



FASHION

Bridging heritage, sustainability, and fashion innovation with Adirelounge

Interview with...

**Cynthia
Asije**

Founder of Adirelounge



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"Paris is where sustainability and responsible fashion are very visible. You see it everywhere—in stores, exhibitions, and campaigns—which reinforces the global importance of these practices."

Interview conducted by Louise Limare on January, 15, 2025.

Cynthia Asije, founder of Adirelounge, is reshaping the fashion industry by combining sustainable practices with African textile heritage. Originally from Nigeria and now based in Paris, she leverages her deep understanding of craftsmanship and innovation to create unique plant-based fabrics for fashion brands around the world. In this interview, Cynthia shares her journey, her vision for sustainable fashion, and her perspective on Paris as a global fashion capital.

Could you walk us through your professional journey and the key moments that led you to found Adirelounge?

Cynthia Asije (CA): I started my career as a banker in Nigeria, but I always felt a strong connection to our heritage textiles, particularly batik. Growing up with a single mother, I was motivated to help women artisans earn a sustainable income, minimum wages in Nigeria are often less than €1 per day. Around ten years ago, I left banking to focus full-time on what became Adirelounge, creating unique fabrics and empowering women. Adirelounge began with a focus on batik heritage fabrics and empowering women in Nigeria.

We began by selling fabrics locally and soon expanded to Europe and North America, exporting to countries including France, Italy, Germany, Greece, the United States, and Canada. Over time, we've grown to work with designers in about 40 countries, helping them create collections using our sustainable textiles. Today, we are an innovative textile company that uses plant-based and agricultural waste fibers to create sustainable fabrics with heritage-inspired designs. Our textiles are sold both to fashion brands for their collections and through retail fabric stores.

We continuously refine our processes to align with sustainability standards, from material sourcing to production. We produce in Nigeria and Europe, with partners in France and Poland.

"One of my biggest motivations was to empower women in Nigeria, where the minimum wage is less than €1 per day. I wanted to create opportunities for them to earn a meaningful income while preserving our heritage."

How is the fashion industry approaching environmental and social responsibility, in your experience?

CA: The industry is evolving. **Fashion is one of the biggest polluters globally, and Europe is implementing regulations to address this.** Adirelounge aims to fill that gap by offering unique, sustainable, and beautiful fabrics that brands can integrate into their collections. This has pushed us to innovate, from fiber selection and pattern design to recycled packaging. We launched a digital product passport, tracking carbon emissions, water use, and sourcing at every step. This ensures that sustainability isn't just a narrative but measurable and transparent.

"We're not just talking about sustainability — we have the numbers and metrics to prove it."

Paris is often described as the world's fashion capital. What does Paris represent to you as a designer and entrepreneur, and why did you decide to base Adirelounge here?

CA: Paris is indeed the fashion capital of the world. Even before moving here, I dreamed of seeing my fabrics on Paris runways. In 2021, I had the opportunity to move to Paris through the La French Tech program by Bpifrance and an accelerator called Bond'innov. These programs supported our internationalization, helping with visas, business processes, and access to the startup ecosystem, including Station F. More recently, we also joined the EIT Culture & Creativity program, which has expanded our network and collaboration opportunities across European fashion and creative industries.

Being in Paris allowed me to access numerous trade shows, fashion brands, and markets across the EU and EEA, giving Adirelounge the chance to scale internationally. Paris inspires my creativity, from museums to Haussmann architecture, and has elevated my design vision.

It's more than a place to do business, it's a source of inspiration, creativity, and personal growth. The city taught me resilience, balance, and the importance of community. Observing Parisians take time off, especially in August, has shown me the value of rest and reflection in fostering creativity.

"Paris has helped elevate my creativity to new levels. It's a place where I can shine, create, and innovate while building a sustainable business."



Do you think Paris is still setting the tone in fashion, or is its role evolving? Could Paris become a global capital of sustainable fashion?

CA: Paris continues to set the tone. The city leads through innovation, trade shows, Fashion Week, and strong textile regulations. These regulations push brands to consider sustainability, recycling, and ethical practices.

In France, consumers are encouraged to "reuse, rebuy, resell", integrating second-hand and ethical products into everyday life. Paris is already taking the lead: sustainable fabrics are visible in stores, labels are made from recycled materials, and brands actively promote responsible fashion. Limited production and recycling incentives push consumers to think and act consciously.

Compared to Nordic cities like Copenhagen or Stockholm, Paris is more visible and pervasive in promoting sustainability. The city's public presence (signage, events, and incentives) reinforces awareness and adoption.

You've worked across different ecosystems. What differences stand out most between Paris and fashion hubs in Africa?

CA: Paris remains central, offering a mature market, government support, and infrastructure that is virtually absent in African countries. Lagos is recognized as a fashion hub in Africa, but challenges like electricity, limited purchasing power, and underdeveloped trade networks make it difficult to establish a robust fashion market. In contrast, France provides structured support through institutions, trade shows, and policies that actively help fashion companies thrive.

In Lagos or other African cities, the fashion ecosystem is still emerging: trade shows exist but retail infrastructure and purchasing power are limited. Laws and public support for fashion are almost nonexistent. **African brands often adhere to international standards only to sell abroad, not for domestic markets.**

Fashion in Africa has immense potential: handcrafted textiles, batik, and weaving are passed down generations. At Adirelounge, we've trained about 5,000 women and currently employ 500, empowering communities and preserving craftsmanship while adhering to sustainability principles.

Looking ahead, what do you hope Adirelounge and cities like Paris will represent in ten years?

CA: I envision Adirelounge as a household name synonymous with heritage, sustainability, uniqueness, and innovation in textiles. We aim to integrate technology, expand our digital product passports, and remain leaders in responsible fashion.

For Paris, I hope the city becomes a true responsible and sustainable fashion capital, where consumers can confidently purchase products knowing their environmental and social impact. Fast fashion will be replaced by conscious, traceable, and sustainable choices. **Just as buying a French-made product today carries a piece of Paris, if the city becomes the center for sustainable fashion, that piece of Paris would also be a piece of responsible, eco-conscious design.**



Paris-Île de France Capitale Économique (PCE) is the innovation lab for the attractiveness of Greater Paris. Founded in 1991 by the Paris Île-de-France Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) alongside around thirty major French companies and supported by the Greater Paris Metropolis, PCE analyzes the trends and factors shaping today's and tomorrow's most attractive cities. PCE identifies key challenges and proposes concrete solutions to help Greater Paris and its stakeholders anticipate major transitions and assert their leadership on the global stage.

PCE carries out three core missions:

- Prospective monitoring and international benchmarking on the key factors driving the attractiveness of global cities.
- Organizing working groups led by economic actors to develop actionable strategies and implement pilot projects within Greater Paris.
- Showcasing the expertise of our Grand Paris Makers®, by hosting conferences and seminars, welcoming international delegations, and organizing learning expeditions.

Editor

Paris-Île de France Capitale Économique
2 place de la Bourse - 75002 Paris
contact@pce-idf.org

Managing director

Chloë Voisin-Bormuth

Redactor

Louise Limare

Communication

Louise Limare

Louise Tirvaudey