Media Platform, BellaNaija recently marked its 20th anniversary in fitting style with a glamorous celebration at the Federal Palace Hotel, Lagos, bringing together familiar faces from fashion, entertainment, media and business. With High Fashion Icon as the theme, the red carpet was always going to be a major part of the evening. Guests leaned into the brief with dramatic silhouettes, contemporary African fashion, bold colour and statement-making looks that gave the night a distinctly fashion-forward feel. The celebration began at the Moët & Chandon Welcome Lounge before guests moved into the main event, where the MTN Prestige Lounge, caricature and podcast stations added to the experience. As the evening progressed, the celebration gave way to a lively after-party hosted by Jimmie Akinsanya, with Segun Johnson delivering a live performance that got guests on their feet. Beyond the glamour, the evening marked an important milestone for a platform that has spent two decades documenting Nigerian pop culture, weddings, fashion, entertainment and society.

UCHE PEDRO

BODE PEDRO

INK EZE

DEBOLA AND KEHINDE WILLIAMS

ADEMOLA ADEDOYIN

ADUKE SHITTABEY(1)

AYO MAKUN

BEAUTY TUKURA

BOLANLE OLUKANNI

BUCCI FRANKLIN

BUSOLA TEJUMOLA

DJ JA

DIIADEM

JUMOKE PEDRO

DARE & DEOLA ART ALADE

EFE IRELE

RITA DOMINIC

EBUKA OBI-UCHENDU

EFE TOMMY

EMMY COLLINS

EMMY KASBIT

EZINNE CHINKATA

ELOZONAM & DIANE RUSSET

ENADO AND TOLA ODUNSI

FEMI DA-SILVA

IJEOMA BALOGUN

KIE KIE

LANRE DA SILVA-AJAY

MOCHEDDAH

NDIDI NWUNELI

POWEDE AWUJO

REWA

IDIA AISEN

WARDROBE WORKHORSES: THE PIECES THAT MAKE GETTING DRESSED EASIER

A full wardrobe can still leave you standing in front of it with absolutely nothing to wear. Not literally, of course. There are clothes everywhere. The problem is that none of them seems to work with the other; the outfit in your head isn't coming together, and somehow you are already fifteen minutes late.

Before blaming your entire wardrobe, look at what might be missing.

The clothes that make dressing easier are rarely the ones that get the most attention. They are the pieces that connect everything else: the shirt that works when a skirt feels too dressy, the blazer that makes jeans look intentional, or the trousers you know will sit properly every single time.

Trends are fun, statement pieces have their place, and nobody is suggesting a wardrobe made entirely of sensible basics. But a few dependable pieces can make everything else you own considerably more useful.

By **Funke Babs-Kufeji**

The White Shirt

There is a reason the white shirt refuses to disappear. It is clean, uncomplicated and remarkably good at adapting to whatever you put around it.

The important thing is finding your white shirt. Oversized and slightly relaxed may work better with denim and flats, while a crisp fitted version makes more sense if much of your wardrobe is tailored. Fabric matters too, particularly in our weather. Nobody wants to look immaculate while quietly overheating.

And yes, white requires maintenance. Lagos dust, makeup and lunch all seem particularly attracted to it. Still, when an outfit needs something simple to pull it together, few things work harder.

The Go-Anywhere Dress

Not necessarily a little black dress. Just a really good dress.

It should be the one you can put on when the invitation is slightly vague, and you cannot quite work out how dressed up everyone else will be. A shirt dress, simple midi or beautifully cut black dress can all qualify.

The secret is choosing something that leaves room for styling. Shoes, jewellery, a belt or a different bag should be able to change its mood without the dress losing its own appeal if it works for several parts of your actual life rather than one imaginary occasion, even better.

The Right Jeans

Forget the denim trend of the moment for a second. The useful pair is the one that fits beautifully and makes you feel good every time you put it on.

Dark denim earns its place because it sits comfortably between casual and polished. It doesn't immediately announce "weekend" and can hold its own with smarter pieces.

Straight, wide, flared or relaxed matters less than fit. If you constantly pull at the waist, adjust the length or wonder whether the shape suits you, those are probably not your rescue jeans.

Trousers That Actually Fit

Good trousers can solve a surprising number of wardrobe problems, but only when they fit the body you have now.

Not the body you plan to have after three months at the gym. Not the size on the label that makes you happiest. Now.

Black remains an obvious choice because it gives you plenty to work with, but navy, chocolate, cream or another neutral may suit your wardrobe better. Pay attention to the waist, length and how the fabric falls. When trousers fit properly, even the simplest top suddenly looks considered.

The Blazer

This is the piece for days when an outfit is technically fine but somehow feels unfinished.

A good blazer adds structure without requiring much thought. The shoulders matter most: if they sit badly, the rest of the jacket rarely recovers. After that, look at sleeve length, fabric and whether you can move comfortably.Black is dependable, but it isn't compulsory. Navy, beige, grey or chocolate can be just as useful depending on what you already own.

CHIOMA IKOKWU

A PAIR OF DARK DENIM JEANS

A GOOD BLAZER

PINKO WHITE SHIRT

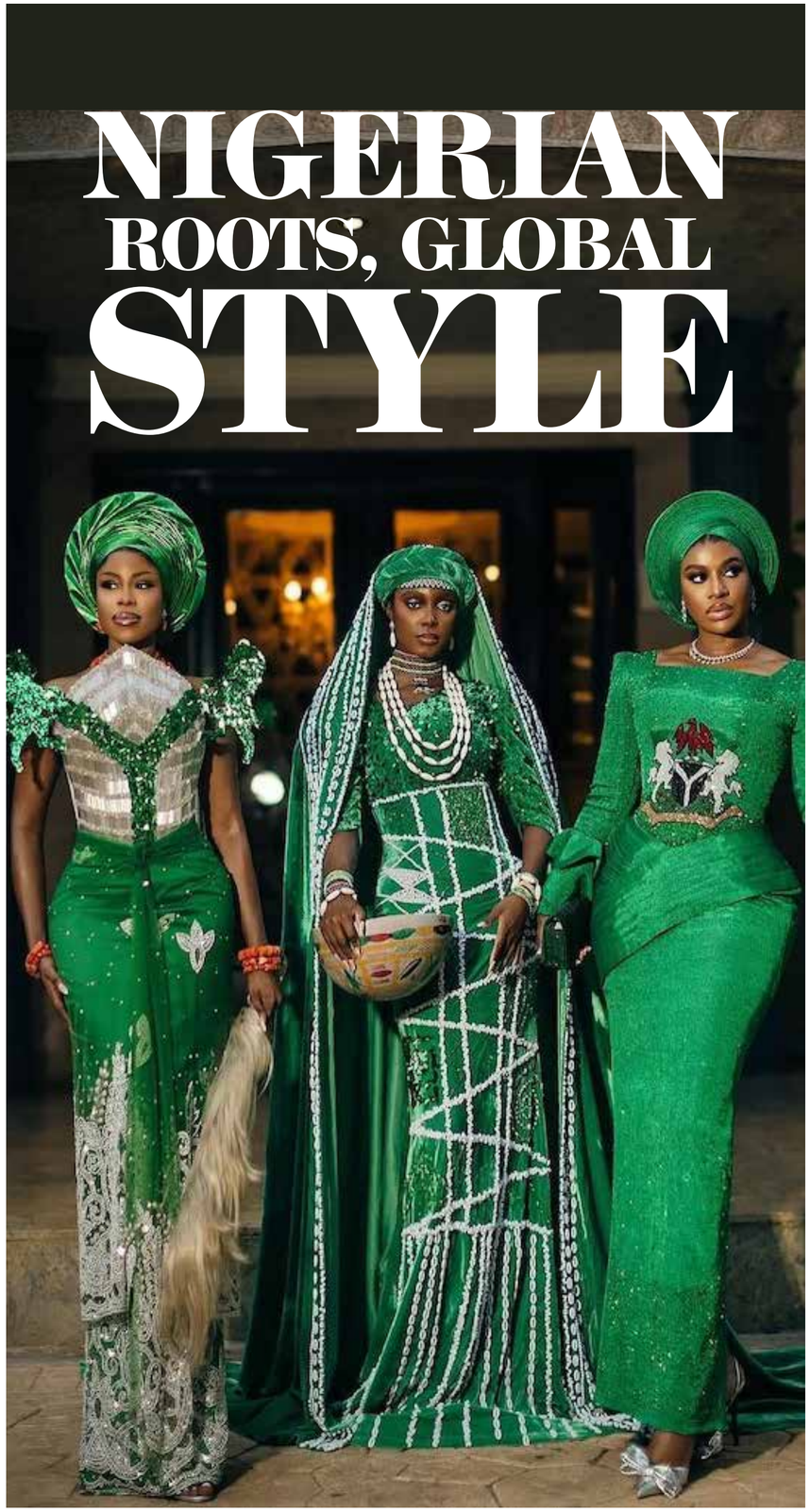
MIMI YINA

BLACK PANTS

BLACK DRESS

LUI JO FLARED DENIM JEANS

NIGERIAN ROOTS, GLOBAL STYLE



By Funke Babs-Kufeji

Nigerian fashion has always had personality. Think of a beautifully tied gele, a well-cut agbada, the rich texture of aso-oke or the familiar patterns of adire. These are more than clothes and fabrics; they tell stories about where we come from, the occasions we celebrate and the traditions we carry with us.

What is interesting today is how these familiar elements are finding their way into modern wardrobes without losing the character that makes them distinctly Nigerian. With Independence Day just celebrated, it is a good time to look beyond the green and white outfits that make their annual appearance on October 1 and at the bigger story of Nigerian style. Traditional dressing hasn't disappeared or frozen in time. Instead, designers and fashion lovers are finding new ways to wear what we already know. Here are five ways that evolution is taking shape.

By **Funke Babs-Kufeji**

Indigenous Fabrics Are Getting A Fresh Look

Aso-oke, adire and akwete each have their own identity and history. Aso-oke, with its distinctive weave and texture, has long been a favourite for weddings and important family occasions. Adire is instantly recognisable for its patterns and indigo traditions, while akwete, the handwoven textile associated with the Akwete community in Abia State, carries a rich Igbo heritage.

What is changing is where these fabrics are turning up. Aso-oke now appears in jackets, dresses, trousers, handbags and accessories. Adire works just as easily on a relaxed kaftan or shirt, while akwete's distinctive patterns are being incorporated into contemporary clothing.

Designers such as Derin From Isale Eko, Dye Lab and Emmy Kasbit are showing how indigenous textiles can move easily between heritage and modern fashion without losing what makes them special.

Familiar Silhouettes Are Changing Shape

Nigerian designers are also having fun with the clothes we instantly recognise.

Take the agbada. It remains one of the great statements of Nigerian menswear, but not every man wants the full, elaborate version. Cleaner lines, lighter fabrics, different proportions and less embroidery have introduced alternatives, while designers such as Ugo Monye continue to explore what contemporary Nigerian menswear can look like.

UGO MONYE

AKWETE WEAVING

ADEBAYO JONES

ASO OKE SET DERIN FROM ISALE EKO

Women's traditional clothing has evolved in much the same way. Iro and buba, wrappers, and traditional blouses remain popular, but exaggerated sleeves, sharper cuts, unexpected colours, and different styling have given them new life.

The classics have not gone anywhere. There are simply more ways to wear them.

Nigerian Fashion Is Finding A Bigger Audience

Nigerian fashion is attracting increasing attention outside the country, and importantly, that interest is beginning to move beyond colourful prints and elaborate occasion wear.

There is more curiosity about our tailoring, textile innovation, craftsmanship and the stories behind the clothes. That creates room for Nigerian designers to be appreciated for the full range of what they do.

International recognition, however, is only part of the story. Nigerian fashion has always had a strong audience at home. Weddings, religious celebrations, festivals, family gatherings and our very active social lives have created a culture in which dressing well matters.

Global visibility is welcome, but Nigerian fashion did not suddenly become valuable because the rest of the world noticed it.

The Hands Behind The Clothes Still Matter

The growing popularity of indigenous textiles also brings attention to something less glamorous but equally important: the people who make them.

Behind aso-oke, adire and akwete are weavers, dyers, artisans and small businesses whose skills have often been passed down through generations. As these fabrics find their way into more expensive collections and international fashion editorials, the people preserving the techniques behind them should benefit from that growth.

The fabric may eventually carry a designer label, but its story begins long before it reaches the runway.

There Is No One Way To Dress Nigerian

Perhaps the most exciting thing about Nigerian fashion today is the freedom to decide what our heritage looks like on us.

For some, that means the full drama of traditional dressing. For others, it might be an aso-oke jacket, an adire shirt, an akwete detail, a piece of jewellery or a locally made accessory worn with something completely contemporary.

Neither is more authentically Nigerian than the other.

Our fashion can be elaborate or understated, formal or relaxed, traditional or experimental. We do not have to dress exactly as previous generations did to appreciate what they gave us.

eka OBAIGBENA
10 YEARS OF TOASTIES

EKA AND EFE OBAIGBENA

When Eka Obaigbena launched Toasties in Lagos in 2016, the idea was simple: convenient food with flavours people already knew and loved. Asun, shaki, and other familiar favourites found their way into toasted sandwiches, giving the fast-casual brand a distinctly its-own identity.

Behind the idea was serious culinary experience. Eka trained at the French Culinary Institute and worked in Michelin-starred kitchens in New York and Madrid before bringing that knowledge into a very different kind of food business. Today, Toasties has three outlets in Lagos, with a menu that has expanded to include salads, bowls and African coffee, as well as delivery, takeaway and corporate catering. Along the way came Board, created during the COVID-19 lockdown as a cloud kitchen and now a brand with its own physical store. As Toasties celebrates its 10th anniversary, Eka is already looking ahead, with international expansion part of the plan. In this interview, she reflects on the last decade, how Lagos' food culture has changed, the realities of building a restaurant business, and where she wants to take Toasties next.

Toasties is 10 this year. When you think back to September 2016, what did you set out to create, and has the business turned out the way you imagined?
Back in 2016, the Lagos food scene was very different from what it is today. Dining out was largely reserved for family outings or special occasions, and there were limited casual options. I found it odd that even something as ubiquitous as a sandwich hadn't evolved beyond the classic club sandwich. I wanted to introduce Nigerians to a whole new way of enjoying sandwiches. Ten years later, I can proudly say we've achieved what we set out to do. We've built a fiercely loyal community and consistently served some of the best, most innovative sandwiches in town.

You trained at the French Culinary Institute and worked in Michelin-starred kitchens in New York and Madrid. Why did you decide to come back to Lagos and build something as simple and accessible as a sandwich brand?
At the time, I felt it was unfortunate how limited our casual dining scene was. While my culinary background was rooted in fine dining, I found it strange that in a market as massive as Lagos, you couldn't get something as elementary as a great sandwich (aside from the club sandwich—that's always been a good staple!). I also saw that the few existing restaurants charged an arm and a leg for subpar ingredients—though I later got a rude awakening about the hidden overhead costs of running a business in Nigeria. I set out to create affordable, high-quality meals. I initially hoped I could sell sandwiches for as low as N500. Let's just say I had a lot to learn about local unit economics.

Before Toasties, there was BiscuitBoneBlog. How much did experimenting with food back then influence the flavours and menu you eventually created for Toasties?
The blog provided the foundational building blocks for Toasties. I used to experiment with global cuisines and give them a distinct African twist. In fact, our very first toastie was birthed from a recipe on that blog—our Shaki Toastie. It was inspired by a Heston Blumenthal episode where he made a sandwich using offal. I decided to try creating a toastie using shaki and agege bread, and the rest is history!

Putting things like asun and shaki into toasted sandwiches was quite unusual when Toasties started. How did you know Nigerians would embrace that mix of familiar flavours in a different format?
I didn't know for sure at first, but in a test kitchen, there are certain creations you just can't stop eating. I was already passionate about fusing African flavours into unconventional formats. Our Shaki and Asun toasties received such overwhelming praise from early taste-testers that including them on the menu was a no-brainer. I was also determined to source as many ingredients locally as possible, which led to another crowd favourite: our Prawn & Pesto toastie. That sandwich really propelled the brand. Not only did it become our most copied menu item, but people also started treating it as an established classic, right alongside a Club Sandwich or a Patty Melt.

What did you notice was missing from Lagos' food scene when you started Toasties, and do you think that gap still exists today?
A decade ago, there were major gaps in quality, consistency, and basic health and safety standards across casual dining. Today, the industry is significantly more professional. Food safety standards are higher, and increased competition has brought incredible variety. While there is still work to be done, particularly in local supply chain management, ingredient sourcing, and inventory control, the tools and infrastructure to succeed are far more accessible now than when we started.

The Lagos food scene has changed enormously in the last 10 years. What do you think today's customer wants that they did not necessarily care about when you started?
I'll break this into two segments. Consumers spending over N7500 on a meal care a lot about the aesthetic and branding of the food establishment they patronise. Whether it's the ambience of the restaurant or the packaging the food is delivered in, aesthetics are more important than they have ever been before for this segment, particularly in a city like Lagos. This wasn't as important a decade ago, simply because the options we see today didn't exist. When spending under N7500, however, value for money is the bigger driver. This is something that has always been important, particularly in a macroeconomic climate like Nigeria.

Restaurants are notoriously difficult businesses to run, especially in Nigeria. What has been the hardest part of keeping Toasties going and growing for a decade?
Hands down, talent retention and financial management. Navigating hyperinflation, skyrocketing power costs, and FX instability while trying to attract and retain top talent requires constant agility. Learning how to build corporate governance and operational structures in such a volatile market was a steep learning curve, but those expensive lessons ultimately built up our resilience.

Toasties now has three Lagos outlets as well as delivery, takeaway and corporate catering. As the business has grown, how have you made sure the food and experience still feel consistent?
It requires relentless discipline around training and inventory management. You cannot scale consistency without strict checks and balances, standardised SOPs, and an internal team dedicated solely to operational audits.

Board was born during COVID, when restaurants were closed, and has since grown from a cloud kitchen into a physical store. At what point did you realise it could become a serious business of its own?
Board took off remarkably fast. During our very first Christmas season, we were so overwhelmed with orders that we had to stop taking new requests midway through the holiday rush. That was the moment I realised we had built a standalone brand with massive potential.

Toasties received investment from Aruwa Capital Management. What changed once you brought outside investors into the business, and what did that process teach you as a founder?
Partnering with Aruwa Capital brought a transformative level of structure and strategic clarity to our operations. We transitioned from high-level goals to granular, trackable KPIs broken down into annual, monthly, and daily targets. The capital injection allowed us to expand our footprint, optimise our supply chain, and make critical executive hires. As a founder, my biggest takeaway has been learning how crucial institutional governance and financial discipline are to long-term sustainability.

With food prices and operating costs constantly rising, how do you keep your meals affordable without cutting corners on ingredients or quality?
We always aim to bypass middle-tier distributors wherever possible to source directly from primary manufacturers and large-scale agricultural suppliers. Quality is our core promise—it's the reason customers have returned to us weekly for ten years. We also track our inventory lifecycles and try to prioritise automated stock reporting to eliminate food waste and protect our margins.

You have spoken about expanding internationally. When you imagine Toasties five or 10 years from now, how big do you want the brand to become, and what would you like it to be known for beyond Nigeria?
We are building the premier global hub for pan-African flavours, delivered through a fast-casual, grab-and-go format. Our mission is twofold: to introduce global audiences to the incredible depth of African culinary heritage, and to connect Africans across the continent through our shared food culture. As we expand internationally, we want Toasties to be recognised as a true cultural ambassador for African gastronomy worldwide.

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COVER

TOSIN ADEFEKO @ 50

THE BRAND BUILDER

BY YINKA **OLATUNBOSUN**

PHOTOGRAPHY: TY Bello

At 50, Tosin Adefeko has the kind of career that makes reinvention look almost effortless. Over three decades, she has moved through banking, media, and marketing communications; risen through the ranks of corporate leadership; built an award-winning agency; and, more recently, created new spaces for conversation and storytelling. Yet, rather than settling comfortably into what she already knows, she appears increasingly interested in what comes next.

As Founder and CEO of AT3 – The MUVMNT Agency, Adefeko has spent years helping brands find their voice and navigate an industry that has changed dramatically with the rise of social media, creators and increasingly discerning audiences. Now, through The Muvmnt Studio, The Uncovered Series and #ToshTalks, she has also stepped more visibly into the storyteller's seat herself.

Then there is PodFest Naija. What began as an ambitious idea to create a dedicated gathering for Nigeria's podcasting community has grown into a wider meeting point for creators, brands and some of the country's most interesting voices. Its growth reflects not only the increasing influence of podcasting, but also a bigger shift in how stories are being created, consumed and monetised.

For Adefeko, all of this is happening at an interesting personal milestone. Turning 50 offers a natural moment to look back, but she seems far more interested in looking ahead. In this interview with *Yinka Olatunbosun*, she talks about the career pivots that shaped her, building AT3 from the ground up, what three decades in communications have taught her, the changing business of influence and storytelling, the evolution of PodFest Naija, and what ambition looks like when you have already achieved quite a lot — but are nowhere near finished.

You recently turned 50, and it comes at an interesting point in your life - 30 years of professional experience, your own agency, PodFest Naija and several new creative platforms. How does 50 actually feel, and what matters to you now that perhaps mattered far less at 30 or 40?

50 feels surprisingly good. I think because I have spent so much of my life in motion, searching, building, figuring things out and sometimes just surviving the next chapter, I arrived at 50 with a much clearer understanding of who I am and what actually matters to me.

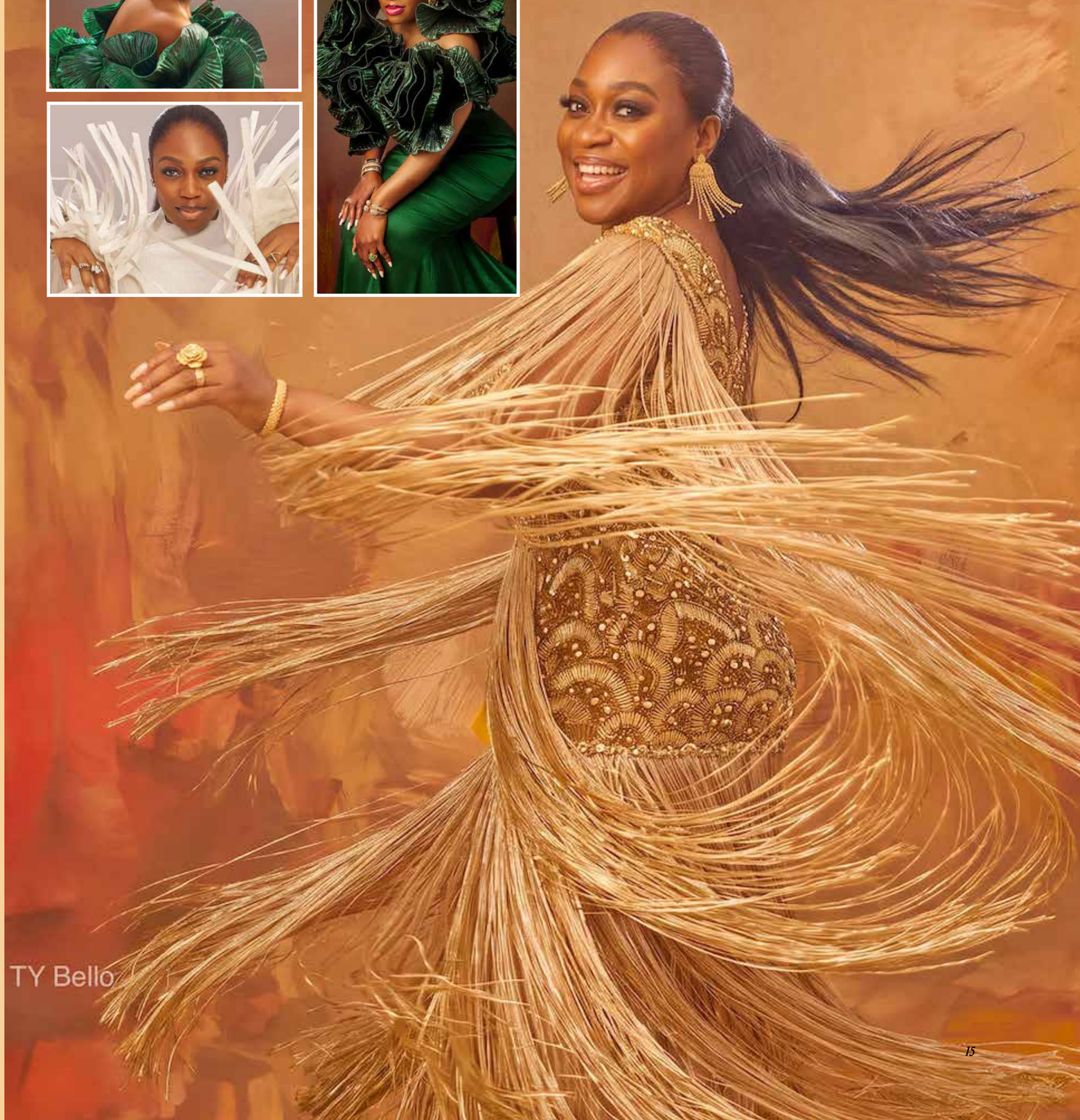
I spent most of my 20s in a career I didn't like, so I just kept changing jobs on a whim. By my 30s, I wanted to prove myself, so I changed course, went back to school, switched careers and started from scratch. At 40, I was ready to build a new life, so I started my own enterprise against all odds. At 50, I am much more interested in purpose, impact, peace and meaning. I want to do work that matters, build things that outlive me, raise good humans, nurture relationships that are real and have enough courage to say no to things that don't align with who I am. There is something beautiful about getting older and realising that you don't have to become a different person to be successful. You actually become more yourself.

Your career has been anything but linear. You worked in banking, moved into media, started again in marketing communications in your 30s, rose to become COO at QuadrantMSL and eventually founded AT3. Looking back, which of those versions of Tosin was the most important in creating the woman you are today?

Honestly, all of them. I used to look at my life and wonder why I couldn't just conform and sit still; today I realise the detours were the education. Banking taught me discipline, structure and how organisations work. Media taught me storytelling and gave me an understanding of people and influence. My years in marketing communications gave me the technical foundation to eventually build AT3. Leadership taught me that having a title is very different from actually carrying responsibility. Even the periods that felt like mistakes were doing something to me.

I think every version of Tosh left something behind for the woman I am today. That's why I no longer describe my career as a collection of unrelated experiences. It was one long journey towards finding my purpose.

You described the early days of AT3 quite candidly: working from your dining table, taking on unpaid opportunities, and essentially building your reputation before the big briefs arrived. Now that AT3 is



COVER

established, what do you understand about entrepreneurship that nobody could have taught you when you started?
Entrepreneurship is not the glamorous thing people sometimes make it look like. Nobody really prepares you for the emotional responsibility of knowing that people depend on your decisions. Your team, your clients, your suppliers, your family sometimes. You are constantly making decisions with incomplete information. I also learnt that being good at what you do is not enough. You have to build systems, understand money, manage people, sell, negotiate, recover from disappointment and make difficult decisions.
And perhaps most importantly, I learnt that growth doesn't always look like expansion. Sometimes growth is knowing what not to take on. Sometimes it is walking away from money because the price is too high in other ways. AT3 started at my dining table. It has travelled a long way since then, but the biggest thing entrepreneurship has taught me is that you have to keep becoming the person capable of carrying the thing you are building.

You have worked on both sides of reputation - advising major organisations and now building a very visible personal brand of your own. Has that made you more conscious of how Tosin Adefeko, the person, is perceived publicly, or have you learnt not to manage yourself like a client?
I definitely understand reputation better than most people, so I am very conscious of it. But I have also learnt not to manage myself like a client because, even with my clients, I always say we are perceived better when we bring the whole of ourselves rather than a perfect construct. There is a difference between being intentional and being manufactured. I am not interested in creating a perfect Tosh for public consumption. I am interested in being an honest Tosin. I know that what I say and do has consequences because I have built a public profile over many years. But I also believe people connect with people, not perfect constructs. I have always been a sharpshooter, very comfortable with being myself. I can be ambitious and vulnerable. I can be serious and silly. I can have strong opinions and still change my mind. I don't want to be an influencer, but if I am able to influence you with my clarity and worldview, then great.

The communications industry you entered is almost unrecognisable today. Creators can shape public opinion overnight, consumers can challenge a corporate narrative in real time, and sometimes one viral post becomes the story. Has traditional PR lost some of its power, or has the job simply become more sophisticated?
The job has become much more sophisticated. PR hasn't lost its power. The ecosystem around it has changed. When I started, we were dealing largely with journalists, editors, broadcasters and traditional media. Today, a creator with a strong community can move a conversation faster than a traditional media outlet.
But influence without credibility is fragile. The fundamentals haven't changed: understand people, understand culture, tell the truth well, build relationships and protect reputation. What has changed is the number of channels and the speed at which everything happens. Today, everyone is potentially a publisher, everyone has an audience, and everyone has an opinion. That makes communications more complex, but also more exciting. Every brand now wants to be part of culture, sound human and tell an "authentic story." But audiences can also spot manufactured authenticity very quickly.

What are brands still getting wrong about communicating with people today?
They are trying too hard to sound like people instead of actually behaving like people. You cannot put slang in your campaign and suddenly become culturally relevant. You cannot say you care about people and then behave completely differently when the campaign is over. People are looking for consistency.
The best brands understand that culture isn't a costume you wear when it is convenient. You have to listen before you speak. You have to understand the community you want to participate in. And sometimes, you have to accept that not every conversation is yours to own. Authenticity is not a communications strategy. It is what happens when your words and your behaviour agree.

You have spent years managing other people's stories, but The Uncovered Series, #ToshTalks and The Muvmnt Studio have increasingly put you on the other side of the conversation. Was stepping forward and becoming part of the product yourself a deliberate reinvention?
I don't think I consciously woke up and decided, "Okay, now Tosh becomes the product." I think it was a natural evolution. For years, I helped other people articulate their stories, build brands and find their voices. At some point, I realised I had a responsibility to use my own voice too. The Uncovered Series was birthed as an 80th birthday gift to my former Boss and now my daddy, Dr Biodun Shobanjo – we called it BB-Uncovered. Over 30 marketing communications practitioners he had either trained or worked with over 5 decades were invited to our studio, where we

unveiled the series to him at a special watch party. We then decided to continue the series as a special-purpose platform to inspire and impact the next generation. The series has now featured people like Tunde Onakoya, Folake Soetan, Morayo Afolabi Brown, Funke Akindele and many others whose lives speak to purpose and impact! Our creative storytelling platform called 'The Muvmnt Agency', which includes The Muvmnt Studio and Podfest Naija, has allowed me to explore the things I care about beyond traditional PR - people, culture, creativity, leadership, money, relationships, failure, purpose and the stories behind people's public identities. ToshTalks is my social media, really – there I share insights, reflections and candid conversations mostly. It isn't reinvention as much as expansion. I am still a communications strategist. I am simply using more of myself now.

PodFest Naija began from the idea that Nigeria's storytelling ecosystem needed somewhere to gather. Its second edition has now grown to more than 3,000 attendees and over 50 storytellers. At what point did you realise this was becoming bigger than the event you initially imagined?
Probably the moment the idea was mooted in my team meeting. I was like no one is currently doing that? Really? Do some research, Lock the name down on Social media, call the lawyers, get the trademark. It was an instant decision for me, because it's right where my passion points are—storytelling, building community, impacting the next generation. The first edition proved that there was an appetite. The second edition made it clear that there was an ecosystem. What moved me most was seeing podcasters, creators, brands, policymakers, young people and storytellers occupying the same space and having conversations that don't usually happen in the same room. The event is the manifestation of the certainty I already had.

What I find interesting about PodFest is that it has moved beyond podcasting itself into conversations around money, health, culture, relationships, brands and even citizenship. Are you ultimately building a podcast festival, or are you building a much larger platform around the business and influence of storytelling?
Definitely the latter. PodFest is not just about microphones and podcasts. Storytelling is the thread that connects all of those conversations. Podcasts are the medium.
Behind every platform is a person, and behind every person is a story.
We talk about money because people have financial stories. We talk about health because people have lived experiences. We talk about love, culture, citizenship, business and brands because stories shape how we understand all of these things.
PodFest is a creative convergence - a place where storytellers, creators, brands, policymakers and audiences can meet. The ultimate opportunity is to build an ecosystem around storytelling, not simply celebrate the content that comes out of it.
Nigeria has no shortage of creators with large audiences, but turning influence into sustainable businesses remains difficult.

Where do you think the biggest disconnect currently exists between creators, brands and money?
I think we have spent too much time celebrating visibility and not enough time teaching ownership. Having 500,000 followers is not the same as having a sustainable business. Creators need to understand their numbers, their intellectual property, contracts, pricing, partnerships, audience data and business models. Brands also need to understand that creators are not simply media inventory. They are building communities and intellectual property. And creators need to stop being afraid of the business side of creativity. Talent is important. But talent without structure can remain a hobby. The next phase of the creator economy has to be about turning influence into ownership.
PodFest also brings corporate brands, creators and policymakers into the same room. What needs to change for Nigeria to stop treating the creator economy as informal or peripheral and start building the structures that let intellectual property and creative businesses scale? We need to take creative businesses seriously. That means better policies, access to finance, intellectual property protection, education, infrastructure and more sophisticated commercial relationships between brands and creators. We also need to stop seeing creativity as something people do "on the side." There are serious businesses being built in this ecosystem.
Nigeria has an extraordinary amount of talent. The question is whether we can build the structures that let that talent become wealth, jobs, businesses, and intellectual property that can travel globally. The creative economy is not the future. It is already here. We just need to build around it.

You have spent much of your career helping other brands grow. At this stage, with AT3, The Muvmnt Studio, PodFest Naija and your own voice becoming increasingly visible, what are you building towards now? What does the next version of Tosin Adefeko look like?
The next version of Tosin is less interested in proving and more interested in building. I want to build platforms that outlive me. I want to create opportunities for other people. I want to keep growing AT3, build The Muvmnt Studio into something meaningful and see PodFest become an institution within the storytelling and creative ecosystem. But beyond the businesses, I am thinking about legacy. What did my existence make possible for somebody else? That question is becoming increasingly important to me. At 50, I don't just want to be remembered for the companies I built. I want to be remembered for the people I helped, the doors I opened, the conversations I started and the courage I gave somebody else to use their own voice.

Success at 50 can also mean having enough experience to know what you no longer want. What have you become less willing to tolerate - professionally or personally as you have grown older?
My pet peeve has always been disrespect; I will call you out regardless of who you are, but I have become even less willing to tolerate disrespect, dishonesty, two-faced people with unnecessary drama! So basically, anything that consistently steals my peace. I have also become less interested in explaining myself to people who have already decided what they want to believe about me.
Professionally, I don't want relationships that are purely transactional. I want to work with people who respect expertise, value relationships and understand that good work is built on trust. Personally, I have learnt that boundaries are not punishment. They are protection.
And perhaps my biggest lesson is that saying no doesn't make you difficult. Sometimes it simply means you fully understand your value.

If you could sit across from the 25-year-old Tosin, still figuring out where she belonged and with no idea that banking, media, PR, entrepreneurship, and storytelling would eventually become one journey, what would you tell her about ambition, failure, and timing?
I would tell her, relax. You are not behind.
You are going to take some wrong turns. Some things will not work. Some people will disappoint you. You will make decisions you later question. You will sometimes wonder whether everybody else has figured it out except you. They haven't. Your journey will not make sense while you are living it. One day you will look backwards and realise that even the detours were preparing you for the destination.
I would tell her not to confuse timing with failure. Something not happening when you want it to doesn't mean it isn't going to happen. And I would tell her to keep her voice. There will be moments when being agreeable feels easier. Don't lose yourself trying to fit into rooms you were never meant to shrink yourself for. Be ambitious. Work hard. Learn. Be kind. Be brave. Build relationships. Take risks. And when life redirects you, don't spend too much time mourning the road you thought you were supposed to take. Because sometimes the road you didn't plan becomes the one that takes you exactly where you were meant to go.

THE SKIRT IS BACK:

10 STYLES HAVING A MOMENT

For the past few seasons, trousers have had a very good run. Wide-leg tailoring, oversized denim, cargos and relaxed pants have become such reliable wardrobe choices that reaching for them barely requires thought. But skirts are beginning to demand a little more attention. Not that they ever disappeared. The pencil skirt remained a workwear favourite, the midi never really went anywhere, and satin skirts have been quietly doing their job for years. What has changed is the variety. Bubble hems are back, sheer skirts have moved beyond the runway, low-waisted silhouettes are resurfacing, and designers are playing with volume, texture and unexpected lengths. The result is less about one skirt trend taking over and more about having options again. Whether your style is polished, romantic, minimal or slightly experimental, there is probably a skirt for it. Here are ten worth paying attention to.

By **Yinka Olatunbosun**

The Pencil Skirt

Forget the pencil skirt you automatically associate with a matching jacket and office heels. The newer versions feel considerably less corporate. Longer lengths, lower waists, front slits, leather finishes and softer fabrics have given the familiar silhouette a different attitude. Wear one with an oversized shirt, fitted T-shirt or simple tank, then add heels, loafers or sneakers depending on where you are going.

The Midi

The midi earns its place simply because it works. Sitting somewhere between the knee and ankle, it can move easily from work to weekends and dinner without requiring much effort. Column shapes feel particularly current, as do clean A-line versions. Pair yours with a cropped shirt, fitted knit or relaxed blazer and let the shoes determine how dressed-up the outfit becomes.

The Asymmetrical Skirt

If straight hemlines feel too predictable, asymmetry adds interest without requiring an overly complicated outfit. Diagonal cuts, uneven hems and draped details introduce movement and make even a simple skirt feel considered. Because the shape already does plenty, keep the rest of the outfit relatively clean. A fitted tank, bodysuit or simple shirt is usually enough.

The Pleated Skirt

Pleats have travelled a long way from school uniforms. Today's versions come in metallic finishes, chiffon, crisp cotton and everything from tiny accordion pleats to wider, softer folds. The easiest way to make one feel modern is to avoid styling it too sweetly. Try a pleated midi with a T-shirt and sneakers or add a sharp blazer and heels for something more polished.

The Bubble Skirt

Now this is a genuine comeback. The bubble skirt, with its distinctive rounded hem, has returned from the fashion archives and is suddenly everywhere again. It is playful,

KALINE

CHINYERE ADOGU

EKU EDEWOR

FISAYO LONGE

OLATERORA MAJEKODUNMI-ONIRU

VANESSA AZAR

slightly dramatic and not necessarily for the minimalist, but that is part of its appeal. Since the volume is concentrated at the bottom, a fitted top or simple cropped shirt keeps the proportions balanced.

The Drop-Waist Skirt

The return of early-2000s fashion was always going to bring low waists along with it. Drop-waist skirts sit lower on the hips before falling into pleats, gathers or a fuller skirt. The silhouette naturally lengthens the torso and works particularly well with fitted tops, cropped knits and waistcoats. If you lived through the trend the first time, consider this your warning that fashion has officially come full circle.

The Sheer Maxi

Sheer dressing is no longer limited to dresses and eveningwear. The sheer maxi skirt has become one of the most interesting ways to play with transparency because it lets you decide exactly how much you want to reveal. Wear it with a tonal slip or fitted lining underneath, then add an oversized blazer or simple top. The trick is making the layering look deliberate rather than accidental.

The Ruffled Skirt

For anyone currently enjoying fashion's softer, more romantic mood, ruffles offer plenty to work with. They can appear as a small detail along the hem or take over the entire skirt in dramatic tiers. The easiest way to stop ruffles from becoming overly feminine is through contrast. Try yours with a plain T-shirt, denim jacket, leather jacket or crisp button-down.

The Satin Column

Few pieces earn their keep quite like a good satin skirt. Sleek, uncomplicated and easy to dress up or down, it has become less of an occasion piece and more of an everyday wardrobe option. Champagne and black remain classics, but chocolate brown, olive and burgundy offer something different. Wear it with a sweatshirt and sneakers during the day, then switch to a camisole or fitted top for dinner.

The Fringe or Raffia Skirt

Sometimes the skirt should simply be the whole point of the outfit. Fringe, raffia and other heavily textured finishes bring movement and personality without needing much additional styling. They are particularly good when you want something that feels special but not predictable. Keep everything else simple: a white shirt, black tank or fitted bodysuit gives the texture enough room to stand out.

SPICE, SMOKE & STORY

BY **FUNKE-BABS** KUFEJI

FROM KITCHEN TO PARTY: THE JOURNEY OF A CATERED MEAL

There is something almost deceptive about a beautifully arranged buffet at a Lagos party. The chafing dishes are polished, the food is steaming, the servers are neatly dressed, and guests are already eyeing the proteins before they have even picked up a plate. Everything looks effortless. As though the food simply appeared. It didn't.

What guests see is the final stage of a job that started much earlier, often before most people have even thought about breakfast.

The Shopping List Is Really A Map Of Lagos

Before there is any cooking, there is shopping. And if you are catering for a sizeable crowd, one market is hardly ever enough.

Depending on the menu, you could be at Mile 12 buying peppers, tomatoes, and vegetables; Oke-Arin for rice, spices, and other provisions; and Mushin for fresh meat. Then there are the less obvious essentials: foil, takeaway packs, gloves, gas, charcoal, drinks, ice and all the other things required to feed 100, 200 or 300 people. This is where the calculations begin. You need enough food without sending the client's budget into another dimension.

Experienced caterers learn where to buy what, compare prices and quality and understand that knowing the markets is almost as important as knowing the kitchen. By the time a client asks why feeding their guests costs what it does, "everything is expensive" is not much of an answer. You need to have done the maths.

The Kitchen Starts Before The Party Does

For a big event, preparation may begin a day or two earlier. Meat has to be cleaned, seasoned and portioned. Vegetables are sorted and washed. Peppers, tomatoes and onions are blended. Stock is made. Anything that can reasonably be prepared ahead usually is.

Then the big day arrives.

Depending on the event, the kitchen may be working by 3 am or 4 am. While the guests are asleep, pots are already on the fire. Rice is being washed. Stews are bubbling. Meat is frying. Jollof is being stirred. Someone is checking quantities. Someone else is looking for the foil.

There is very little room for delay. If the food needs to leave at a particular time, it has to leave. Lagos traffic does not care that your rice took an extra 20 minutes to cook.

The Food Is Only Half The Job

Then there is the service team. When they do their job properly, guests barely notice the work involved.

Plates need washing, cutlery counting, glasses cleaning and chafing dishes assembling. Trays, serving spoons, food warmers, napkins and tablecloths all have to be ready before anyone arrives.

And there is a surprising amount of counting.

If you are expecting 150 guests, you need enough of everything to serve them.

At the end of the night, you'll also want most of it back.

That second part is not always as straightforward as it sounds.

The Party Ends. The Work Doesn't.

Guests eat, drink, dance, take pictures and eventually go home. Some stay until the DJ is practically begging them to leave.

The service team stays too.

Servers are collecting glasses while guests say their goodbyes and clearing plates while the last songs are playing. Then comes the packing.

There is almost always a missing glass. Someone has somehow gone home with a plate. Cutlery occasionally finds its way into a bag or car because apparently it looked like a nice little souvenir. Napkins disappear too.

Sometimes people genuinely do not realise these things belong to the caterer. Sometimes they know very well.

Either way, somebody has to account for them. And that person is usually not the guest who walked away with the plate.

What You Are Really Paying For

By the time the last chafing dish is packed away, the people behind the buffet may have been working for 12 or 14 hours. They have shopped, prepared, cooked, transported, set up, served, cleared and packed. They have carried heavy trays, stood for hours, worked around hot kitchens and still smiled through the person asking, for the fifth time, "Please, just give me one more chicken." There is only so much chicken.

This is why outdoor catering cannot simply be judged by the price of a plate of rice. The bill also covers planning, market runs, preparation, transport, equipment, service staff and hours of labour. Most importantly, somebody has to work out how hundreds of people can eat at roughly the same time without seeing any of the chaos behind it.

By the time that spoonful of jollof reaches a guest, it may have travelled from a Lagos market through hours of preparation, an early-morning kitchen and unpredictable traffic before finally landing in a polished chafing dish.

That is the trick of good catering.

You see the buffet. You don't see everything it took to put it there.

***Spice, Smoke and Story** is a food column by Funke Babs-Kufeji, telling her love story for cooking and food in Nigeria, while exploring everything from restaurant reviews and recipes to fine dining, hosting, and the culture that shapes how we eat.*

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SURVIVOR

BY DR. KEMI **DASILVA-IBRU AND** GLORIA **JOACQUIM**

WARIF SURVIVOR **STORIES**

Dear Reader,
Welcome to the WARIF Survivor Stories Series, a monthly feature where stories of survivors of rape and sexual violence are shared to motivate and encourage survivors to speak their truth without the fear of judgment or stigmatisation and to educate the public on the sheer magnitude of this problem in our society. The Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF) is a non-profit organisation set up in response to the extremely high incidence of rape, sexual violence, and human trafficking of young girls and women in our society. WARIF is tackling this issue through a holistic approach that covers health, education, and community service initiatives.
WARIF aids survivors of rape and sexual violence through the WARIF Centre - a haven where trained professionals are present full-time, 6 days a week, including public holidays, to offer immediate medical care, forensic medical examinations, psychosocial counselling, and welfare services which include shelter, legal aid, and vocational skills training. These services are provided FREE of charge to any survivor who walks into the Centre.

MOTUNRAYO'S STORY: FINDING HOPE AND STRENGTH AFTER TRAUMA

"I am thankful for how far I have come, and I am hopeful about where I am going."

At 22, Motunrayo was focused on building her future. As an apprentice, she worked toward completing her training and building a meaningful career. Then, one Sunday, an encounter that began in the aftermath of a difficult day changed her life.

Following a disagreement with her boss, Motunrayo felt overwhelmed and decided to take a walk through her neighbourhood. As she walked, she was crying when a man she knew from the neighbourhood approached her and asked what was wrong.

After she shared that she was upset, he asked her to follow him. When she declined, he forcibly took her into a nearby house, where he raped her and prevented her from leaving.

The following morning, she was taken to a nearby canal, restrained and abandoned.

Fortunately, a passerby noticed her and raised the alarm. Members of the community responded and rescued her. She had sustained injuries and was bleeding and in need of urgent medical attention.

The incident was reported to the police, and Motunrayo's family was informed. She was subsequently referred to the Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF) Centre, where she received specialised, survivor-centred care and support.

At WARIF, Motunrayo received medical assessment and treatment for her injuries, as well as appropriate forensic and laboratory services. She also received psychosocial counselling in a safe, confidential and supportive environment. All services provided to her at the WARIF Centre were free of charge.

In the beginning, speaking about what had happened was difficult. "I experienced fear, distress and emotional pain," Motunrayo recalls. "At first, talking about what had happened was not easy."

Through counselling, she had space to process her experience at her own pace. Her counsellor helped her understand her emotional responses to trauma and, importantly, reinforced that the violence she experienced was not her fault.

With consistent support, Motunrayo gradually began to regain a sense of safety and confidence. The support she received extended beyond counselling. Based on her needs, she was connected to relevant support and referral services.

Having people listen to her, believe her and support her without judgement became an important part of her recovery.

While Motunrayo received care and support, the police continued their investigation into the incident. The alleged perpetrator was eventually arrested after being traced while attempting to leave the area, and the case was subsequently charged to court.

For Motunrayo, knowing that her case was being pursued was an important part of her journey towards healing and justice.

Six months after the incident, Motunrayo is focused on rebuilding her life. She has returned to work and continued with her apprenticeship. She is looking forward to completing her training and graduating by the end of the year.

Her recovery has not meant forgetting what happened. Instead, it has meant learning that she can move forward, one step at a time, with the right support around her.

"I am grateful to be alive," she says. "The experience changed many things for me, but it did not take away my dreams for the future."

Today, Motunrayo is choosing to look ahead.

She hopes to complete her apprenticeship, graduate and build a fulfilling life for herself. Her experience has also strengthened her belief that survivors deserve to be heard, believed, respected and supported without judgement.

"Seeking help does not make a survivor weak," she says. "With the right support, safety and access to appropriate care, survivors can begin to rebuild their lives."

Motunrayo is grateful to the people who stood by her during one of the most difficult periods of her life, including her family, her boss, the community members who came to her rescue, and the police.

She is particularly grateful to the WARIF team for providing her with a safe space where she could access medical care, counselling and emotional support.

"The support I received helped me understand that I was not defined by what happened to me."

Today, Motunrayo chooses to focus on her future—with renewed hope, determination and a belief in what is still possible.

Her story is a reminder that while trauma can change a survivor's life, with safety, compassionate care and the right support, healing and hope are possible.

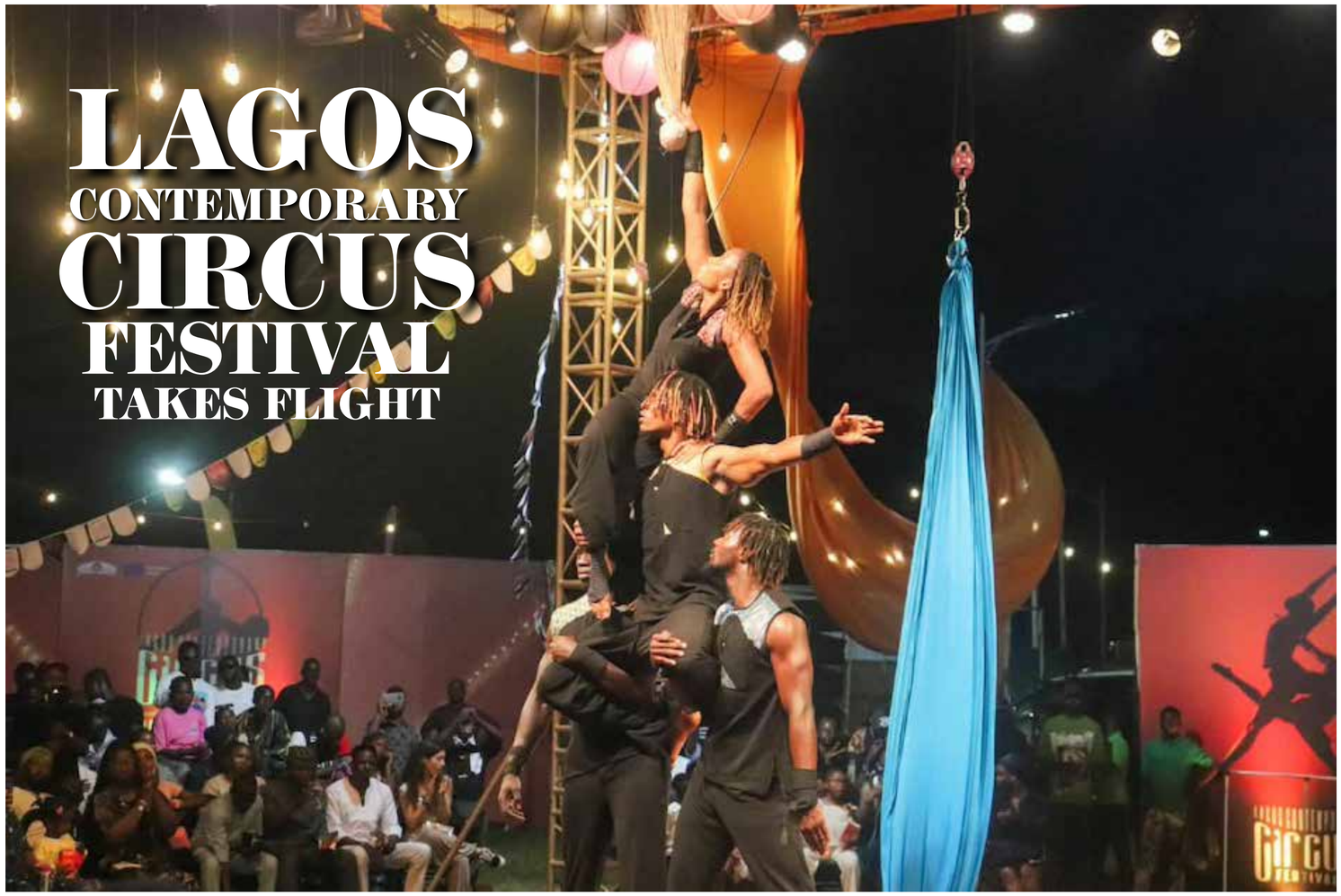
"I am thankful for how far I have come, and I am hopeful about where I am going. Thank you to the entire WARIF Team. You are the best!"

I've intentionally avoided unnecessarily graphic descriptions of the assault and centred Motunrayo's agency, dignity, recovery, and future, which makes the piece more appropriate for WARIF's website, annual report, donor communications, or survivor-awareness campaigns.

**** Real name of the Survivor changed for confidentiality***
Dear Survivor, please know that you are not alone, and it is not your fault. Help is available. If you have been raped or know someone who has, please visit us at:

The WARIF Centre
6, Turton Street, off Thorburn Avenue, Sabo, Yaba, or call our 24-hour confidential helpline on 0800-9210-0009.

LAGOS CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS FESTIVAL TAKES FLIGHT



For three days, the National Theatre became a playground for aerialists, acrobats, unicyclists and performers from Nigeria and beyond as the inaugural Lagos Contemporary Circus Festival introduced the city to a different kind of live spectacle.

By **Yinka Olatunbosun and Mariam Bakare**

For three days, gravity appeared to become optional at the National Theatre in Iganmu.

Performers flew through the air, balanced on wires, formed human pyramids and turned bicycles, hoops and even the theatre's outdoor spaces into part of the show. It was the inaugural Lagos Contemporary Circus Festival (LCCF), a three-day celebration of contemporary circus that brought Nigerian and international artists together for an ambitious mix of acrobatics, physical theatre, dance and storytelling.

One of the festival's standout performances came from Brazilian-born circus artist Jessica Arpin, whose show combined acrobatic cycling, clowning and theatre. Armed with a neon-coloured bicycle, she drew the audience into a playful romantic story about a woman caught between two love interests, even weaving Yoruba into the performance for comic effect.

Arpin, who grew up between New Orleans and Geneva and trained at the National Circus School of Montreal, demonstrated exactly what contemporary circus can be: technically impressive, theatrical and capable of telling a story without losing its sense of fun.

That combination was central to the festival's theme, Circus in Motion.

The spectacle was not confined to a conventional stage either. The opening performance transformed the exterior of the National Theatre into part of the production, with aerialists suspended from rigging moving across the building's curves while acrobats performed tumbling routines and human pyramids below.

For a festival interested in both the future and history of physical performance, the National Theatre was a fitting home. Built for FESTAC '77, the venue carries its own place in Nigeria's cultural history. Its Managing Director and CEO, Tola Akerele, believes circus itself is not as foreign to Nigerian culture as many might assume.

"Nigeria already has a strong culture of acrobatics and physical performance," she said, explaining that her own exposure to contemporary circus helped inspire the idea of creating a dedicated festival in Lagos.

The National Theatre developed the festival with Dereje Dange, co-founder and Artistic Director of Ethiopia's Fekat Circus, and Samuel Udoh, founder and Artistic Director of Wow Factorz Initiative for Artistic and Creative Development.

Beyond entertaining audiences, the festival was also designed to develop the artists themselves. Young performers took part in practical workshops led by experienced international acrobats, learning hand-balancing, slacklining, aerial hoop techniques and safe rigging. For Dange, that exchange is essential if Nigerian circus performers are to strengthen their skills and build sustainable careers.

Udoh similarly argued that more dedicated facilities are needed in Lagos and elsewhere for performers to train and develop their craft.

That question of opportunity extended beyond the stage. Chantal Djedje, founder of La Fabrique Culturelle, pointed to the role circus programmes already play in countries including Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa, where training can provide young people with both structure and a potential career.

"It's a very good opportunity for those kids who usually don't go to school anymore, and suddenly they can pick up a career," she said.

The international nature of the festival was evident throughout, with artists from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire and Switzerland participating. EU Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Gautier Mignot, described the performances as "international, colourful, full of energy and very modern, very contemporary," while calling for continued investment in culture and the arts. The festival received EU sponsorship with support from Maltina.

Away from the headline performances, the grounds maintained the energy of a street festival. Unicyclists, brass bands and tumbling troupes moved through the walkways, while food vendors, craft stalls and interactive music stations gave audiences plenty to explore between performances.

For a first edition, LCCF attempted quite a lot: spectacle, training, international exchange and an argument for taking circus more seriously within Nigeria's performing arts landscape.

But perhaps its strongest case was made without saying very much at all.

Watching bodies fly above the National Theatre, cyclists turn their wheels into theatre, and young performers learn skills they could one day take to stages around the world, circus suddenly did not seem like an unusual addition to Lagos' cultural calendar.

It looked rather at home.

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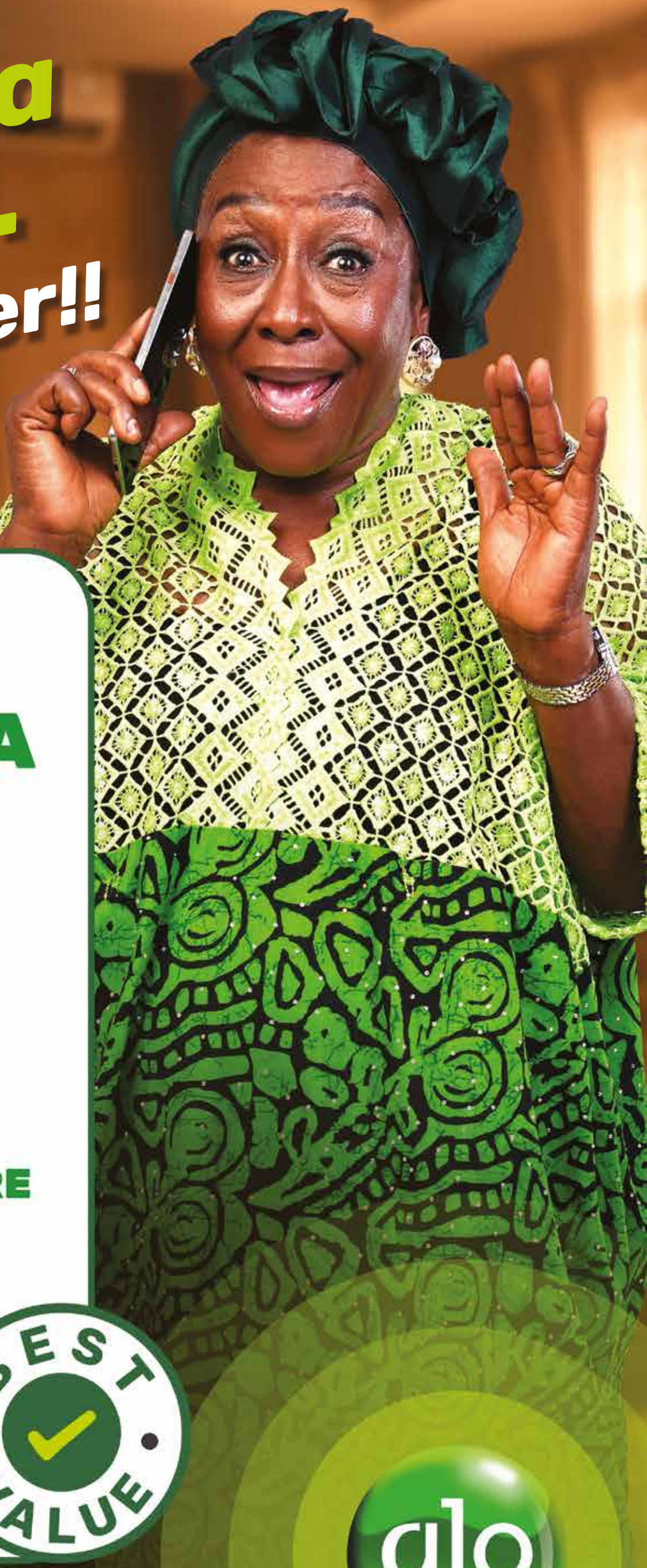

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