

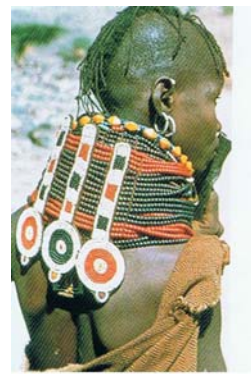
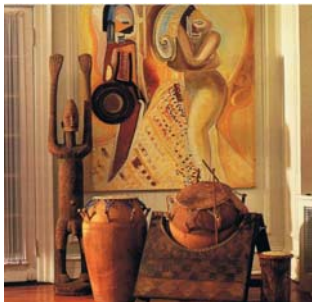
African style design & colour



evolution

Exploring the continent's vastness, Africa reveals the excitement of colour, pattern, art and culture. Distinctive motifs, rich earth tones, as well as the spiritual connections, combine to reflect the diverse societies who have lived off the land for more than 5,000 years.

As the world grows increasingly complicated we become more drawn to linking back to traditional ways of life, simplicity, nature, symbolism. As well as the primitive and tribal arts, the African landscape itself influences design and architecture - lush rain forests, sun-parched deserts, grasslands and animal wildlife.



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history and culture

Africa is comprised of more than 50 nations, 900 different ethnic groups, and accommodates 10% of the world's population. Year after year, there is a struggle with nature and survival somewhere in Africa, many cultures believe there are powers in natural elements such as trees, rocks or rivers that determine the outcome of floods, droughts or disease. When things go badly it is believed the spirits are punishing the people for the errors of their ways. Because nature is so much a part of African life there is a special kinship between the physical world and spiritual wellbeing.

Earliest African dwellers were the hunters and gatherers in Zambia 34,000BC, and early African art dates back to 3100BC and is found in tombs and pyramids in Egypt. Nigeria also has a rich history of jewellery, ironwork and sculpture dating back 500BC.

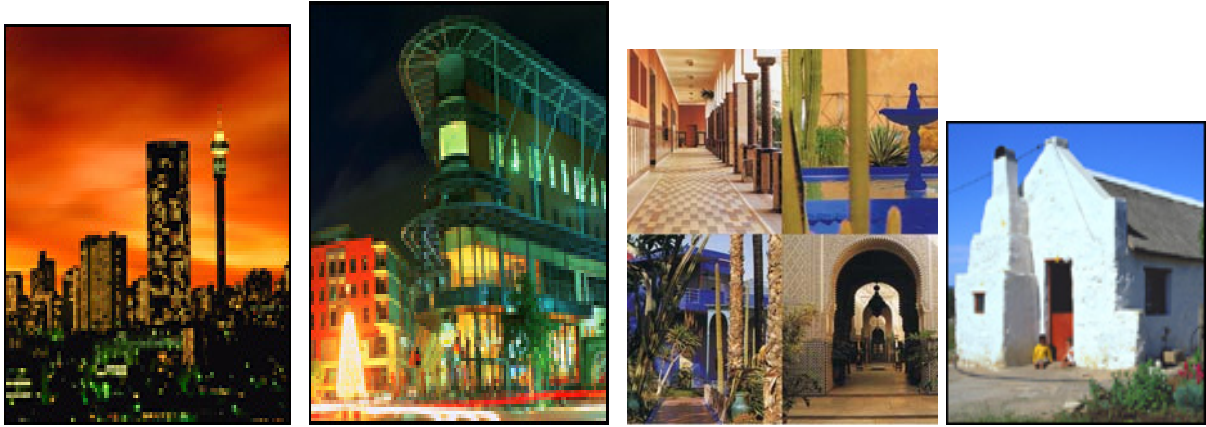
In the 1600s trading posts were set up on African coast by all major European powers, and the Dutch found colony at Cape Town. In the 1800s Britain, France, Belgium, Germany and Portugal begin to colonise inner Africa, and the Suez Canal opened to link the Mediterranean Sea with Indian Ocean.



landscape

When thinking about African outdoors, we may conjure up thoughts of antelopes roaming the grasslands, exotic birds in lush rain forests, crocodiles and hippos at the waters edge, or the tropical jungles and wild animals such as lions, panthers, zebras, leopards and tigers. Nature provides much of the symbolism found in African style, visual and tactile elements emerge from the landscapes, animal life and vegetation. Wood carvings of elephants and giraffes, or ostrich feathers and eggs are used to decorate both indoor and outdoor spaces.

This connection is strengthened by the timbers and earth colours. The environment determines the materials used, from clay or soapstone, bamboo or raffia, and timbers such as baobab, ebony, rosewood and walnut. In the northern regions there is oak, eucalyptus, cork and papyrus which the Egyptians used to make paper and rope.



architecture

Because of the size of Africa, there is a range of architectural styles such as the influences of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria in the north - colourful ceramics, tiles and adobe architecture reflecting a land of camel caravans, bustling outdoor marketplaces and a desert oasis.

In the west the design characteristics are casual, building and furnishing materials include wood, leather, iron, Kente cloth, mud cloth - foreign companies own many of the coffee and cocoa plantations in the region, which also influences the modern architecture.

In the east, the emphasis rests on co-existence of people, land and wildlife. Taken from the terrain and grasslands, the colour palette is dusty beiges, browns, yellows and ochre, giving a sense of timeless, natural integrity.



living spaces

Trying different elements together is the spirit of African style. Texture and tactility are sensual qualities, with so many textiles, furniture and mats made by hand using natural materials, these take on a rich personality. Surfaces that are coarse, uneven, knotty, fibrous or grainy are rustic and primal, and evoke visual excitement.

The living room to the left demonstrates the earthiness of terracotta shades, solid wooden carvings, organic plants and woven textiles as wall art and cushions. The room to the right has Islamic styled patterns, dark timber wall panels, leopard print rug and lots of African influenced art on walls.



Not all living spaces are in earthy colours, there are many sources of inspiration from colourful and noisy markets, history of the traders and busy ports, tropical climate and vegetation. Spicy colours, jewel coloured silks, exotic patterns and botanical prints.

The sitting room to the left shows velvety patterned upholstery, Egyptian coffee table, mud-cloth cushions, wooden masks and sculptures with lush tropical pot plants. The picture to the right shows the use of spicy colours, metal sculpture, plants and coloured glass.



interior styling

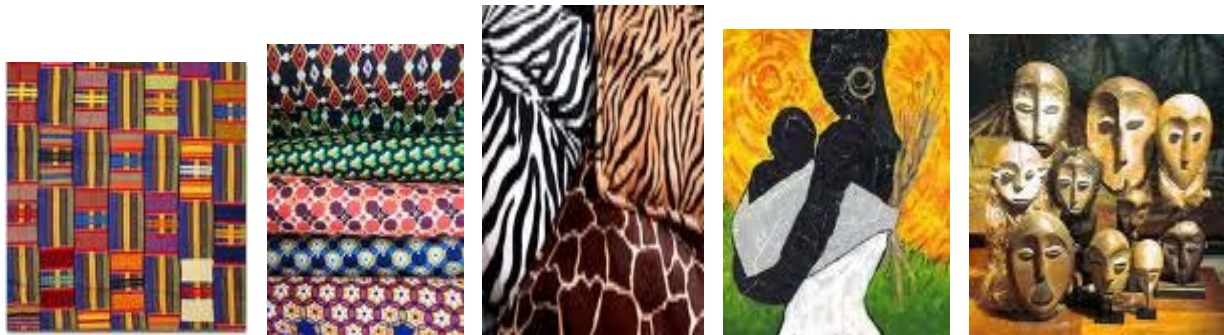
This is achieved through the careful selection of decorating accessories and the mixture of materials and textures. It is about displays, utilising shelves, tables, windowsills, fireplaces and the walls to create areas of interest.

Dramatic figures, pottery, cane ware, old receptacles and boxes, jewellery and masks. These objects come with fascinating stories of origin from past owners, or they may have fulfilled some vital role in a village household.



accessories

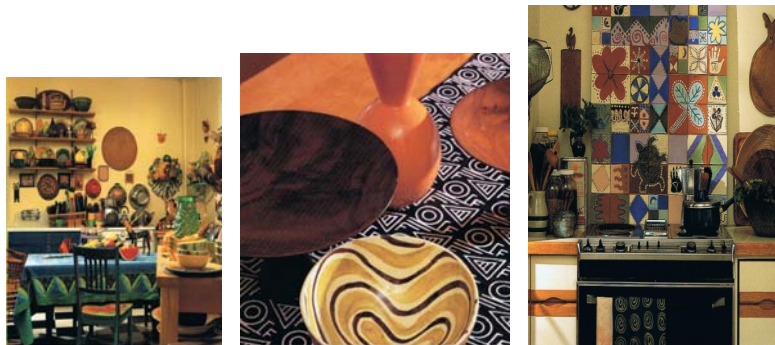
Other styling objects include wooden or ceramic sculptures, sisal, jute or seagrass mats, wool and cotton rugs or runners, textile wall art. Design motifs include wild animal prints, tribal geometric shapes stencilled onto furniture, feathers and tribal weapons and tools. Wooden doors may be carved or painted with geometric or organic designs, or symbols to ward off evil spirits.



art and textiles

Traditionally, if art didn't contribute to the good of the community, it wasn't made. It was used to visually communicate information, to express marital status, religious affiliation or tribal identity. A reverence for ancestors and the forces of nature permeates all forms of African art.

Textiles were traditionally hand woven and coloured from vegetable dyes. The time and skill that goes into producing just one cloth is astounding, a labour of love. Indigo cloths from Nigeria and mud cloths from Mali are perfect for throws and seat covers. Ewe cloth made from silk or cotton in Ghana is characterised by abstract symbols and shapes. African artisans also weave raffia from palm leaves into textile panels, sometimes decorated with appliquéd images of people, animals or weapons.



It is important to understand the culture and design preferences when it comes to kitchens and items used/stored for food preparation and cooking. African baskets are used for food storage and as trays for displaying and serving food.

In Africa the kitchen can be part of the house, a separate building or an open-sided thatched hut or outdoor space. Traditional kitchens are a place where legacies are passed from one generation to the next - the hearth and fire symbolise the radiant spirit of the family or village. In areas where there is little formal schooling, the kitchen is the place where children are taught life skills, amid pots, pans, gourds and pottery.

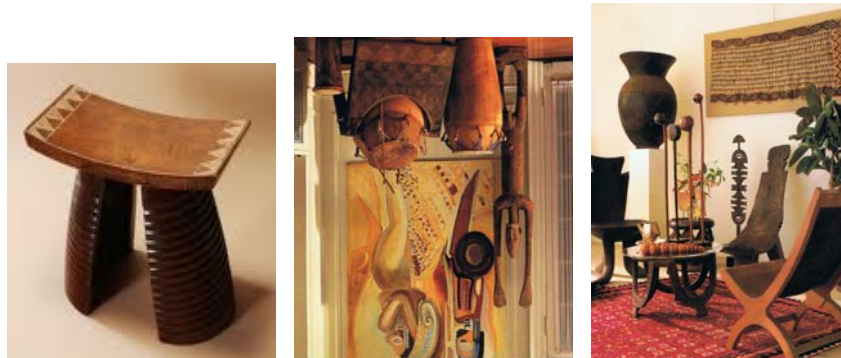
Colourful and vibrant kitchen décor and dining accessories.



sleeping

Bedrooms are a place of rest, and what makes bedtime rituals so comforting and relaxing is often the setting of the scene for sleep. In Africa beds range from simple mats or animal skins on the floor to elaborately carved bedroom furniture handed down through the generations of a family. In Egypt beds were carved from wood and embellished with ivory, gold or other precious metals - they had footboards but no headboard as they were built on a slant so head was higher than feet. While some timber pole and raffia beds were just a few feet off the ground, others were as high as three metres to minimise contact with mosquitoes in swampy areas.

To work with existing beds, changing the sheets, bed linen and accessories can dramatically transform the look of a bedroom. A Kente cloth or Moroccan rug can be folded across foot of bed as a comforter to compliment animal print sheets and pillowcases. African inspired patterns and colours for lamps, cushions, candles and art help to bring the style together.



furniture and displays

Archaeological records show that furniture has been made in Africa since 3100BC - skilfully designed, intricately handcrafted from exotic woods and decorated with patterns and motifs. The oldest pieces in the world were discovered in Egyptian burial sites.

Stools, masks and other objects made from wood were designed with sacred purposes in mind such as offer prayers and worship the gods, or as symbols of authority.

Their use in furnishing rooms creates drama, style and conversation about their origins.



colour

One place that captures the essence of colour of life in Africa is the marketplace, an integral part of African lifestyle. Here the locals purchase their fruit and vegetables, fish and spices, baskets and fabrics, household items. At the same time they grab a bite to eat and socialise, enjoy music and dance, immerse themselves in the culture and traditions of their homeland.



From Egypt to South Africa, colour is everywhere and in everything. From indigo to the strong yellow, red, green and black blocks of colour seen in fabrics and fashion. The lush green rainforests contrast against the golden sand dunes and the deep indigo seas of fishing villages on the west coast. Purple, magenta, orange and gold are the colours seen in turbans and jewellery, and transferred into interior decorating to capture the explosive colour stories.



Indigo is one of the most loved blues of Africa, achieved by the organic dye from the indigofera plant.

Darker shades of blue mix well with orange, gold, pink or purple accents, or work back with black and brown.

Chocolate brown, red-brown and blue-brown - all deep, dark and delicious. Natural hardwood floors in various shades of brown possess a warm beauty and mix easily with most other colours.



Colour is the heart and soul of Africa, and paint allows us to produce any colour we wish. Resene colours from the 2011/2012 Range are listed beside the colour palette to the right of this page.

The colour of festivals, ceremonies, markets, fashion, plants, flowers, beads, handcrafts and homewares. They are vibrant and uplifting, traditional and modern at the same time.

Try Resene Nest Egg, Resene Lush, Resene Galliano, Resene Half Alabaster, Resene Legend, Resene Jalapeno, Resene Believe and Resene Artefact.

compiled by

- Colourwaves - Jill Carroll

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