

# Global Vans x Mami Wata collaboration spotlights African surf culture

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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Surf label Mami Wata is a refreshing departure from the surf shop norm, with apparel and accessories in bold, eye-catching designs that reflect the vibrancy of Africa while holding appeal for a global audience.



Vans Surf x Mami Wata. Source: Supplied

'Mami Wata', when translated from West African pidgin English means 'Mother Water'. The brand [launched in South Africa in 2017](#) to celebrate Africa's diverse and expressive surf culture, which has been underrepresented in the global industry's portrayal of surfing.

The company strives to be a creative force for good in Africa, designing and manufacturing its range of premium products exclusively on the continent to create job opportunities and boost local economies. Additionally, the label supports local surf therapy organisations Waves for Change and Surfers Not Street Children, promoting surf development on the continent.



Mami Wata donates online profits to grassroots surf businesses in Africa

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## Building a global brand

Nick Dutton, Andy Davis, Peet Pienaar and Selema Masekela are the creative and business brains behind the venture, and they're successfully growing the Mami Wata brand [beyond local borders](#). The company has expanded its team to the US and the UK, and is increasing its sales presence in North America and Europe.

The brand's strong vision and design language have not gone unnoticed, and it recently caught the attention of streetwear and sportswear giant Vans, leading to a global collaborative collection with Vans Surf. The collaboration broadens Mami Wata's reach, allowing the brand to present its fresh narrative of surfing and Africa to the world.



Vans Surf x Mami Wata. Source: Supplied



The Vans Surf x Mami Wata head-to-toe collection draws inspiration from important cultural moments in the continent's history, creating a unique and distinctive range of apparel and footwear.

From Zaire's 'Rumble in the Jungle' in 1974 and Nigeria's 'Festac '77' to other iconic local music festivals, the new range of apparel and footwear incorporates bold and graphic imagery of these cultural events and adds a modern Vans twist, tying back to Vans' heritage checkerboard prints. The result is a collection of apparel and footwear that is both stylish and culturally significant, highlighting the richness and diversity of African culture to a global base of consumers.

Vans Authentic VR3 in Mami Wata Cream is the hero product of the collab collection, while the Style 36 Decon VR3 SF and Sk8-Hi 138 Decon VR3 SF complete the footwear offering. In the apparel department, there's a pullover, t-shirts, a woven shirt, boardshorts and a hat. Products incorporate responsibly sourced, renewable or recycled materials.



Vans Surf x Mami Wata. Source: Supplied

“This collection pays homage to the past while giving a vibrant nod to the future generations that will live and define African surf culture,” Vans said.

Nick Dutton, CEO and cofounder of Mami Wata, shares more on the creative collaboration and the African surf brand's growth journey.

■ **Nick, how did the partnership between Mami Wata and Vans come about?**

We got approached by the Vans global team based in Los Angeles. We were put on their radar with our book *AfroSurf*, the overall message, storytelling and book design made them feel we were helping broaden and redefine global surf culture and they wanted to shine a light on it.

They also really liked our product designs and felt a collaboration with their design language would work well.



Vans Surf x Mami Wata. Source: Supplied





■ ***What has the collaborative process been like putting the Vans x Mami Wata collection together?***

Both companies are creatively led and ambitious for their brands, so the culture of the project felt great. Also, the nature of the two brands having strong graphic languages meant the type of creative and design work worked well.

### ▣ **How has Mami Wata grown since its inception in 2017?**

It's been a bit of a journey, not helped by Covid! But we've grown from a stand at the Biscuit Mill market in Woodstock to having a permanent store in Los Angeles and shipping to some of the best retailers in the world.

We've grown from a team of four in South Africa to a team of 12 across South Africa, the United Kingdom and the USA.

### ▣ **How did Mami Wata set out to distinguish itself from other brands in the established surf apparel space?**

Three ways.

1. The designs of our products - we tell original design stories of African surf culture.
2. Where we make our product - we only manufacture in Africa.
3. How we tell our stories - we challenge the communications conventions of the category.

### ▣ **How do you hope the Vans collaboration will aid Mami Wata's growth strategy?**

We hope it will get our message across to a much wider audience than it already has. Also, there's something about Vans which has a universal 'cool' appeal. People have been blown away to see us, a small African brand, do a global collaboration with them.

*The Vans Surf x Mami Wata collection is currently available globally.*

## ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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