



ADORA MBA
WEARS SILK DRESS,
£2,185, BY LANVIN,
AT MATCHES

OPPOSITE PAGE, KOLA
KARIM WEARS
POLO SHIRT, FROM
A SELECTION, AT USA
POLO GEAR

THE NIGERIANS HAVE ARRIVED

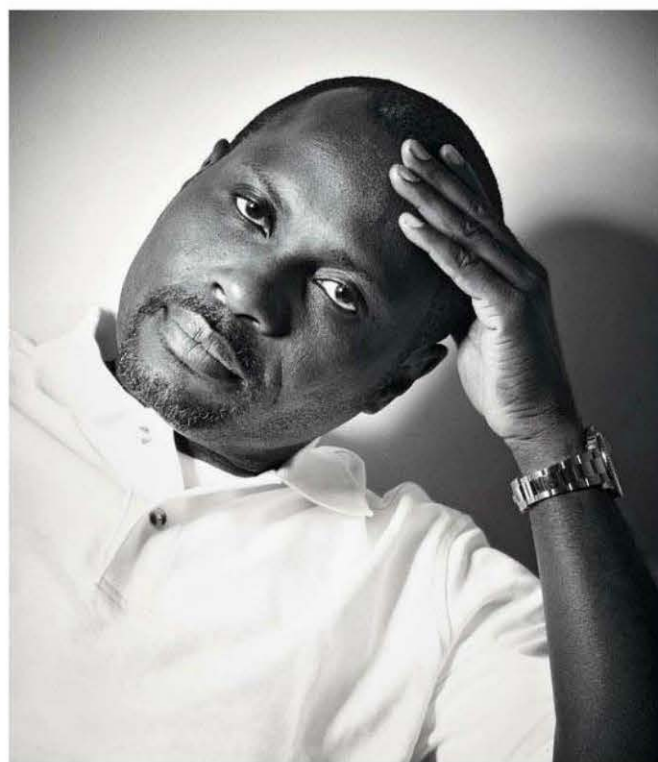
Photographed by
AMELIA TROUBRIDGE

Styled by SOPHIE GOODWIN

They fly from Lagos to London by private jet, they love Belgravia and bespoke suits and they play polo with the princes. David Jenkins talks fast cars, champagne wars and casual racism with Africa's new golden girls and boys

Richard Vedelago is 29 years old and worth more millions than he's prepared to tell. 'Money talks, but wealth whispers,' he says with a smile, sitting back in the bar at Claridge's – his idea – and lazily sipping an elderflower juice. That whispering is not, the oil, gas, property, telecoms and menswear tycoon goes on, typical of a Nigerian mindset: 'Very loud, quite brash, larger than life – even if you're just having a family meal, everything's over the top all the time. So it's quite fun.' Real fun, he should have said. Nigerians all say they work hard and party hard, believe that they're better at anything than anyone else, collect PhDs like confetti and are intensely entrepreneurial. 'When mankind finally gets to Mars,' chortles Ateh Jewel, who has both a film production company and a beauty business, 'they'll find a Nigerian already there, cutting a deal.'

You don't have to go to Mars, or Lagos, to see the fruits of that in action. Misan Harriman – whose father, Chief



Hope Harriman, was one of the founding fathers of modern Nigeria – ‘practically lives on Mount Street’, eating in Scott’s, going to George all the time and making his way down to 5 Hertford Street with his business partner, Boris Becker (‘I’m like the other woman in his marriage’). You’ll find 44-year-old Kola Karim, the boss of Shoreline Energy International, playing polo with the Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry at Lord Lloyd-Webber’s private estate; see old Wykehamist Anthony Adebó, who sprinted and fenced for England, having breakfast at Colbert and late nights at Boujis; hear Kessiana (‘Kessie’) Edewor-Thorley

roaring with laughter over drinks at Bluebird as she mockingly says that for moneyed young Nigerians in London, it’s Cirque du Soir on a Monday, ‘that awful place Dukebox’ on a Tuesday and Loulou’s on a Thursday. Meanwhile, Florence (‘Cuppy’) Otedola, the 20-year-old ex-King’s School Canterbury daughter of Femi Otedola, one of Nigeria’s richest men, studies business and French at King’s College London, while DJing at Privé, Jalouse, District, Funky Buddha and D’Den, a truly Nigerian club in Finchley Road.

Meantime, Kessie, her twin sister Eku Edewor (Nigerians pop out more twins than

anyone else) and their old chum Adora Mba recall the golden days of Kabaret, 10 years back, when they were still naughty teenagers at large in London. The scene’s moved on, but £10,000 nights are spoken of, though not admitted to, by all the beautifully spoken and exquisitely mannered people I speak to. And one young man, the budding oil and property mogul Rotimi Alakija – whose mother, Folorunsho Alakija, is the richest black woman in the world (oil) and dropped £100m on four flats in One Hyde Park (‘She didn’t mess around,’ says Vedelago, who helped sell them to her) – tells me a Nigerian champagne war in an American club ended with the winner spending £1.1m, though Rotimi certainly wasn’t there: ‘That’s just silly. It’s not part of who I am.’ Mind you, on one night at Cirque du Soir, the hard-toiling Rotimi and his friends sent a pal at another table a bottle of champagne, and ‘he sent back 20!’ But then, ‘we’re a very celebratory culture,’ says Kessie (ex-Benenden, international sales manager for Lazul resort wear and a freelance stylist), ‘so every day’s a champagne day. It’s not, “It’s your birthday!” It’s “You got back from work day! Let’s party!”’

Nigerians are this country’s sixth-highest foreign spenders, racking up an average £628 in each shop, four times what the average British shopper coughs up. Selfridges is a favourite, as is Harrods, which has been looking for Yoruba-speaking staff – the research unit at the shopping company Premier Tax Free reports that, for Knightsbridge, ‘Nigerian spend so far this year has increased by 52 per cent’. Premier Tax Free also says that Nigerians account for 46.3 per cent of total African sales in London, and that the fastest-growing region for international sales in the UK this year has been Africa, whose spend has risen by 45 per cent year on year. No wonder the managing director of Harrods and the chief executive of Gieves & Hawkes inveigh against the government’s proposed policy of demanding a £3,000 cash bond for a visa from visitors from Nigeria, Ghana and four Asian countries. More than 140,000 Nigerians come here annually – why make Paris a more welcoming option? Meanwhile, according to Vedelago, Nigerians are investing £250m in British property every year and, says one African expert, ‘they’re buying up swathes of north-west London’ to add to the earlier generations’ happy hunting grounds in Belgravia, St John’s Wood and Chelsea. (Vedelago also says they’re buying up student accommodation in Liverpool, Birmingham, Sheffield and Leeds.) And Nigerians spend £300m annually at British universities and schools – King’s School Canterbury, Wycombe



FLORENCE (‘CUPPY’) OTEOLA WEARS SATEEN DRESS, £1,355, BY **THAKOON**, AT **NET-A-PORTER**. LEATHER SHOES, £395, BY **CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN**, VINTAGE CHANEL PEARL & GOLD-PLATED EARRINGS, £220, FROM **LINDA BEE**, AT **GRAYS ANTIQUES**

ROTIMI ALAKIJA
WEARS WOOL SUIT,
FROM A SELECTION,
BY GIEVES &
HAWKES. COTTON
SHIRT, FROM A
SELECTION, BY
ERMENEGILDO
ZEGNA. SILK TIE, £69,
BY THOMAS PINK

‘WHEN MANKIND FINALLY GETS
TO MARS, THEY’LL FIND
A NIGERIAN THERE, CUTTING A DEAL’

Abbey, Cheltenham Ladies' College, Eton, Harrow and Bradfield among them. It's the African century, and here in London the Nigerians are the standard-bearers, jostling the Arabs and the Russians out of the picture. Not that Nigerian old money is entirely happy with what it sees as gross ostentation: it is, says another founding father's daughter, 'vulgar'. But, for Nigerians, home is a pressure cooker and London is where they relax. And shop.

All of which might seem jarring from a country of 170 million people, 70 per cent of whom live on under £1.25 a day. (Sixty-two per cent of them are under 25.) Even on Victoria Island – 'the Island,' as the locals call the smartest part of Lagos – the roads are potholed and the electricity intermittent at best. But, says one English Africanist, 'Nigerians respect power, and they respect money.' People believe 'my time will come', says Folarin Gbadebo-Smith, director of the Centre for Public Policy Alternatives in Lagos. 'Whereas there's that sense in many other places that where you find yourself in society could be permanent, here everybody is rich-in-waiting.'

And money certainly sloshes around Lagos today, the product not just of the black gold that oil brings and has brought since oil production started in 1958, but of the property boom (land on Lagos's Banana Island is as expensive as any on earth), the banking boom, the telecoms boom, the high-life boom. 'It's glitzy and glamorous,' says Vedelago. 'People drink champagne like water.' He's right: Nigeria's the second fastest-growing champagne market after France. Total consumption reached 752,879 bottles in 2011 and the country is spending around 41.41bn naira (£159m) on the drink annually. Moët Rosé is a favourite – Nigerians have a sweet tooth – though the country's in the top 10 for Hennessy cognac and is getting more and more partial to wine. Still, champagne's the thing: even in fast-food joints like Southern Fried Chicken in Abuja, the capital, there are bottles of Moët in the fridge. And it's not just alcohol: annual GDP growth has been around seven per cent during the past few years, and there's an emerging middle class to join the rich elite. And though Nigerians pour abroad to buy-buy-buy, Western retailers are moving in: Zegna has opened in Lagos, as have Boss, MAC and L'Oréal. Malls are opening, and retail's the next big thing. 'You could make a killing,' says Cuppy Otedola, who loves Topshop – perhaps Sir Philip Green should take note. 'As much as there's corruption and things don't work here,' says one Lagotian businessman, 'right now, Lagos is very cosmopolitan, because this is where



EKU EDEWOR, *NEAR LEFT*, WEARS DRESS, FROM A SELECTION, BY **JEWEL BY LISA**.

SUEDE & LEATHER SHOES, £680, BY **NICHOLAS KIRKWOOD**.

RINGS, FROM A SELECTION, BY **JAGGA MEHTA**.

SAPPHIRE, RUBY, DIAMOND & SILVER EARRINGS, £2,969; GOLD, OPAL, TANZANITE, DIAMOND & TOURMALINE BRACELET, £36,667, BOTH BY **AMRAPALI**.

RINGS, FROM A SELECTION, BY **JAGGA MEHTA**.

KESSIANA EDEWOR-THORLEY, *FAR LEFT*, WEARS DRESS, FROM A SELECTION, BY **JEWEL BY LISA**. SUEDE SHOES, £695, BY **NICHOLAS KIRKWOOD**.

CRYSTAL, METAL, LAPIS LAZULI & BEAD NECKLACE, £1,925, BY **BEA VALDES**, AT **GIFTLAB**.

GOLD-VERMEIL & AMETHYST RING, £120, BY **DIDI**. RING, FROM A SELECTION, BY **JAGGA MEHTA**.



RICHARD VEDELAGO WEARS WOOL SUIT, FROM A SELECTION, BY **SPENCER HART BESPOKE**. COTTON SHIRT & COTTON POCKET SQUARE, BOTH FROM A SELECTION, BY **SPENCER HART**. SILK TIE, £69, BY **THOMAS PINK**. SHOES, £425, BY **MR HARE**.

GROOMING BY MARK COOK, USING GIORGIO ARMANI

the money is, and there's a lot of money pushing around.' It reminds one English expatriate of Moscow in the Nineties, and Google co-founder Sergey Brin has described Russia as 'Nigeria, with snow'. Perhaps that's why Nigeria has gone from being dubbed the happiest society in the world in 2003 by *New Scientist* to being called the most stressed-out society on earth by Bloomberg earlier this year.

Certainly, says Eku Edewor, 'Lagos is the hardest place in the world to make money and the easiest to spend it in.' By 'hard' she means tough, on the nerves. When Vedelago

returned to Nigeria – like many in this story, he went to prep and boarding school in England (King Edward's School, in Surrey, in his case) – a friend told him, 'You've got to learn to swim with the sharks.' Eku (who went to Benenden) has done that, but others find the cut-throat hustling, the hassle, the corruption, the sheer in-your-faceness too much to handle. So how did Eku manage? Once on *Britain's Next Top Model*, she's the face of Martini in Africa, a face of BlackBerry in Nigeria and was a co-presenter of *Big Brother Africa*. 'I'm a TV presenter.

When I went back, there was an open audition to be the new face of a channel, and I got it.' She's been with her show for five seasons and she's now the only presenter – 'It's a bit like *E! News*'; she's also just finished her first drama series. She's evangelical about Lagos and derisive about IJGBs ('I Just Got Backs'), as many returnees are known. 'They're talking about life with a driver putting fuel in your car! If you go to Lagos thinking that's what you deserve, then it's going to be very hard for you – you've got to adapt. If you give yourself a year and a half to settle in... But it was tough for me. I hadn't seen that side of Lagos.'

Though oil and gas is still the usual career path for the ambitious and connected, it's notable that several of the younger generation are trying to make it in the entertainment business. Chin Okeke – whose father is a prominent lawyer who's been honorary legal counsel to the British High Commissioner since 1989, and whose partner was once Nigeria's foreign minister – manages both Eku and 'music superstar' Lynxxx and is setting up an innovative branding/music enterprise. He's also got a beach festival in the works. And

'WE'RE TRYING TO SHOW THE WORLD A SIDE OF AFRICA THEY DON'T SEE'

Cuppy, who toured Nigeria with her first single, 'I Love My Country', this summer (which led to online abuse, saying, effectively, 'Of course she does, she's a billionaire's daughter'), is going to do a master's in music business in New York. 'There's a lot of money to be made; you don't have to be the one on TV, the one in the forefront. So I might DJ for a while, then maybe step behind the scenes, open up my own record company – but do the oil thing on the side.'

On the side? Well, Nigerian women are powerful, and pragmatic. 'They're into things like *dredging*,' says Ateh Jewel. 'I've got an aunt who runs a port authority.' As Cuppy says: 'We've got a cabinet with five or six female members, which is pretty much unheard of. Our minister for petroleum is female, and our minister for finance, and for aviation, and for women's affairs, obviously. But in the entertainment industry, no – it's just not spilling over.' But soon, maybe...

Meanwhile, they can have a good time. There's been an explosion of beach culture on the Island – think Miami, a favourite Nigerian haunt – and the young things go to clubs like Likwid and Rhapsody's, dancing to the likes of Wizkid, a singer who marked his

24th birthday in London with what was reported to be a £1.2m diamond-encrusted bottle of Taste of Diamonds champagne (created by 'luxury designer' Alexander Amosu) bought for him by Liam Payne of One Direction. If they fancy 'local', they'll eat at Yellow Chilli or L'Afric – but sushi's on the rise.

What's always been big is the wedding culture, enormous affairs with thousands of guests. Also big are the Lagos Polo Club and the Lagos Motor Boat Club, where all well-connected generations mix – and, no doubt, discuss the two almost identical, and large, yachts that sit next to each other off Victoria Island's Carrington Crescent. One's owned by Cuppy's father, Femi Otedola – his net worth is an estimated £2.2bn – and the other belongs to Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man, with a net worth of £10.1bn via a conglomerate ranging from cement to sugar refining by way of oil. He gave himself a £28m jet in April 2010, as a 53rd birthday present.

Dangote recently praised the government's policies, and he, Otedola and many others have had close ties to Nigeria's politicians – as

has the 'stupendously rich' Senator Andy Uba, who's married to Richard Vedelago's beautiful sister, Faith, herself the founder of Faith Ministries, a popular and successful church. Richard has a 'ginormous' house next to hers in Abuja, which he describes as a slower and calmer place than Lagos – like 'Washington to New York'. As well as that house, Richard has some dazzling cars in Abuja, including two Bentleys. There's a market for expensive cars, despite the potholed state of most Nigerian roads, and Porsche has opened up there; its Cayenne 4x4s do well, as do Jeep Wranglers and the Mercedes G-Wagon. But one Nigerian told the *Guardian* that 'I have a Bentley, a Porsche and a Ferrari. But people don't travel by road any more. So the Ferrari in the garage hasn't done 500 miles in three years.' Vedelago had a Lamborghini in London, as well as a Bentley, but he drove it so little that he ditched it. He'd like to buy a Smart car to go to the gym, but friends jeer at the idea. 'So I'm looking for a Porsche or an Aston Martin.' He laughs. 'Sounds bad, doesn't it? A Porsche to go to the gym.'

Kola Karim does drive a very lovely, very yellow Ferrari Italia 458 here in London, one of two he was given by 'generous friends –

good friends'. He had it parked recently in Chelsea, 'and this lady said her son would love to have a picture with the car. I said, "Feel free." And then she said, "Who do you play for?" I said, "Play what?" "Football," she said. "What team did I play for? Was she being racist? No. But that was her understanding.' The automatic assumption was that a prosperous black man could only be a footballer or a rap star. But Karim, a very successful businessman who's taken his mother's trading company into construction and oil, does indeed encounter racism. 'Oh, yes. It's normal. There's a lot of ignorance around.' Ignorance that ranges from stewardesses automatically shepherding you towards economy to policemen pulling you and your Ferrari over. 'In the country recently, we went to lunch at a restaurant. We walked in, and the whole place stopped eating – it was like we were going to pull a gun and stick everyone up.' Then some local grandees appeared and sat down with Karim – at which point other people from other tables felt it was in their interests to meet this funny foreigner. It's happened as well to others in this article, at nightclubs in London and Paris. As for Cuppy, she was in Switzerland, interning at an oil-trading company, when the story about Oprah Winfrey being mistreated in a shop in Zurich was reported. 'It was hilarious. [Store staff] were all over us. I loved it. I wish Oprah complained every time.' Mind you, says one man, 'I find green is accepted everywhere.' 'Yes,' says Karim, only half-laughing. 'When you're wealthy, you don't see it. Either the guy wants to collect your money, or not.'

But far more important for Karim is showing that there are 'better and better prospects' for his continent. 'Because Africa's like a pair of shoes. You wouldn't get good money for it if it wasn't polished. If it's dirty and it looks worn out, no one wants to buy it. We're trying to show the world a side of Africa they don't see.' That's why Karim was more than happy to let Ralph Lauren throw a party for him and donate 15 per cent of the Bond Street store's takings that day to a charity of his choosing – one benefiting autistic children. '396 people turned up. *Very* successful.' (Misan Harriman helped set it up, and Cartier have been in touch with him about a similar event; he sees great potential in acting as a conduit between Nigeria and the West.) Kessie Edewor-Thorley was there, and Nacho Figueras, and two of Karim's own polo ponies, outside the store – the other 10 were, as usual, at the Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club.

Next year, Karim will focus on buying a farm in England and keeping his *équipe* there. He's got another acquisition in mind, too: a Premier League football club. CONTINUED ON PAGE 249



ANTHONY ADEBO
WEARS WOOL SUIT,
FROM A SELECTION, AT
KINGDOM COUTURE.
COTTON SHIRT, £89; SILK
TIE, £69, BOTH BY
THOMAS PINK. SILK
POCKET SQUARE, £40,
BY **TM LEWIN**. VELVET
& LEATHER SHOES,
FROM A SELECTION,
BY **ARFANGO BY**
ALBERTO MORETTI

GROOMING BY
MARK COOK, USING
GIORGIO ARMANI
FOR STOCKISTS,
SEE ADDRESS BOOK.
FASHION ASSISTANT,
LUCINDA TURNER



'If you imagine a continent of 900 million people who are football crazy, imagine the followership of an African businessman. Think about the marketing. It's awesome.' Even

more so if his currently 12-year-old son were playing – he's been scouted by Chelsea already. Meantime, the boy attends Bruern Abbey, while his older sister goes to Benenden and his younger one to 'Holland Park Prep'. Karim's son plays polo too, as does his brother, though Karim's handicap's gone down from +2 to 0, 'with so much work going on. We're the second-largest independent oil producer in Africa, by reserves [1.3bn barrels], and we're building.' No wonder he has homes in Lagos, London, Marbella and Miami.

Karim's firm has a private jet, but he prefers to fly commercial – he's a people person

travel, with one nanny for each child. It's 'if someone wants basic food – milk, bread, cheese, yogurt – I'll go somewhere like Whole Foods, and I'll pick up the principal [her employer] on the way to Farnborough and load it on the plane and send it off.' It could be for a dinner or 'it could be their everyday food. They don't necessarily want to shop in Abuja, because they may think the quality of the food is better here. So I have one family who loves the sausages they get from Whole Foods. And the scones.' Private: it's the only way for scones to travel.

But that 'premium economy' jibe sums up a claustrophobic sense that all social eyes are upon you in Lagos, one that has contributed to Adora Mba leaving her oil-world job in Lagos and moving into a job in marketing consultancy in Mayfair. She felt suffocated. She was, she says, born in Britain and schooled here – Wycombe Abbey and Bristol. She spent only four of her very young years in Nigeria. She became an IJGB and she found it too much, for now. 'Who knows if I'll go back? It's a very exciting place and it's coming up in the world. But my [dream] house – I know it, I feel it – is going to be in Primrose Hill.' Dream on,

London-based Think Africa Press. The Nigerian now residing in London whom he'd really like to interview is James Ibori, a former governor of Delta State who's in jail for 13 years for money laundering and fraud. Ibori had plenty of it: he paid £2.2m in cash for his house in Hampstead when his official salary was £3,700 a year. No wonder 94 per cent of Nigerians think their politicians corrupt – scarcely surprising in a country where it's been authoritatively estimated that £250bn of oil revenues have been stolen or misspent since independence in 1960. Akinloye shrugs wearily. 'People in Nigeria don't ask how you got it,' he says. Still, he thinks that in 2015 a new political grouping, the All Progressive Congress, may unseat the People's Democratic Party, the conservative and economically neoliberal party that has held power since 1999. 'But,' he writes in a cogent piece, 'that of itself does not guarantee ordinary Nigerians will benefit.'

Meantime, Akinloye hangs out with a 'creative' Nigerian crowd in London, one that detests the moneyed scene. For them, ostentation is symptomatic of the destruction of moral values in Nigeria. 'But,' says Akinloye, 'if they had a contract [and the money that brings], I bet they'd be singing a different tune.' And wearing better clothes, like Richard Vedelago, who, with singer Robbie Williams, is the largest investor in Spencer Hart, the tailor. His jacket tells an interesting, post-colonial story: inside are the letters 'HRH HART', a clue to its original commissioner, the Duke of Cambridge, who in the end found its (very acceptable) blue a little bold for him.

Perhaps William would be more in tune with Anthony Adebo. Beautifully turned out in a silverish-grey suit of his own design, a mildly hungover Adebo sits before me, picking at an omelette in a central London restaurant. He's back in London after a spell in Lagos, which he's finding 'fascinating'. He's keen on Likwid, is toying with taking 5 Hertford Street to Lagos, thinks Ilashe Beach and Tarqua Bay are fabulous and is going to steer clear of politics – doing so was almost a family edict after his uncle, Funsho Williams, was murdered in 2006 while running for the governorship of Lagos State. Still, 'the general term is enjoyment – there's a lot of money coming through.' And though he's been working in PR in Lagos, he's also busy in Britain, setting up a suit company called York & Windsor. 'York because that's where the trade really started in the UK – all the mills were up there. And Windsor because the Duke of Windsor is my favourite best-dressed man of all time.' He smiles. 'Closely followed by Prince Charles, of course.' Nigeria and the UK: a special relationship indeed. □

'WE'RE A VERY CELEBRATORY CULTURE. SO EVERY DAY IS CHAMPAGNE DAY'

and flying alone bores him senseless. But his fellow polo enthusiast Prince Albert Esiri, a 'well-known' billionaire – he's been playing for 33 years, has a handicap of zero at Ham in this country, a string of 133 ponies and Nigeria's 'premier private polo facility' in Delta State – flew into the 2012 UAE Nations Cup in Dubai in his personal Gulfstream G2 jet. Others too are keen on private jets, not least because BA's London flights are packed and expensive – Nigerian newspapers rage at the comparative cost of first-class tickets to London from Lagos and Accra, both being much the same distance and Accra half the cost. And first class it just has to be. 'Yeah,' cackles Kessie, relishing the absurdity, 'you hear people saying, "And they travelled premium economy!"'

But for those who go private... Well, Ansemu Fagonpa is a 36-year-old South African who manages 'the family office' of a very select group of families from 'very much the upper end of Nigerian society'; all are worth more than £100m and 10 per cent of that is in liquid cash. 'So I do a lot of crazy things – well, things that money can allow you to do.' But it's not just hiring star chefs for private dinners or dealing with the logistics for the way Nigerian families

Adora: Lagotians are invading London. 'I know people who've bought houses in Walton Street,' sighs Kessie. 'I can't go out in my sweats any more; I'm always seeing people I know.' People who'll tell her mother, a restaurateur and decorator who's the daughter of the Obarisi and Olokun (which, Kessie helpfully explains, mean 'King of All Kings' and 'King Maker') of the Urhobo Kingdom of Delta State; her maternal grandmother was a princess, educated at UCL and called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn.

That sort of background isn't uncommon among Nigerians who've been educated here. Anthony Adebo's grandfather, Simeon Adebo, was an under-secretary general at the UN and Chancellor of Lagos University; an Okanlomo (chief) of the Yoruba, he too read law at UCL and was called to the bar. Lagun Akinloye's father, Adisa, was the Seriki of Ibadanland and read law at the LSE. A cabinet minister in the Sixties, Adisa was forced to flee the country in 1983; Margaret Thatcher helped him find a house in Eaton Terrace.

Akinloye went to Davies Laing & Dick, and then to Leeds. Although he knows – and put me in touch with – many in this article, he's less on the scene, working as a journalist for the