

## Filling in the pieces of the 'African Mosaïque'

"JOHANNESBURG – and South Africa – is one of the most exciting places in the world to live right now," says Ethiopian-born former model **Anna Getaneh**, gently stirring her coffee, oblivious to the quietly admiring glances at her simply knotted, bright scarf and white knitted cap, clues to a downplayed elegance.

We were at Organic-2-Go, in Illovo Square, one of Anna's favourite spots as it reminds her of New York, with its inviting smells of homemade cakes wafting out into the winter sunshine, and waiters juicing wintergrass shoots into bright-green, foamy, health drinks.

It is a breathtaking compliment to both our city and our country that Anna decided to put down roots here, and make Jozi the business base for her various ventures – when the world is her oyster. She's worked with fashion and modelling's top names, when her New York modelling career was at its pinnacle in the 1990s.

One of Anna's biggest achievements to date, however, has been to put the designs of African designers firmly on the international map. Nine years ago she and a group of "creative" friends were sitting around drinking coffee in her New York apartment, when they mutually agreed that there was an under-representation of African designers in international fashion.

The idea was to bring them to Paris, and show-

case their designs at the Cafe Caroussel D'Louvre, on the last day of Paris Fashion Week.

The show, "African Mosaïque", was a sensation, and grew from strength to strength over the next eight years, showcasing the designs of **Xuly Bet**, **Alphadi**, **Amasale** and **Montgomery Harris**, and the sensuous lines and colours of African fabrics and textures. The show attracted sponsorships and invitations to many cultural events and showed twice in Paris and New York respectively. Designers such as **Yves St Laurent**, **Christian Lacroix** and **Donna Karan** were quick to lend their support, and sometimes archive material or part of their collections. Other established designers such as **Alexander McQueen** and **Jean-Paul Gaultier** also made an appearance in the shows.

Over a period of eight years, the show was put on 11 times and the profits went towards a non-profit organisation, the Ethiopian Children's Fund. The fund established The Ethiopian Children's Fund Village, which included a school for underprivileged children.

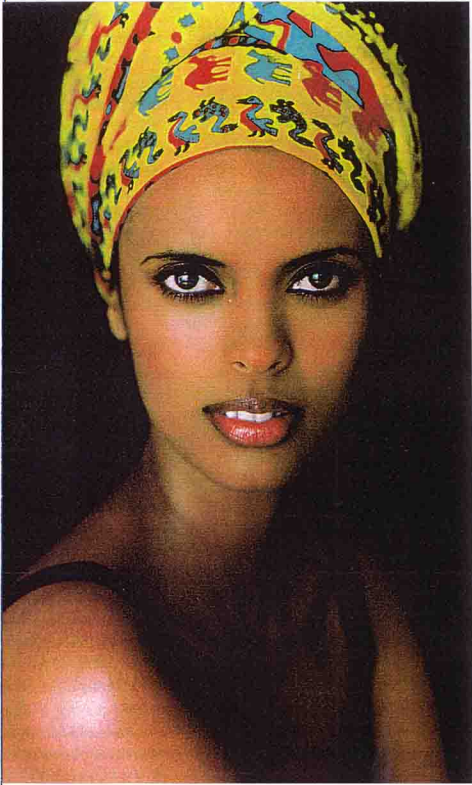
But then came a turning point in Anna's life. She met and married her soulmate **Admassu Tadesse** in 2000, and their son was born at the end of that year. It confirmed her yearning for her to return to the continent of her birth. Anna's husband now works as senior economic adviser for the Development Bank of Southern Africa, and Anna uses Johannesburg as her base for her various business ventures.

But what is it about our country that she loves so much, and why does she want to make her own valuable contribution towards it? It's the people that she loves and their spirit, she says, plus that **Madiba** magic which weaves its way through the fabric of our society.

Anna played an advisory role behind the scenes at the recent **People's Bank African Pride Award**, which was fabulous, and was a presenter at the Kora Awards in 2001.

But will she be doing anything else on our fashion scene in the future? She wants to look at ways of working with African, including South African, designers – as well as building a clothing range. The infrastructure in South Africa is better for sustaining and developing what she envisages – as other African countries, which have traditional skills of clothweaving, for example, do not have the necessary support.

In the meantime, we salute our adopted sister, and hope she spends many more happy years in the most exciting country in the world.



ANNA at the Addis Ababa appearance of 'African Mosaïque'.