

# VIVA AFRICA!

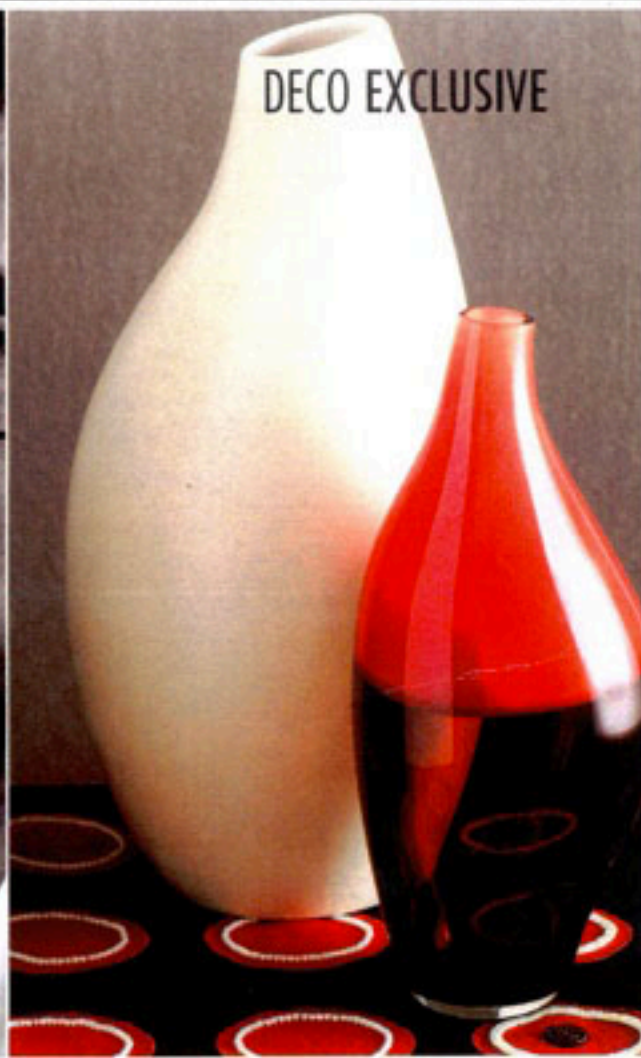
THE MYRIAD TEXTURES AND WARM COLOURS OF AFRICA ARE THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH IN THE SOON-TO-BE-LAUNCHED CONRAN AFRICA RANGE FOR WOOLWORTHS. SEBASTIAN CONRAN REVEALS HOW HE ARRIVED AT ITS STYLISH 'AFRO-MOD' LOOK

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We're particularly thrilled that Sebastian Conran has collaborated with local designers on Woolies' latest, offering, the eponymous Conran Africa range. Is it because he's an international, award-winning hotshot? No. Is it because he's our ELLE DECO SOLVE Awards Judge? Not really. So then why are we so interested when a London-based designer, and not one of our own talents, gets to interpret Africa for the South African market?

Because the unmitigated star here is, of course, Africa itself. And more particularly, South Africa. The new Conran Africa range has been sourced in Africa and is founded on ethical and sustainable design principles. It will be sold at selected Woolworths outlets nationwide and also at Conran stores abroad.

As you know, Sebastian Conran, director of Conran & Partners and son of design godfather Sir Terence Conran, is no stranger to local shores. He first came out here in 2002 as a judge and partner in DECO's SOLVE Awards Event – and has been back every year since, for 'the buzz of Joburg and the view from Table Mountain'.

Conran Africa came about, Sebastian says, when he 'was at the SOLVE Design Awards in Joburg as the Design Indaba was going on. Woolworths approached Terence at the Indaba... I came out to see them a month later, was impressed by the Cavendish store and sent them a proposal to collaborate on this range'.

Woolworths usually works with established, large manufacturers, and here a new opportunity existed to support small businesses and give them a nationwide platform. Says Julia Shingler, head of Woolworths Homeware Group: 'We were delighted when Sebastian shared his ideas with us. The Conran Africa range is more than just a range of beautiful products, it creates opportunities for wonderfully talented, small local manufacturers and designers. The designers and crafters in this range cover the length and breadth of southern Africa, and we are very proud of the fact that 96 percent of the product is manufactured locally.'

Sebastian took on the role of creative director, which involved spending 'a good few weeks seeking inspiration and visiting manufacturers, artists and craftspeople throughout the region.' At times he would brief designers and crafters to produce certain products and at other stages he collaborated directly with locals on brand new designs. The resulting range is 'part inspired by traditional tribal artefacts, part through modern usage and requirements, and part through contemporary African design.' Naturally, the 'basic Conran values of inspirational, aspirational, accessible, simple and practical were also incorporated.'

Interestingly, acting as Conran Africa's creative director has influenced Sebastian's other work – a fortuitous side effect that is perfectly understandable to us South Africans. Africa has affected his designs 'in many ways, more at a subliminal level. The process of visiting the suppliers and makers was really moving'. So that in the end, a sense of genuine application and feeling inhabits this landmark collection. It is one that is modern without being ethnic, and yet infinitely of Africa. ■