



T-Michael

The tailor behind Norwegian Rain on Ghanaian hip-hop, Japanese whisky and his 90-strong collection of spectacles

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MY PERSONAL STYLE SIGNIFIERS are my hair and my beard. They're always the first things people notice. Hair is important – you can use it to define yourself or you can use it to get away from yourself. My hair is as natural as it can get, but it's treated well. The beard is getting heavier and finding its own way. I've had it since I was 37, so this has been my look for the past 17 years.

THE LAST THING I BOUGHT AND LOVED is a brass trivet. It's by an old Japanese company called Futagami and is shaped like the sun. It reminds me of the Ghanaian pectoral discs worn by those in the favour of kings. It's just something that you put on the table, but I look for reasons to bring it out. It makes mundane tasks a little bit cooler. €85, pantoufle-design.nl

T-MICHAEL'S
LEICA MINILUX



A PLACE I LONG TO GO BACK TO is Noto Peninsula in Japan. I normally stay in Japan for a month every October. I do Tokyo Fashion Week but I also reboot. Noto is a marvellous place for that. Everything just slows down when you get there. Practically nothing happens. I stay at Shunran no Sato – a cosy, quaint residence hosted by Kiichiro and Hiriko San. It's the core of the simple Japanese life. You drop your shoulders. You eat good food – the rice is pure and the fish is caught right outside, then staked and grilled on the *irori*. I want to go back right now. shunran-no-sato.com

MY STYLE ICON is a combination of people. It's a little bit Miles Davis, a little bit Steve McQueen and a little bit Sidney Poitier. Mix them together nicely and I hope that would be me.

THE VIEWS THAT INSPIRE ME are all around Bergen, where I live. Like most of Norway, the natural landscape is amazing. Just going out to Floyen, one of the city's mountains, or going to Nordnes, by the sea, is incredibly refreshing.

I'VE RECENTLY DISCOVERED high-waisted, loose trousers. I'm wearing them so much



HIS JAPANESE
BRASS TRIVET

these days. If they're cut well, you can truss them quite high up and the fabric drapes beautifully – that's elegance. I make them myself, I don't buy clothing from anyone else. I'll spend money on books, on eating out, on art – everything but clothing, because I can do that myself. €450, t-michael.com

THE GADGET I'D NEVER PART WITH is very low-tech – a Leica Minilux, one of the first compact cameras that Leica made. It's a 35mm-film camera – point and shoot, so you don't know what you'll get. I have about 10 rolls to develop at the moment. *Leica Minilux, about £750 on ebay.co.uk*

THE MUSIC I PLAY ON REPEAT is a guy called M.anifest. It's a nice mix: hip-hop with an Afro vibe fused into it. I play it practically every other day and it always takes me back

THE AESTHETE



Right: T-Michael at his newly renovated flat in Bergen. Below: his bedroom, which is separated from the rest of his living space by a “massive, organic” wood structure



IT'S DIFFICULT AS A BLACK MAN TO FIND GOOD HAIR PRODUCTS, BUT CHARLOTTE MENSAH MAKES AMAZING STUFF

to Ghana, which is where I grew up. Sixty per cent of the population of Ghana is under 25. Think about all that energy.

I'M CURRENTLY READING all the reference books I can find on architect David Adjaye. I just got a new one, *Works 1995-2007*, from Thames & Hudson. It presents his earlier work, which challenged the notion of materiality, of light and shadow, and created its own architectural vernacular. His design for the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC is amazing. And I'm looking forward to seeing his National Cathedral of Ghana. He inspires me to do more.

IN MY FRIDGE YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND a hot chilli paste from Ghana called shito. Aubergines. Miso paste. Soy. Parmesan. Franciacorta. Pancetta. And fresh, fiery Scotch bonnets. I love to cook. I make a lot of Ghanaian food. I do some Japanese stuff. And, like everyone else, I do a bit of Italian, a bit of French, sort of all boxed up. But I like to improvise, to find the core and then see

how much I can take it away from there without people going, “Oh, what's that?”

THE PODCAST I'M LISTENING TO is *The Institute of Black Imagination*, run by American artist Dario Calmese. They asked me to be on it, so I went through the back catalogue and I really enjoyed what they've been doing – getting people they believe in to just talk about things they like to talk about.

THE LAST MEAL THAT TRULY IMPRESSED ME was at a restaurant in Bergen called Bare. It's been there for about 10 years and I go there often. It just keeps getting better and better. It got a Michelin star last year – the city's first – but it's not at all pretentious; just good food and good service. I love the grilled langoustine served with mushrooms. barerestaurant.no

WITH TIME ON MY HANDS, I've gone back to my tailoring roots. In 2020, my refuge was going into the studio in the middle of night and making a new pattern, trying different things out. It felt nostalgic. This time has been what I call a “corona-cation”. You're not busy but you're very busy somehow. We've pulled our company apart, dissected everything to have a look at it with different eyes and see what we can do differently. And different is always good.

WHEN I NEED TO FEEL INSPIRED, I make myself a Negroni or get myself a whisky – Hibiki Master's Select or Nikka from the Barrel – then pop on some old-school hip-hop, like Mobb Deep, and just relax, let my mind wander. It's a very good spot to be in. At the Handelskammeret bar in Bergen you can order a drink called the T-Michael. It's one quirky Negroni! bergenbors.no/handelskammeret-ba

THE GROOMING STAPLES I'M NEVER WITHOUT are fragrances by London brand Gallivant, all of which are based around cities. I love the Tokyo one but also the latest one, Bukhara, which is unlike any scent I've had before. Normally I go for woody, vetiver-filled scents, but this is more spicy, more punchy, and yet subtle. Just a dash is enough. My hair products are also important. It's very difficult as a black person to find good

hair products, but I've found a woman called Charlotte Mensah who makes amazing stuff. I love the shampoo and hair oil. *Bukhara*, £65 for 30ml, gallivant-perfumes.com. *Manketti Oil Shampoo*, £24, and *Hair Oil*, £48, charlottemensah.com



GALLIVANT BUKHARA, £65 FOR 30ML EDP

A CURRENT OBSESSION is my newly renovated flat. I ripped out practically everything and worked with a design team called

Michelsens to create a space that is entirely seamless and designed around what I need – my way of life. We've built an installation within the walls – a massive, organic plywood structure that contains the bedrooms and the bathrooms – while everything else is one open space. It's my new shrine. michelsens.no

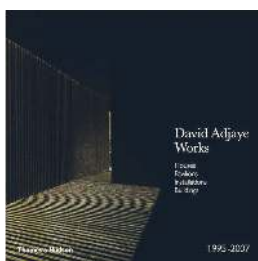
THE BEST GIFT I'VE GIVEN RECENTLY is mentoring. I was asked to mentor two entrepreneurs. I'd never done it before and now I've got the taste for it. It doesn't take much time, but it can help people to think about things in a different way, to expand their thoughts and then, boom. I'm hoping it's a good gift for them, but actually it's a great gift for me too.

I HAVE A COLLECTION OF spectacles. I'm ashamed to say that I have probably 90 pairs – all with prescription lenses. I've been collecting them since the end of the '80s, from Byblos, Persol, Kirk Originals, Alain Mikli – and more recent pairs from Ralph Vaessen, Lotho and Tom Ford. I don't wear them any longer, but the frames are lovely to have. It's sort of an archive. Glasses are part of my thing, part of my face. The ones I wear now, I design myself.

THE BEST SOUVENIR I'VE BROUGHT HOME is a carved wooden sculpture from Ghana. It's a wise old man, very serene, about a metre high. When I saw it at the Arts Center in Accra, I fell in love with it. It was too big to carry but I kept thinking about it. So I went back and packed it in.

THIS YEAR I'VE BEEN THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT... face masks. People come into the store and you don't really know who you are talking to. It's all about the eyes now. You tend to look people in the eyes and it's not as uncomfortable as before for some strange reason. It's funny to think about how you have a conversation with someone and you don't know what they look like. I think that's a good thing.

MY WELLBEING GURU is myself. I take care of myself in a good way. I know when to slow down, I know when to move fast. ■HTSI



Above: part of his 90-strong collection of glasses. Left: *David Adjaye: Works 1995-2007* – his current read. Far left: *The Bone* by Bergen-based artist Lin Wang – a porcelain piece printed with sailor tattoos. Below: his sitting room

