



My friends often drop by my Mayfair boutique for coffee and a chat.



Part of a group show I curated at Salon 94's Freeman gallery in New York in 2012. It's important for me to have fun and mix things up in a non-institutional way.

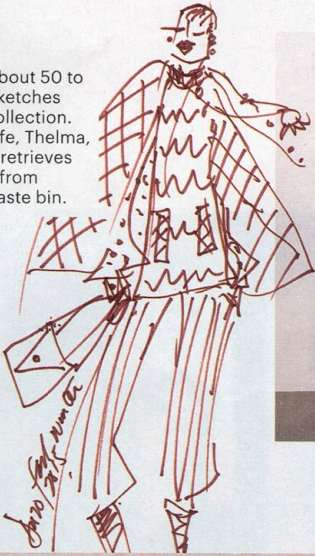
Profile in Style

Duro Olowu

The Nigerian-born, British-educated lawyer-turned-fashion-designer merges riotous prints with daring shapes for collections that transcend trends — and global boundaries.

BY EVIANA HARTMAN PORTRAIT BY RORY VAN MILLINGEN

I do about 50 to 100 sketches per collection. My wife, Thelma, often retrieves them from the waste bin.



negro sunshine

Words from a novella by Gertrude Stein in Glenn Ligon's "Warm Broad Glow."

A display of clothes currently in my store. The multicolored feathered cape is inspired by a Pointer Sisters LP.



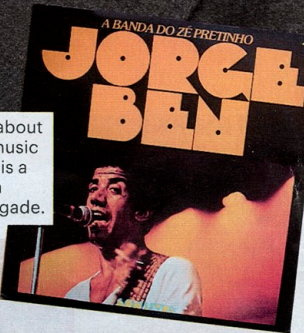
Alma Thomas is my wife's favorite artist. One of her paintings now hangs in the Old Family Dining Room in the White House.

I've always just done my own thing and made it different. The ability to work from your gut is a very attractive quality to me.



I often buy Taher Chemirik's jewelry for Thelma. He mixes materials and makes them look like the most rarefied thing.

I am mad about Brazilian music and Jorge is a poet and a quiet renegade.



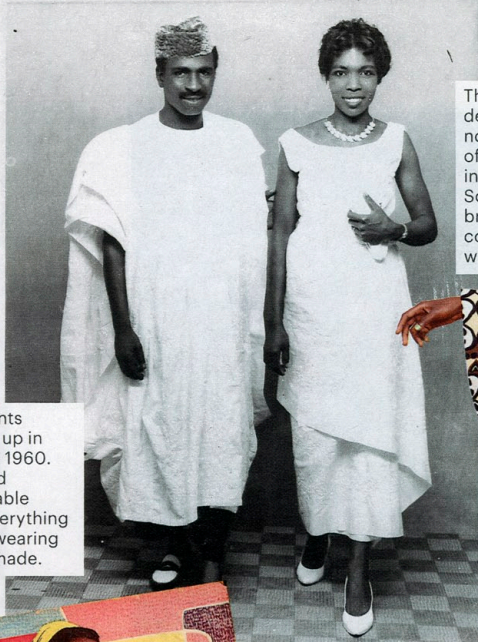
Thelma and me on our wedding day in New York in 2008.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF DURO OLOWU; "MATERIAL," (INSTALLATION VIEW), CURATED BY DORU OLOWU, 2012, COURTESY OF SALON 94, NEW YORK; SON I LIVE/COURTESY NEAL PETERS COLLECTION; COURTESY OF DURO OLOWU; RORY VAN MILLINGEN; "END OF AUTUMN," ALMA THOMAS, 1968, COURTESY OF MICHAEL ROSENFELD GALLERY LLC, NEW YORK, N.Y.; COURTESY OF DURO OLOWU; "WARM BROAD GLOW (DARK)," GLEN LIGON, 2007, COURTESY OF DURO OLOWU; ALAIN CORNU



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF DURO OLOWU; RORY VAN MILLINGEN, COURTESY OF LES COUILLES DU CHIEN, COURTESY OF DURO OLOWU (2); LUIS MONTEIRO/COURTESY OF DURO OLOWU; MORE MATERIAL (INSTALLATION VIEW), CURATED BY DURO OLOWU, 2014; COURTESY OF SALON 94, NEW YORK; DRUM MAGAZINE/AFRICA MEDIA ONLINE



My parents dressed up in Lagos in 1960. They had impeccable style. Everything they're wearing is handmade.

The spring 2015 designs are a nod to the island of Saint-Louis in Senegal. Some of the brocade in the collection was made there.



Polaroids of special moments with Thelma scattered around our London flat. She considers my experimentation a virtue, not a burden.



I grew up reading Drum, a South African culture and style magazine. The women in those days seemed so confident. That's something that always stayed with me, this notion of dressing to be ready for any occasion.

My second show at Salon 94 Bowery gallery in Manhattan last year. It's hard for me to see my curatorial work for what it is. Thelma had to say to me, "Yes darling, it's a real art show."



The fall 2015 collection is inspired by the Fauvist painter Kees van Dongen.

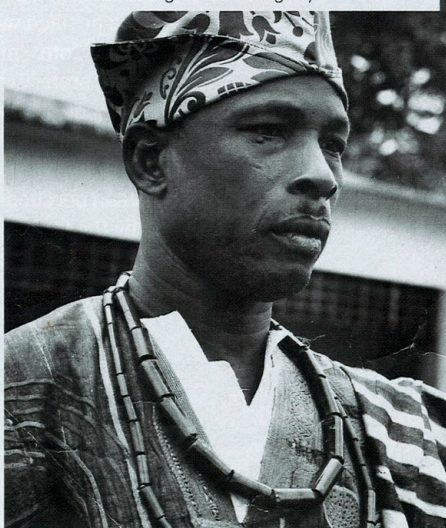
"I DON'T FOLLOW trends," Duro Olowu says. "I'm inspired by the world." Coming from a

designer whose patchwork empire-waisted "Duro" dress has been a hit since its 2004 Barneys debut and spawned an ethnic-bohemian pattern-overload collection coveted by Michelle Obama and Solange Knowles, it is a bit of an understatement. The 50-year-old Olowu's clothes are an artful mash-up of his background: Raised in sophisticated circles in Lagos by a Nigerian father and a Jamaican mother, he spent childhood summers in Geneva, went to Canterbury University and lived for a year and a half in Paris, inspired by his heroes like Azzedine Alaïa. His mother mixed Yoruba tops with YSL Rive Gauche scarves; his Caribbean cousins sported reggae chic. "My path was not straightforward," says Olowu, who first sketched clothes as a 6-year-old. "It's made me open to things, able to see things in a certain way."

A lawyer in London until he launched his line 11 years ago, he met his wife, Thelma Golden, the gamine director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, soon after she contacted him to have a Duro dress made. They split their time between New York and London, where in his boutique the clothes are displayed amid 1960s photographs of Mali beatniks, necklaces made from small brass hands that once hung off royal horses in Morocco and books on Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin.

Lately, Olowu has extended his reach into the art scene. A lifelong collector of photography, ceramics and decorative objects, last year he curated "More Material" at Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn's Salon 94 Bowery gallery on the Lower East Side, a vibrant assemblage of his own designs, antique African costumes and the work of more than 60 artists, including Rachel Feinstein and Laurie Simmons. The artists, he says, "have inspired me to design with sincerity and emotion."

My grandfather, Oba M.O. Akinsoroju, ruled as king of Ode Aye in Ondo State, Nigeria, for over 50 years. As children, we were taught to bow down to him. He had a great air of dignity and calm.



My favorite neighborhood antique shop on Golborne Road in London, where I bought the table on which we wrap things in my boutique. It was originally a desk from the Savoy Hotel in the 1930s.



This street scene in Lagos really shows the way the people there mix color and print. They take much pride in the appearance.