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FABRICS AT SAHELIA

SAHELIA

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Fatim Thiam has managed to fuse African craft with Italian fashion and New York luxury in her recently released line of sumptuous bed linens. Taking cues from the design aesthetic of Africa — Thiam was born and raised in Senegal — the Sahelia line uses traditional textiles, patterns and colors, and translates old world into new by transposing the designs onto her bed linen collections.

"It is a fusion of cultures," Thiam says, noting that her inspiration comes from a variety of sources, from museum pieces dating back to ancient African civilizations to the clothes people wear in the streets of Senegal today. Using hand-dyed color combinations, Thiam sends her designs to a fashion designer in Italy, where the linens are woven and finished in some of the finest mills available. The linens then make their way to New York, where Thiam's design studio and homebase are located. Her first collection, which launched for Winter 2005, consists of four distinct lines, each named for an African city.

With the thread counts of Egyptian sateen hitting 600, these luxurious sets



of sheets, pillowcases, coverlets and shams recall the sensuality of a cool breeze through the gauzy netting of a safari tent. Each line evokes the spirit and history of the city it is named after; the Mopti line is named for a city in Mali known for its colorful wool and geometric-patterned cotton blankets. The crisp reds and creams of the cotton sateen linens recall the ideas of security and protection, as the Fulani nomads use blankets such as these for wedding gifts and protection from the elements.

"I like to call it modern luxury rooted in ancient history," Thiam says. Thiam hopes Sahelia will evolve beyond linens to include loungewear, bath and tabletop products. And in the future, Thiam hopes to bring the production to Africa. "Then the loop will be closed!"

Sahelia's line of fabrics is also available at Les Migrateurs in Tribeca.