



FASHION

## Thanks to Okapi, safari-chic has never been so sustainable

By Nick Foulkes  
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This month's 1,001 mensential: Okapi horn pendants



Not counting Marrakech, which in any case I find often resembles a far-flung suburb of Paris, I have never visited Africa. Shocking isn't it? As I scroll through the photos in my iPhone, I find no shots of giraffes nibbling treetops, no photographs of six-star, tented eco-luxury game reserves, no pictures of sunset (or is it sunrise?) over the Serengeti. To be honest, without my friends at Wikipedia I couldn't really tell you exactly or, for that matter, even roughly where the Serengeti is.

I do not really see myself as a Wilbur Smith or H Rider Haggard protagonist: all that trekking and tracking and wilderness and bushcraft is too macho for me. I am simply not up to Africa... or so I have thought for the majority of my life, but now I am not so sure.

What has had me question my deeply rooted reluctance to embrace Africa? It is a rhetorical question that hardly needs answering: luxury goods. Luxury goods are where the worlds of craft and art meet, where you see the applied arts in action. Luxury goods are the fruits of a deeply rooted and highly developed aesthetic culture. And as well as the cradle of humanity Africa might also be the carrycot of the luxury goods business: in my new book, *Taming Time*, the first "timepiece" I write about is the Ishango bone, a 25,000-year-old baboon fibula, found in what is now the Democratic Republic Of Congo, that has been interpreted by some scholars as having been used as an early calendar.

### 'THESE WERE BEAUTIFUL THINGS BEING THROWN AWAY'

I am sure it was the case all those millennia ago that one was not properly dressed for a night out at the prehistoric answer to 5 Hertford Street without an upcycled mammoth's tusk somewhere about one's person. However, tastes have moved on since the Palaeolithic era and these days the acme of sub-Saharan style is the Springbok horn pendant from South African luxury brand Okapi.

The okapi is an animal that cannot quite decide whether it is a giraffe or a zebra, which is probably why it is described as the “African unicorn”. This whimsical taxonomic designation appealed to Hanneli Rupert, who used it as the name of her brand when she started it about ten years ago. Hanneli is a scion of the Rupert luxury goods dynasty – Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Dunhill, Montblanc, *inter alia* – so she has grown up around nice things, but rather than creating another European-flavoured brand, Okapi has the *goût de terroir* of her native Africa.

It started with handbags, made from locally tanned game hides, characterised by a little scimitar-shaped horn closure. I asked her about the horns and I was surprised to learn that they were waste products. “I got the idea because I was looking at beautiful natural things that were being thrown away and recovered them,” she said. I told her I thought they would make superb pendants: they reminded me of the coral talismans worn by Italian playboys. Happily, Hanneli concurred and this autumn she launches her first collection of high jewellery and seldom has upcycling looked so good. It’s eco-bling par excellence, mounted with gold fittings and studded with anything from turquoise to diamonds (but without guilt, if indeed you find yourself assailed by guilt).



Chest grandmaster  
Peter Wyngarde as  
Jason King  
© ITV/Shutterstock

Safari-chic has never been so sustainable. Hanneli ensures her brand manufactures everything locally with selected ethical partners. This stuff looks as good glimpsed through a slightly too unbuttoned Charvet shirt at Loulou’s as it does around a campfire in the veldt.

As far as I am concerned, there is no male thorax that is not enhanced by a chain with a few baubles dangling from it. I would like to think that my male fashion hero *GQ Style* Editor Luke Day is aligned with my view.

In this instance I practise what I preach and garnish my rather unappealing middle-aged sternum with gewgaws – and they have brought me luck of a sort. People ask me to tell them about the pendants, rather than commiserate with me about my problem pectorals. Needless to say, I have already bespoken a particularly extravagant Springbok horn pendant so as to further distract people from the inevitable continued decline of my physique.