

"Let's design the future of urban Africa" - Issa Diabate

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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It's not easy to make it to the Friday morning session of Design Indaba on time due to the wide range of partying and networking activities of the previous nights.

This year, those who did, were rewarded by listening to Issa Diabate, who apparently even [trended on Twitter](#) during his presentation.



Photo by Mike Souter

Urban planning

Offering another glimpse into the new African design ethos shaping our continent, Diabate shared the cases studies of 12 year old architectural outfit [Koffi & Diabate](#), in his native Cote d'Ivoire or what is known as Francophone Africa - mainly stylish contemporary residences and developments set in lush tropical landscapes.

Diabate explains that due to lack of political vision and little control in urban planning, their studio has decided to make the shift from architects to property developers and even educators. Repurposing derelict areas with the intention of showing that density does not have to mean congestion, demonstrating new ways of building, including public sidewalks, parks and sustainability techniques.

In addition, to redress the hopelessly inadequate ratio of approximately 200 architects to the population of 26 million, they have started a design and urban planning curriculum at the School of Architecture.

Discussing African trade opportunities

Bizcommunity chatted to Diabate after his presentation. He is non-committal about his previous visits to Cape Town, commenting that while the city is beautiful, he has experienced people as "colder" than in Johannesburg or other parts of Africa.

Which is exactly what we have been talking about - how the design of public spaces can help create opportunities for engagement and make people feel welcome.

In 2007 Koffi & Diabate organised the first Archibat, a trade show for building materials and architecture. That year 7,000 people attended, last year at Archibat 2013, the number more than doubled to 15,000.

We discuss the types of opportunities presented by earlier Indaba speaker Juliana Rotich of the new communication networks opening in the interior of Africa and new Pan African trade opportunities. Issa has visited Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Ethiopia and sees similar opportunities in terms of urban space, which could be addressed.

For now they will be inviting only their immediate neighbours such as Gabon, to the next Archibat event, which will be held in Abidjan in October 2015.

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