

Written by Ernest Kanjo

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Increasing, young Cameroonians in the diaspora are not just putting their God-given artistic skills into action, but are making a livelihood from the art they know best. Particularly, there has been a spectacular up-shoot of Cameroonian fashion designers in the United States of America and these artists have of recent contributed enormously to the brilliant image the country is having, culturally speaking. One of such Cameroonians who toil day and night to put her game on top is Yvonne Jolie. Jolie who resides in Arlington, Texas is known, from her days back in Cameroon, to have an inseparable relationship with fashion. "She has always been a sapeur {Francophone African coinage for person who dresses gorgeously} and I admire her neatness," a fan of the fashion designer told TIPTOPSTARS. Jolie, who runs Bhywlas Italian Boutique is also an up-and-coming movie actress. She talked with Ernest Kanjo recently on Afrikka Radio's African Cocktail, as main guest of the show. Among other things, the multi-talented artist described her life as a growing child in Kumba, her clothing line and her acting prowess. Here is a transcribed version of the interview!

Ernest Kanjo: Who is Yvonne Jolie

Yvonne Jolie (YJ): Yvonne Jolie is a Nigerian-Cameroonian by birth and a citizen of the

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United States of America. I'm married with two kids, a daughter and a son. I live in Arlington in Texas.

EK: Describe your childhood and up-bringing

YJ: I was born and raised in Kumba, in the South West region of Cameroon. I came from a Christian background. I am the last child in a family of four children.

EK: What is your educational background?

YJ: I obtained my First School Leaving Certificate, GCE Ordinary Level and Advance Level certificates in Cameroon. Here in the US, I have obtained an associate and bachelor in Business Administration.

EK: Why did you choose to study what you studied and how is that helping you today?

YJ: I grew up in a business-oriented home. My mom was a hard working and wealthy business woman and that inspired me a lot. I was fixed to follow her steps and an entrepreneur. When I came here a couple of years back, I kept my ambitions intact, despite scores of other lucrative career field. of studies, I stuck I'd always loved and eventually owned my business.

EK: For how long have you been in the U.S and how have you found life in the U.S?

EK: For how long have you been a fashion designer?

YJ: For a little less than a year.

EK: What inspired you into doing designing?

YJ: First of all I'd say that I'm a lover of fashion. As a young girl, growing up, I had this propensity to coordinate colours and matching outfits. I knew when and on what occasion to wear heels, flats and so on. Also, compliments from friends and people I met on a daily basis on how gorgeous I always looked encouraged me into fashion designing.

EK: Could you trace your way into the art?

YJ: When I came to the US, my husband and I decided to open a fashion clothing shop - BHYWLAS ITALIAN BOUTIQUE. That was way back in 2004. I traveled a couple of times to Europe to buy merchandise and make all the necessary connections I needed. We have been running this shop for years now. Creating my own fashion clothing line came to me as a revelation from God through a dream. I heard a voice saying why can't you start your own clothing Line? It was so loud and clear and here I am today.

EK: What kind of designs are you specialized in and why that choice?

YJ: I focus more on contemporary outfits, at least for now. My choice for contemporary wears

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is connected to my wanting to remain on the top of my game in meeting the demands of present time and age, since there is something new out there every day. That's why I love the fashion industry.

EK: Who are those who demand the outfit you produced most?

YJ: Everyone! Celebrities and non- celebrities alike! This is because I design and tailor outfits for every occasion - weddings, cocktail parties and so on. This allows every individual to be able to place orders.

EK: How interested are Africans in the outfits you design?

YJ: Very interested! I design outfits for all nationalities and occasions.

EK: How affordable are your outfits?

YJ: Honestly, I will say my outfits are very affordable as compare to the work my tailors and seamstress and I put in. One can have my outfit for as low as 300 dollars and as high as 1500 dollars, depending on the fitting sizes and fabrics.

EK: Could you explain how the world gets to know about your products? How is exhibition done?

YJ: When it comes to marketing my products, I can be reached via the following - www.bhywlasitalianboutique.com

, I am on Facebook page at www.facebook.com/bhywlasitalianboutique

, I also have a page on Instagram: www.instagram.com/bhywlascouture

, then on twitter at www.twitter.com/hal83_jolie

. I have videos on my YouTube Page. To view them, click on www.Youtube.com/YvonneJolie

. I have business cards handy everywhere I go. As far as exhibition is concern, we have done a couple of fashion shows. The first was during the launching of my clothing line in June this year. Right after that in July, I organized a fashion show with Dress Dallas 2013. The event took place in Dallas, Texas on August the 3rd.

I had another fashion show with Igbo Unite 2013 which is an organization of working professionals in Dallas. I already have a couple of bookings for 2014. I'm working on those now.

EK: Just where do you intend to take Bhywlas Couture to?

YJ: Oh my! My prayer each day is that the good Lord should lead the way and let me follow. I am already seeing His mighty hands working. Little did I know I would be call upon to dress celebrities such as Ghanaian star actress Juliet Ibrahim, renowned gospel artists Maybelle

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Boma and the ones whose outfit I'm currently designing. I know God is taking Bhywlas Couture to the highest level.

EK: What advice would you give to youths who desire to become fashion designers?

YJ: I will tell them to follow their dreams and not let anyone discourage them.

EK: Who are your role models in fashion designing?

YJ: Oh wow! I would proudly say Versace, Roberto Cavalli and Valentino. I love their outfits and designs.

EK: I understand you are also a movie actress, what prompted you into it?

YJ: I love acting with an inexplicable passion. I'm able to give a character a personality and make that character real to the audience. Also, there is nothing like standing center stage, getting the reaction from the audience, hearing the applause, the laughter, as you are performing a scene, knowing you have made them think, feel, cry, believe and the chance to be someone different. To step out of reality into someone else's shoes for a short while is just a great experience for me. Honestly, there is absolutely no feeling like that, and that's exactly what I'm doing right now as an actress.

EK: for how long have you been in the movie industry and how many productions have featured in so far?

YJ: For less than a year and I have featured in six productions, four movies and two TV series.

EK: What do your directors and producers tell you when you are on set?

YJ: They would always say I nailed it – hahahahahaha! They would always say I did a good job, that Jolie is a rising movie star. Such encouraging words keep me going.

EK: How would you assess the Cameroonian Film Industry in the US?

YJ: Doing good I must say. A lot has been going on. I had a great experience working with producer Emmanuel Takusi who doubles as president of the Cameroonian Film Industry, CFI-USA. Also, the CFI General Coordinator Akim Macauley, the Actors Guild president Mat Atugon, our very own first PRO Agbor Gilbert Ebot aka AGE and of course the one and only Maybelle Bomahave been on doing a magnificent job in marketing the industry here in the USA. If we do not regress which will hopefully not be the case, CFI would be a reference before you know it. We have the potential to overtake Nollywood and Ghallywood.

EK: What traditional dish would someone serve you to be your friend?

YJ: Ekwang is my favourite!

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EK: Your favorite musical genre...

YJ: Hahaha! Gospel and country music!

EK: Your favorite dance: Zouk Love, sentimental and makossa

EK: What are your hobbies?

YJ: Honestly, I can't leave without music. I just love listening to music. I would always also be caught taking my kids to their numerous sporting activities, cleaning, cooking and reading. Then I would also stay at home and enjoy my family.

EK: Thanks Yvonne for talking to us.

YJ: I'm thankful for this interview Ernest. Be blessed!