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STORIES BY DESIGN



01 The Circe lounge chair and marble-topped Helios table are two pieces in the Below the Heavens collection for Sé.

HIS mentor, Jerry Helling, creative director of Bernhardt Design, describes Ini Archibong as “one of America’s design storytellers”. His creations, made of a mix of luxurious materials like marble, leather and glass, speak to his culturally rich upbringing and experiences living in various places around the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in his largest furniture collection yet, a 22-piece collaboration with UK brand Sé called Below the Heavens.

VISI chatted to this award-winning designer when he visited Cape Town as a Design Indaba Global Graduate.

How has your journey – from growing up in California to moving to Switzerland to study art and design – influenced your work?

I think how and where I grew up have a huge influence on my work. The way I see the world around me was shaped during my formative years growing up in Southern California. My philosophical perspective and spiritual grounding is a product of how my Nigerian parents raised me. And having been able to spend time in different cities and absorb the culture and experience their history keeps me continually inspired.

Having had these experiences and cultural exposure, I knew I was ready to take on the next stage of my education at ÉCAL in Switzerland. My background and my experience living in Asia and travelling extensively helped me to be a more well-rounded designer, and I think it put me in a position to absorb and learn with a different perspective. Having graduated with a more thorough understanding of how to work with craft and with a more developed conceptual approach has allowed me to apply my experiences to my work in a more profound way.

SWITZERLAND-BASED DESIGNER INI ARCHIBONG, FOUNDER OF DESIGN BY INI,
FINDS INSPIRATION IN MYTHOLOGY, LEGEND AND RELIGION.

02 Lighting from Ini's Formentera collection.



What did you take away from your experience in Cape Town in February?

Participating in Design Indaba was nothing short of life-changing. A lot of what I shared on the stage was very personal, and there were things I had never talked about publicly before. Something about the energy and the sense of community made it feel like a safe place and the right time to let people know who I am and what I stand for as a designer.

It was an amazing opportunity to address such a large international audience, especially so soon after graduating. It was like a dream come true to be able to share my thoughts and philosophy with so many people. As I am of African descent, it was also exciting to finally be able to share my work on the continent, as well as to be there in the flesh to absorb South Africa's creativity.

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Your creations are often inspired by escapism and fantastical stories. Which one of your pieces do you feel speaks to these ideas or stories the most?

These notions seem to inevitably touch on everything I work on, and I don't think I can be the best judge of how well my approach is working. If I had to choose, however, I would highlight the pieces from my Secret Garden collection. Much of my work is predicated on a developing philosophy about personal legend/destiny, the power of mythology and religion, and the primacy of the object and environment as a means for affecting the emotional and spiritual states of those that interact with them. This collection is a response to the world we live in today. Each of the pieces has its own inspiration and story, stories about hope, perseverance, and faith in oneself as a hero and in humanity at large. Just like a fantasy story offers a chance at escape to a magical realm of infinite possibility, the objects in this collection will hopefully provide a similar escape.

PHOTOS THOMAS CANET, ANDREAS ZIMMERMANN



03 Ini's Galilee and Orion tables from the Secret Garden collection have coloured glass legs and solid marble tops.