

ANZO'S FASHION JOURNEY: FROM RUNWAY DREAMS TO BUILDING AN INDUSTRY

FASHION THAT CHANGES LIVES

SANTA ANZO IS THE FOUNDER OF ARAPAPA FASHION HOUSE AND DESIGN STUDIO, AS WELL AS THE FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF UGANDA INTERNATIONAL FASHION WEEK. AFTER A SIX-YEAR HIATUS, UGANDA INTERNATIONAL FASHION WEEK IS SET TO RETURN THIS JUNE, SOMETHING ANZO HAS DESCRIBED AS A "CALCULATED STEP FORWARD" RATHER THAN A COMEBACK. SHE SPOKE TO **RANEL DICKSON NSEREKO** ABOUT WHERE IT ALL STARTED, THE CHALLENGES SHE HAS FACED ALONG THE WAY AND PLANS

For many, fashion begins and ends with the spectacle of bright lights, striking garments and applause echoing off the runway. For Santa Anzo, it began with observation. "I didn't just see clothes," she says. "I saw gaps."

Long before she became one of the most influential figures in Uganda's fashion industry, Anzo was a young model trying to find her footing in a space that had little structure. When she stepped onto the runway in 1995 at just 20 years old, the industry was vibrant with creativity, but fragile in foundation. Designers worked in isolation, opportunities were scarce and fashion was

rarely seen as a serious economic pursuit.

From that vantage point, Anzo saw both promise and problem. And even then, she understood that talent alone would never be enough.

SEEING BEYOND THE RUNWAY

Anzo's transition from model to designer in 2001 marked a turning point, but not in the way many would expect. While others pursued individual success, she began to think more broadly about systems, sustainability and the long-term future of fashion in Uganda.

"Talent without structure cannot build an industry," she says.

Anzo began her career as a model in 1995

What she envisioned was bigger than garments or shows. She saw fashion as an ecosystem, one that connected designers, tailors, stylists, photographers, marketers, and retailers as each depended on the other. Without structure, the entire system would remain stuck in cycles of short-lived success.

However, building an ecosystem from scratch meant stepping into uncertainty. "I was starting with very little," Anzo recalls. "There were limited resources, no clear roadmap and an industry that was not yet taken seriously as a business."

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FACT FILE

Born in Kampala with roots in Moyo district, Santa Anzo began her career as a model in 1995, before transitioning into design and fashion leadership. She holds a diploma in fashion design from Dolphins Fashion College in Kampala and has played a key role in shaping Uganda's fashion ecosystem through platforms that connect creatives to opportunity.

Anzo is a fashion designer and entrepreneur, founder of ARAPAPA Fashion House and Design Studio, as well as the founder and president of Uganda International Fashion Week.

Over the years, she has received multiple accolades, including the Presidential Transformers Appreciation Award (2006) and a Lifetime Fashion Icon Achievement Award (2015), cementing her legacy as a pioneer in the industry.