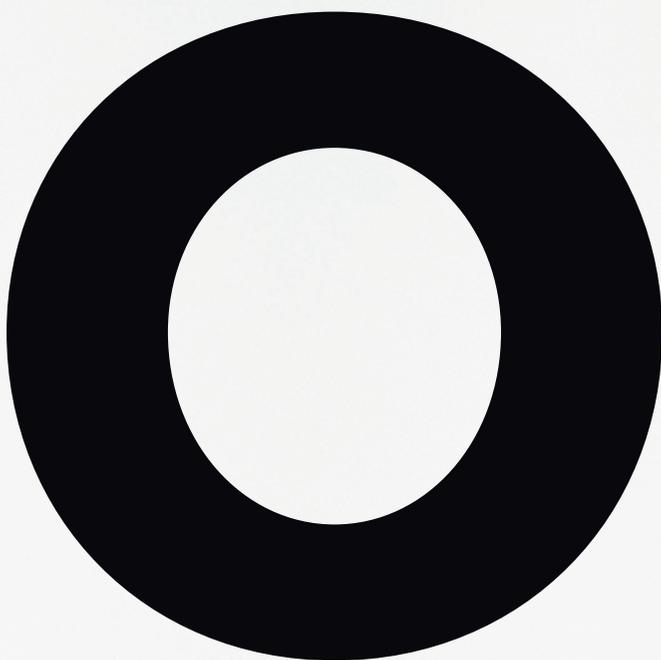


# MADE-TO-MEASURE

Celebrated British designer **OZWALD BOATENG** OBE is known for crafting exquisite suits. A master of dynamic details, he turns his attention to his biggest project yet, the Made In Africa Foundation.

WORD: BELINDA OTAS  
PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF OZWALD BOATENG

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On a crisp New York day in September 2013, Ozwald Boateng, his partner, Nigerian business magnate Kola Aluko, rapper and entrepreneur Jay Z and Oscar-winning actor Jamie Foxx stand alongside Africa's leading philanthropists and businessmen, including Tony Elumelu and Wale Tinubu. The Made In Africa Foundation (MIAF), a foundation co-founded by Ozwald Boateng in 2011 to fund feasibility studies and master plans for infrastructure projects around Africa, is here with The African Development Bank (AFDB) to launch the Africa50 Fund at the NASDAQ stock exchange.

The stars are lending their support to the fund's primary goal – to support transformational and large-scale development and infrastructure projects for roads, railways, ports, and the provision of clean water, electricity and wireless connectivity. The latter, the members believe, is necessary for the renaissance of Africa to occur. The Made In Africa Foundation has introduced a funding mechanism to help successful African businesses to transform their existing investments and prospects and give Africa economic independence through development and infrastructure. According to MIAF, the initiative has the potential to lift millions of people out of poverty.

Boateng offers perspective on this economic alchemy: "\$400 million of funding for feasibility studies and master plans across sub-Saharan Africa could develop over \$100 billion of infrastructure projects, which in turn would create a value of \$1 trillion dollars across Africa, increasing GDP by two per cent and lifting 200 million people out of poverty." Having raised \$250 million already, the foundation is looking to raise \$500 million dollars. It is Boateng's belief that once people see this level of investment going into the continent and creating high value in a place perceived as 'high risk', investors that are sitting on the fence will rush to focus on Africa.

**Pan-African  
The Africa50  
Fund will  
focus on  
developing  
physical and  
technological  
infrastructure**



## Designer Past

46-year old Ozwald Boateng is English, of Ghanaian descent, and grew up in Muswell Hill, London. He made his name as the youngest (and only) black designer on London's prestigious Savile Row, distinguished for its exquisite tailoring of men's suits. Today, he is an established British brand, famed for dressing Hollywood royalty like Will Smith, Jamie Foxx and Idris Elba, and sports stars and renowned world leaders in business and politics, including Barack Obama.

Boateng's quest to see Africa's infrastructure come up to par with that of Western nations stems from a personal experience he had in 2006, when he was invited by John Kufuor, the then-president of Ghana, to organise a fashion show in celebration of Ghana's 50 years of independence.

Boateng arrived with his family, and then spent close to two hours in traffic in a journey that should have taken under 30 minutes. "I just got fed up, and said 'we have got to change this,'" he recalls. Hence, in 2011, he co-founded the Made In Africa Foundation (MIAF) with Kola Aluko, a leading Nigerian entrepreneur, and private upstream oil and gas company Atlantic Energy.

## Defining A Future

Boateng has become increasingly vocal about his African heritage in the last decade, which has been met with scepticism in some quarters. Unfazed by his critics, he feels no need to respond. "The truth is, they are right. I was not involved many years ago. I started my business at 16 years old, and I'm 46 now, so that's 30 years. Let's say I have been vocal about Africa for about 10 years. You have got to imagine that when I started my business in the 1980s and early '90s, I was alone – in every sense. Even on TV, you very rarely saw a black face on (British) television. What I had to do to succeed was to be exceptionally good."

He continues: "Being vocal about Africa and my origins early in my career would have put me in a box. In truth, my only focus then was to establish myself as a credible and respected designer. After I established that position, probably after 20 years, then I was able to communicate more about my culture."

"I felt I had gained enough influence to start doing things in Africa. Without influence, no one is going to listen to you, and so I had to get into position. That's when I started to really mobilise, and it has taken an enormous amount of my time and commitment."

Africa is on the cusp of accelerated growth, a prospect he says he finds exciting. "It's time for Africa to celebrate itself and promote itself as an opportunity, as opposed to being a charity case. When I say >

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## “Africans have an ability to achieve in the most unimaginable conditions. God only knows what can be achieved”

opportunity; I mean huge business opportunities. Africa can be an example for other parts of the world. And in terms of our development – and in particular our infrastructural development – we are at the beginning.”

### Sowing The Seeds

A few months on from the NASDAQ launch of the Africa50 Fund, in December 2013, the Made In Africa Foundation project took a major step forward. Boateng, CEO Chris Cleverly and David Adjaye, a leading architect of his generation, known for his body of work that includes the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C and the Nobel Peace Centre, Oslo, presented their vision to the Government of Uganda.

The foundation’s lead project is the urban regeneration of 160 acres of the Naguru-Nakawa area of Kampala, in line with the MIAF’s purpose to advance major infrastructure projects in Africa. The foundation has provided financial support for completion of master plans and feasibility studies for the project, and this groundwork has helped provide momentum, resulting in the securing of vital private-sector funding for commencement of construction of what will be the largest planned urban redevelopment project ever undertaken in Africa.

The Naguru-Nakawa project will eventually provide in excess of 3,500 residential units, a church, school, offices, hotels, shopping malls, restaurants and leisure facilities: in short, it can be viewed as a satellite town, and one that will provide a model which can then be replicated across Africa.

### Strong Foundations

According to economics authority the McKinsey Global Institute, Africa is the world’s second-fastest growing region. At its heart is an engine of growth: a two-trillion-dollar economy, with a third of its 54 nations seeing annual GDP rises of more than six percent. Among the fastest growing economies globally, six are based in Africa. Mobile technology continues to

grow and innovation is taking centre stage, from Nigeria to South Africa. Plus, 60 per cent of the world’s uncultivated arable land is in Africa, holding a well of natural resources that is still in abundance on the continent. According to the Harvard Business Review, Africa will soon have the largest workforce in the world. However, one key factor is missing in this equation – the infrastructure to make Africa’s global economic growth a reality that is sustainable.

It is this need that is fuelling the collaboration between MIAF and the AFDB, which Boateng says is vital to making a project of this magnitude successful. Such a partnership is required to co-manage and market initiatives, which will catalyse funding for the largest infrastructure delivery vehicle created to date.

“Africans have an amazing ability to achieve in the most unimaginable conditions,” says Boateng. “If you look at the interest rate you get charged by banks, the lack of infrastructure, and the fact that we have no power, we only do seven per cent of trade in Africa internally among ourselves, whereas with everyone else, it’s 60 to 70 per cent, and we are still growing at seven per cent. When you know these things, you know that if you will just give Africans a little more than what they have today, God only knows what can be achieved. Africa has been held back by lack of infrastructure and we need to change that.”

### Investing In Young People

While infrastructure obviously has Boateng’s undivided attention, it’s not the only area where he envisions change: he is equally vested in the potential of Africa’s youth. As national governments struggle with ways to engage its young populations, Boateng reveals plans to take on a series of events targeted at youth across the continent in 2014, hoping to inspire them in the same way he was inspired as a young man. At a time when the unemployment numbers among young people in countries like South Africa and Nigeria are above 50 per cent – in South Africa, it is reported that 70 per cent of those under 35 are unemployed – Boateng admits it is not a great picture. “It’s absolutely key to inspire young people. When you are young, you want to know that you can make a difference. We have got to show them examples of heroes that they can strive towards. The first step is that we have to let them know what the future looks like, and their role in that future. To understand your purpose, you have to feel that you are part of something.”

Recognising the power of influence, Boateng believes the

diaspora has a vital role to play in communicating the business case for Africa, and changing the perceptions on a global scale.

“There are Africans all over the world – even in Iceland. There is no part of the globe that the diaspora is not touching. We have a significant role to play in Africa’s future. We know what is great about being in Europe or the USA, and what’s not so great.”

He goes on to conclude: “This is why I believe we can inspire young people. We want to say, ‘the solution is actually to stay where you are, because it’s going to be great’. We have to take the know-how that we have here, share and help it develop.”

In the meantime, Boateng is optimistic about the future. He believes better infrastructure will be revolutionary. “This can only mean one thing,” he says. “Greater connectivity.”

## BUILDING BLOCKS

Voices that inspired the Made In Africa Foundation

“The Twentieth Century is Africa’s. This decade is the decade of African Independence. Independence now. Tomorrow – The United States of Africa.” *Kwame Nkrumah, 1958*

“I am not African because I was born in Africa, but because Africa was born in me.” *Kwame Nkrumah, 1958*

“I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.” *Martin Luther King, 1968*

“The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us.” *Nelson Mandela, 1994*

“Africa’s future is up to Africans. The people of Africa are ready to claim that future and in my country, African-Americans, including so many recent immigrants, have thrived in every sector of society. We’ve done so despite a difficult past, and we’ve drawn strength from our African heritage. With strong institutions and strong will, I know that Africans can live their dreams.” *Barack Obama, 2009*