


Nasonko defends fashion rights

Sizzling Entertainment

Thursday, 14 June 2012 20:56
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 Bridget Nasonko is a paradox but a delightful one at least.

Unlike her learned friends in the legal fraternity, she is not aloof and hardly exhibits an exaggerated sense of self-importance. She is shy, warm and down-to-earth. And that’s not the only difference. When she was done with the volumes of books at Makerere University Law school, Nasonko followed her passion. She went into fashion.

“I have always been picky about clothes right from childhood. However, since I don’t come from a fashion-oriented family, I was surprised that I chose fashion,” Nasonko says.

She attended Kitante primary school and Gayaza High School for both O and A-level. But it was at the university that Nasonko tried her hand at fashion. She would sell designer shoes and outfits to classmates. Later, she started The Work Wardrobe, an elite fashion shop along Buganda road.

“My starting capital was about Shs 2.5m. The shop is now a year old and I am surprised by how fast it has picked. We receive customers from across East Africa,” the 27-year-old boasts.

The shop is a darling to Kampala’s corporate class, especially women.

“I design most of these clothes myself. I shop the rest from all over the world, including here [Uganda],” Nasonko explains.

“I do not care much about brands for as long as the clothes are fashionable and of good quality.”

A closer look at the stock, however, proves otherwise. Clearly, brand is fundamental to Nasonko. Most of the clothes bear celebrated labels such as Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton and Elegance Creation. The shop also has a range of fashion stock including bags, fragrances, shoes, belts, jewellery and even kids wear.

“Most of the corporate girls nowadays have kids and for them, coming here is like killing two birds with one stone,” Nasonko explains.

Besides clothes and accessories, Nasonko also offers fashion advice and sex literature. At The Work Wardrobe, shoppers can browse through the legendary Karma Sutra, read sex column cut-outs and love magazines. The literature is a bonus for her customers.

“I am proud to add value to my customers’ family life by offering them tips about sex. This is clean literature, not pornography and if anything, fashion and sex are inseparable,” says Nasonko.

But the literature at times acts as a distraction. When I visited the shop for this interview, some shoppers were paying more attention to the books than the clothes. Others tasked Nasonko for more sex tips.

“There is rising demand among working class Ugandans for quality clothes at competitive prices and that is what I am trying to offer,” she says. “Nothing in this shop goes beyond Shs 80,000.”

Indeed, only a few arcades in Kampala boast of designer wear at such prices, which has made the shop popular. During this interview, about 20 customers dropped in.

“Our marketing strategy has paid off because we use Facebook and other social media to reach out to customers,” says Jonathan Wakoko, the shop’s publicist.

With fashion in one hand, Nasonko has also held on to her legal career. She credits her two-year legal stint with GIZ-Uganda as the source of her start-up capital. She also says she still gets part-time jobs as a lawyer. But ultimately, The Work Wardrobe is her priority.

“This is something I have a vision for. I want to have moved out to a larger space and better location in the next five years. I also want to start stocking more of the men’s wear,” Nasonko says, adding: “Our motto is to offer the best fashion solutions.”

Away from work, Nasonko enjoys Al Paccino movies and reading inspirational books.

For the final word, the fashionista says: “Ugandans are becoming more conscious about fashion, which is good. But we still have a long way to go in understanding fashion: it is a way of life.”

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