

Every chair tells a story



By [Louise Marsland](#)

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When is a chair more than a chair? When it is designed with a narrative that reflects the people who have inspired the designs, including the designer's own colourful heritage.

London-based designer Yinka Ilori believes chairs are repositories of the stories of the people who sit in them. He has turned the chairs he designs into memorabilia from his life and the lives of the people he encounters. Ilori designs his chairs with the parables which shaped his childhood, as recounted by his father.



Yinka Ilori

He takes inspiration particularly from his Nigerian heritage and culture, demonstrating the memories of his culture, by starting off his presentation by hosting a Nigerian house party on stage with DJ Blinky Bill on the decks.

Ilori, who spoke on day one of Design Indaba 2017 at Artscape in Cape Town, studied furniture product design and found early on with opportunities he was presented with, that his work didn't reflect his culture or individuality. "I felt a bit lost with all these designs I was creating, they said nothing about me or my culture."

He returned to his roots in Nigeria to get inspiration for his first furniture collection. He played around with the richness of his Nigerian culture, which is flamboyant, visual, colourful. He dabbled in hierarchy, sometimes creating functional chairs, sometimes non-functional, but they all told a story, or reflected a parable. Parables like 'No matter how bad a child is, you cannot give it to the leopards'; 'There is sweetness in bitter leaf at the end'; and 'No matter how long the neck of a giraffe is, it still can't see the future'...

He found himself as a designer when he incorporated storytelling into his work, playing the talking drum, starting with a

range of parables. “This is where I found myself as a designer. I worked out what I wanted to tell with my work, status, hierarchy. For me, when I got to Africa, to Nigeria and Ghana, I looked at how people display their wealth and status. I looked at what makes a chair powerful. I like to tell stories about people through my work.”



(C) Yinka Ilori 2015

Ilori uses fabrics from Nigeria and Ghana and gives his work Nigerian names. He specialises in upcycling vintage furniture in a provocative manner, turning them into works of art.

According to his website, Ilori is “passionately against the unnecessary waste he has seen in European and West African consumer cultures and this drives him to reuse discarded furniture and other found objects”. He restores them and in doing so, gives each item a new history and a new purpose.

“Chairs are powerful objects and tell powerful stories. Chairs hold so many thoughts and feelings. If chairs could talk... imagine they could tell your secrets to the world?”

Ilori’s colourful, functional and whimsical chairs embody the celebration of family life, people’s dreams, their culture, heritage, food, homes. Each one tells its own story.

“ Everything about this □

Chair by [@yinka_ilor](#) #art #chair #furniture #homefurnishings #in... <https://t.co/2ZpUDqAdm4>
[pic.twitter.com/f0bKLUjL9M](https://t.co/2ZpUDqAdm4)— Uwanga (@uwa_nga) February 25, 2017 ”

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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