

The Desire of My Heart, a traditional Kente
cloth that lends itself to passion

THE HERITAGE

THE NAME

In the Kente tradition, each pattern has its own name and special meaning. The pattern of the Maakola coat is called “Desire of My Heart.” It is the inspiration for our naming the coat design after this motif: The Desire of My Heart.

You already feel like royalty. The tastes and the garments you gravitate toward already tell us that. Kente can have that jaw-dropping effect as well. By conveying a deep sense of confidence and self-value while displaying the rule by passion and intellect, it’s no wonder it was once reserved for royalty.

At Maakola, we acknowledge the deep significance of the cloth. We use it as a stepping stone to craft clothing that aligns our story with that of the fabric. Kente cloth is made by sewing narrow bands of woven fabric together. The patterns and colors have historic relevance and meaning. Here is our twist on the interpretation of the intricate design and colors used to create this quintessential fabric.



KENTE

An ancient handwoven fabric



Kente was developed by the Ashanti people of Ghana in the 17th century. This intricately-woven cloth was originally reserved for royalty. However, today it is used for special ceremonies like weddings.



ORIGINS

Bonwire is the town in Ghana that gets the acclaim for Kente weaving. There are some schools of thought, proposing that since the word, Kente, has meaning in Ewe, the language of a group that also weaves Kente, there's a possibility that it originated from them. According to legend, two farmers called Krugu Amoaya and Wata Kraban went hunting one afternoon and came across Anansi. Anansi is a spider man popular in Ghanaian mythology. He was spinning his web when they came by, and the two men, astounded by the beauty of the web, returned home and tried to recreate what they saw. The two brothers wove the first Kente cloth out of black and white fibers from a raffia palm. When they presented their cloth to the Asaantehene (i.e, Asante King, Nana Osei Tutu), he approved it as a royal cloth. This was during his reign from 1701 to 1717. Since then, Bonwire has been a home to many Kente weavers and is also the hub for producing quality Kente cloth.

In Kente weaving, strips of different sizes are woven together at right angles, using a horizontal strip loom. The weavers implement the use of weft and warp string by dividing the warp string using the pulleys on the loom and tucking the weft in between the warp thread using a wooden piece holding spools. This allows for specific patterns to be created lengthwise in the cloth.

Because authentic Asante Kente cloth is handwoven by indigenous people on a traditional loom with the indigenous warp preparation accessories, the production of Kente cloth takes a long time, which makes it expensive.

THE MATERIALS

Materials currently used in traditional Kente production

Formerly, the threads used to make Kente cloth were spun from the locally grown cotton or were unravelled from cloth imported from Europe and Asia. Today, under the pressure of increasing revenues and limited offerings on the market, Kente weavers buy what's available on local markets: threads of cotton, silk, rayon, and metallic thread imported from China, often without certifications or descriptive labels.

Even prior to today's concept of weaving was tree bark. In Ghana, Kyenkyen bark was made into a flexible cloth for clothing. However, once cotton and silk made their way over to Ghana, modern weavers came about, although silk was reserved for the affluent.





WEAVING

One creates woven material by interlacing threads. In Bonwire, many weavers stretch their threads on wooden pegs, being mindful of bad weather so the yarn doesn't get tangled. This process is called *warping*. After doing so, the resulting crosses are held together while the warping is removed from the pegs. The yarn on the peg farthest from the resulting crosses is taken off first, followed by the winding of the rest of the warp.

Next, the warp is attached to an *ayaasedua*, Asante for a cloth roller. The cloth roller stretches the yarn in a process wherein the yarn is unrolled, attached to a drag weight, stretched by turning the cloth roller, and tied to the roller.

In Bonwire, the treadle holding up the loops for warp to be passed through is depressed, and the interweaving design weft is inserted along the criss-crossed warp. This first weave is in accordance with the design of the fabric. Then, the weaver puts in a plain weave to interlock the warp and weft. The plain weave involves the spindle-shaped shuttle carrying the weft being tossed between sides of the loom, called *picking*.

DESIGN

Weavers in Bonwire design from memory, keeping in mind the functionality and look of the desired fabric to determine how much yarn to use. Before warping or any of the other weaving steps comes design. The weaver comes up with a plan for pattern, colors, and the amount of yarn.

THE EFFECT OF GLOBAL MARKETS ON MATERIALS

Silk was the traditional cloth used to weave Kente. It has since become very expensive and is not used as much. Rayon is a synthetic fiber that is readily available and easily sourced, and it crafts beautiful pieces.

Dyeing is also a huge part of Kente making. Local dyes, sourced from the bark or leaves of trees, were originally used to change the thread color. These days, most of these dyes come from China or Japan.





A NEW, SUSTAINABLE KENTE

At its origins, Kente was made with locally-sourced thread, and the majority were natural fibers. Over the years, these features got lost. So, to bring it back to its origins and make it more sustainable, we are developing a new Kente cloth with local weavers that maintains traditions but improves its ecological footprint.

We want to reengineer Kente from raw materials that work with nature and design innovation that extends its lifespan by generations and reconnects the fabric to its origins. This will remove any footprint of hierarchical economic relationships between countries.

Ghana's tradition of using natural local fibers to make textiles, baskets, and mats remains strong today. We would like to further explore the use of such materials to create yarn. Alongside threads already on the market, we aim to consider other natural fibers that can be ideal for lightweight composites, such as kapok, pineapple leaf, sisal, hemp, jute, sisal, banana, coir, and kenaf.



We imagine a Kente that regenerates our world with its thread and the stories that result. To accomplish such a feat, we are embarking on a journey with suppliers and weavers to test new threads. Kente already has a low carbon footprint because it's completely handmade and doesn't require electrical power. Reengineering the material with more sustainable fibers will not only lower the environmental impact further but will also improve the final feel of the product and give international certification that can increase its value.

We started by analyzing current materials, tools, equipment, and the step by step processes involved in the weaving to understand how materials contribute to the final features of Kente. The type of yarn determines the durability and qualities like drape, thickness, and stiffness of the fabric.

We have analyzed materials based on their functions and have identified some threads that can replace them. We are currently testing all these combinations.

COTTON

- Function: used for the plain weave or single weave
- Feature: makes cloth a little denser
- Testing: we are replacing cotton imported from China with organic cotton and bamboo

RAYON AND POLYESTER

- Function: utilized for the design weave
- Feature: thin and soft, which makes the woven cloth flexible and drape well
- Testing: we are replacing these materials with Tencel, which is very similar to silk and will enhance its opulence

SILK

- Material: silk
- Function: the best of yarn
- Feature: thin and luxurious
- Testing: silk is very expensive, delicate, and not strong enough for many garments



HOW BLOCKCHAIN CAN HELP US TO BUILD CIRCULAR ECONOMIES

In 2019, the linear “take-make-dispose” approach to production and consumption resulted in over 92 billion tonnes of materials being extracted and processed, contributing to about half of the global CO2 emissions. The most measurable effect of this is on waste production of plastics, textiles, food, electronics etc., and the toll it takes on the environment and human health. Another important effect of this view on consumption is the societal impact of the lack of care and empathy towards other humans and the planet.

This type of production and consumption neglects to ask the question: are there alternatives?

What will happen to these products and the used materials when I get rid of them?

How can it be replenished?

Was someone’s life jeopardized so I could buy an item for next to no money?



It comes down to who pays the bill of that impact at the end of the day?

At Maakola, we recognize that it is hard for the consumer to grasp that their choices could make a difference and to picture what would happen if we were to do things differently. We have embarked on a journey to facilitate this process.

The first step we are taking is to make people, processes, and materials visible. In this way, we as a brand, but also the consumers themselves, can make more informed decisions and slowly build the linkages and connections that will make us part of a bigger system that works only if there is a global balance.

The World Economic Forum estimates that the elimination of waste and the safe use of natural resources can yield up to \$4.5 trillion in economic benefits by 2030. We believe that a circular economy entails the culture and behaviors it creates. This impact is much harder to quantify, but it will translate into stronger social fabric and resilient communities. This is just the beginning, and we know there is much more we can all do, but it is an important start.

Blockchain allows us to create products that are traceable and transparent on the level of materials and people. At Maakola, we pay close attention to the materials we use: where they come from, how they are processed, how they can last longer, and how they can be recycled at the end of their life. Blockchain helps us to streamline the production and make development plans. By making the supply chain more reliable and transparent, we contribute to the creation of a truly global circular economy.

When a consumer purchases a product, blockchain becomes the enabler of a contract between humans and their shared values. We see in it the opportunity to be a social equalizer and facilitate the development of workers in the most fragile economies.

“By bringing everyone together, we equalize the playing field and when consumers purchase something they enter into a contract with other humans and the planet. A contract towards sustainability.”

- Aurora Chiste

We envision a more thorough study of the exact reduction in carbon footprint that developing the new kente from locally-sourced sustainable fibers.

BUILDING A NEW INDUSTRY

Kente is handwoven and its manufacturing technique has a carbon footprint equal to 0. While we were mapping the value chain, we started looking into ways to make it as local as possible. Imported cotton from China can be replaced by locally-sourced materials. We have identified the opportunity to create a new local offer for cotton.

When considering the carbon footprint of the fashion industry, the entire value chain from farm to end of life of a garment should be considered. According to McKinsey's latest study, the priorities that are most impactful are:

- Upstream operations, like the production of fibers and manufacturing of fabrics and garments could have a 61% emission reduction.
- 21% could be saved by altering consumer behavior.
- Another 18% of emission reductions can be realized by the brand's operations. This includes material selection, transport, packaging, minimizing returns, waste, and overproduction.

Maakola's strategy is designed to lower the fashion industry's impact on our planet through all of these channels, actively investing in making a difference in each of them.

While most brands focus solely on their own operations, we look at the entire value chain from day one. Our investment and dedication to work with suppliers to innovate the kente fabric is a testament of this. We envision a more thorough study of the exact reduction in carbon footprint that developing the new kente from locally-sourced sustainable fibers for the Desire of My Heart coat will have, together with other emission-reducing strategies like a local supply chain and made to order.



THE COTTON INDUSTRY IN WEST AFRICA

West African Francophone countries represent a third of all cotton production in the region. The cotton industry in itself is a highly fragmented industry where there is hardly any union among industry players in the same country, not to mention the same region. Many African countries are widely known to rely on their food and cash crops for export, which is known as commodity dependence. As such, cotton is still important for countries such as Benin, Chad, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Togo, and Burkina Faso.

In the West African region, cotton is the third major export good, following closely behind cocoa and precious stones.

Industry-wise, cotton is a major player in the economies of the countries in this region, since its cultivation is practiced by nearly one million households. As with other huge industries that are reliant on labor, cotton farming creates growth income and jobs in different sectors of the country. There is also local value, as cotton seeds are used in the local edible oil industry.

The cotton industry in most of French-speaking Africa surged in the post-colonization era along with a surge in industries and growth infrastructure. Most of these industries have reached stagnation. The cotton sector is characterized by an oscillatory evolution of production due to climate hazards, unpredictable world cotton prices, unsustainable yields, and a growing influx of cotton products from external sources. Traditional fabrics are produced on a small scale, which is largely inefficient and caters only to a minute part of local demand and consumption. In Benin, for example, about 50 percent of total export earnings come from the cotton industry.

The traditional fabrics are produced on a small scale, which is largely inefficient and caters only to a minute part of local demand and consumption. In recent times, West African countries have found themselves importing mostly ready-made garments or fabrics. This only affords them two points of contact in the cotton industry: the point of production and, subsequently, the consumption of the processed finished goods.

The importation of cotton products constitutes a huge industry, one patronized by locals and with a grip on the clothing retail industry. However, there is very little concern regarding the origin of these products, their manufacturers, and the authenticity of the fabrics, which would seem especially important since they tell native stories.

With regard to sustainable cotton production and its industry, the Organic and Fairtrade Cotton Coalition is active in four West African countries: Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Benin. The cotton sector in these countries is divided into cotton companies and cotton producers.

THE POTENTIAL AND BENEFITS OF SOURCING COTTON LOCALLY

The Desire of My Heart coat will be the beginning of game-changers in West African fabric markets. At Maakola, we believe we can contribute to redefining the dependency on raw material and final product imports. Removing Africa's dependency on these will complement poverty reduction policies.

African economies rely not only on the export of raw materials but also on the import of consumer goods and equipment. This double dependency hurts not only the economy of these countries but also their potential to be independent. The short-term pressure on local weavers to generate substantial revenues coupled with the aim of international companies to distribute earnings has resulted in the scarifying of heritage and livelihood. This alone compromises sustainable development, innovation, and the capital expenditure necessary for long-term growth within the fabric industry and general economic growth and development.

By localizing the processing of the raw material and encouraging consumption beyond the borders of these countries, we believe that communities will benefit economically and will be on the way to self-sustainability and long-term prosperity.

“At Maakola, we keep looking for ways to play our part in this paradigm shift while innovating new contexts with our fabric. This translates not just into the use of indigenous West African fabrics like kente. It is necessary to move upstream along the value chain and make sure that the cotton making up the fabric, as well as the dyes, is locally sourced and with that, the entire weaving process is performed locally.” - Aurora Chiste

At Maakola, we go the extra mile of establishing collective evolution and conscious beauty every step of the way. There is a renewed sense of purpose and hope for how we can do business. This is our first step in testing a model of what a solution could be. We aim to stimulate the market and consequently attract investments to grow the local cotton industry.

With regard to our plan and model for the pilot program,

1. We envision that local cotton farms can supply the raw cotton to local workers if they are assured of sustainable demand from the fabric weavers. The fabric weaver can then transform the yield into the final threads distributed for local and international sales. After a first assessment, we concluded that the pilot is feasible by creating a skill transfer program for weavers. We have already engaged possible stakeholders such as cotton farmers from Benin and master Italian artisans like Chiara Vigo to procure cotton and train people.
2. Our business model will focus on the creation of value, with loyalties to the local program instead of continuously extrapolating from it. Having a skill transfer program as well as creating constant revenue will help boost local businesses and efforts.
3. Genuine change coming from reimagining how different organizations and stakeholders in an economy can co-create long-standing value. In this process, our role is to connect the global market to local suppliers through a product that is easily commercialized. This brings the spotlight to local creators and can be a push towards innovation. We hope that bigger international companies and governments that can further facilitate growth with direct investments, indirect subsidies, and tax regulations will join us after this pilot.

4. Another potential benefit of our program and the larger goal of sourcing cotton locally is to change the sourcing structures currently used as well as the designs of the commerce levers usually used to the detriment of independent local farmers and weavers. This interdependency, coupled with the right financial schemes, will provide our locals with the tools they need to contribute towards building a sustainable economy.
5. Changing the system and empowering the lives of local artisans creates collective evolution in that the needs of all stakeholders are considered. Not only major stakeholders but the workers and community institutions will be at the core of commerce.
6. Sourcing cotton locally is the first step. The reality of making sure that the supply, contracts, and relationships result in a more sustainable and equal society that identifies the value creators who can contribute to the wellbeing of people and the planet. This reality is what fuels our ambition.
7. Finally, we see the potential for our customers and the end destinations of these threads. The Desire of My Heart coat has the potential to be loved by many women who will wear it for digital or in person meetings and catalyze investment, innovation, and collaboration across a wide variety of wheels in the economy, engaging both businesses and customers, and challenging the new frontiers of the digital world.

This garment contributes to reach the following
Sustainable Development Goals

1 NO
POVERTY



2 ZERO
HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



5 GENDER
EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE
ACTION



14 LIFE
BELOW WATER



15 LIFE
ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



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