

Unpacking IKEA of Sweden's African collaboration

 By Leigh Andrews

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Before the second morning of Design Indaba kicked off, the tiny yet functional, open-plan IKEA house built at the Artscape's entrance saw the typically tall, blonde, blue-eyed Scandinavian representatives you'd expect shake hands and sit down with a handful of media representatives for a non-typical press conference.

This came off the back of yesterday's Design Indaba announcement of its collaboration with the global clean lines homeware (or just [flat-pack furniture](#) for some) giant, to create IKEA's first-ever exclusive, all-African collection.

IKEA of Sweden's CEO of Range & Supply Jesper Brodin, and head of Design Marcus Engman explained they have enjoyed working with Design Indaba's mastermind Ravi Naidoo and team to draw from an extensive network of designers, architects and creatives from seven African countries: South Africa, Kenya, Senegal, Egypt, Angola, Ivory Coast and Rwanda. The lucky few, including [Selly Raby Kane](#) who created Design Indaba 2017's dreamscape installation, are collaborating with IKEA around modern rituals and the importance they play in the home or habitat – 'habitat' is so big at Design Indaba, it even forms part of the Festival's [what3words address](#).




That's present tense 'collaborating', not some vague concept for the future, as the collaboration kicked off in October last year already at IKEA's headquarters in Sweden, as a form of brand extension by tapping into the creative hub of Africa, thereby diversifying IKEA's own creativity and talent. Having already done so successfully with Asian designers before, they thought, why not Africa?

Why not Africa?

The way Design Indaba connects all the different design disciplines made it the ideal platform to bring the collaboration to the public's awareness, with the house we sat in part of that. It's an open-source house built for tropical conditions, self-ventilating and less of a showcase than a workspace to chat to the IKEA representatives. They're curious and interested to learn how to incorporate their customers and people earlier on in the design-thinking process, effectively tapping into the collective brain.

In response to a question of how that's going, they said, "so far, so good". A carpet will be painted directly onto the floor of the Artscape IKEA house by Laduma Ngxokolo later today, having already been crayoned in, and serious art discussions will also take place over the course of Design Indaba to decide which of their prospective African design projects are feasible. The next level is product development. They'll visit SA producers to see what's possible on site.

 **Design Indaba**

Laduma Ngxokolo collaborating with [IKEA](#) to paint a carpet in the house at the 2017 Design Indaba Festival! Learn more about [Design Indaba's](#) collaboration with IKEA together with designers from across the African continent here: <http://inda.ba/2kVGbMx>

We'll unveil the finished carpet soon, stay tuned. 😊 [#designindaba](#) — at [Artscape](#).

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They add that you can define design in many ways. For IKEA, it's about serving the many and helping them live a better life every day, but based on a model of democratic design – so it's not enough to be beautiful, they also want functional products with sustainability built into the process, which can be a daunting task.

Explaining how they work, we heard they start with the price tag to ensure the product can reach the most people it's intended for, and then make it functional and beautiful. They're not just staying in the safety of their Artscape IKEA house, though – they're also going on the road to see the reality, meeting with various suppliers in their time in SA to discuss sustainable materials and resources – think everything from Eucalyptus wood and water hyacinth to waste like foil packaging and incorporating that into their textiles. That's important as they have an average of 11-year long relationships with their suppliers, and design it all from scratch.

The magic of collaborative design

“If you approach togetherness and collaboration in a certain way, magic happens,” said Brodin. And that magic is when innovation truly happens.

While IKEA doesn't have a big retail footprint in Africa at the moment apart from Morocco and Egypt, the outcome of their African inspired designs will form a global collection in April 2019 in every IKEA store across the globe. Their aim is to invest 5% in new markets each year, and will open in India next year as a result of their earlier Indian design collaboration, so there's hope that we'll see an IKEA store in Africa, they're just not saying when.

They concluded that the range doesn't differ so much in each country; it's the way it's reflected that does. That's good enough for me.

[Click here](#) for more on IKEA's first all-African collection, [here](#) for Terry Levin's overview from the first day of Design Indaba 2017, follow [IKEA](#) on Twitter and visit our [Design Indaba special section](#) for all the latest coverage!

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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