



WAFFLESNCREAM

THIS NIGERIAN STREETWEAR AND SKATE BRAND PROVES THAT THE SMALLEST STORES CAN INSPIRE THE BIGGEST MOVEMENTS.

People claim that Nigeria's capital, Lagos, is the biggest city in the world without a proper skate park. With a population of more than 15 million people – making it Africa's most populous city – they're most probably right. But, over the past few years and despite the generally poor roads and infrastructure of the city, one of the world's most exciting skate scenes has emerged – largely because of the efforts of one man, Jomi Marcus-Bello, and the brand he founded in 2012, WAFFLESNCREAM.

For Waf, as the brand is widely known, bigger doesn't always mean better. Even a small store, located in a forgettable mixed-use development, can inspire a big movement. In the years since Jomi founded Waf, it's improbably transformed itself from the first skateboarding and streetwear company in Nigeria to something much bigger: a hub for skate culture and other subculture sports across West Africa.

Waf makes clothes, skateboards and sunglasses, as well as producing films. Community and skating remain at the core of everything it does. 'Empowering youth in a country where skateboarding is still a developing sport' is one of Waf's stated aims. A real-world example of this is the Go Skate festival it puts on every year. The 10-day program of events sees hundreds of the most talented young skaters from across Africa flying in to take part, and features everything from workshops on how to build skate ramps and grind rails to film screenings, yoga sessions, pop-up exhibitions, skate competitions and cook-outs. Also on the agenda – and central to Waf's brand DNA – is lots of partying.

Thousands of people show up – a big step up from the early days when the store wasn't even really a store. After all, there was nothing in it back then: no decks, no grip tapes and Waf didn't yet design and sell its own clothes. It was literally empty – an unusual strategy for a store. Instead, the space was used primarily to throw parties and serve as a second home for

Jomi, now in his early 30s, and anyone else interested in skating who wanted a place to hang out. Back then, most of those who turned up didn't have phones, so each day they'd meet at the store. Meanwhile, the community grew organically, without it feeling like Waf was simply another brand trying to flog them stuff.

Over time, the parties have become better organized, as have the products stocked in the shop. The crew started to hang boards on the walls and design own-brand clothing – always vibrant colors, with many pieces featuring the Waf logo of a man in a top hat with coins over his eyes. A few years ago, Jomi explained the meaning behind the logo in this way: 'The top hat signifies a high status in society, right? People will be very comfortable wearing something like that. But it has a little bit of a different meaning, too. In most African mythologies, there's some version of covering the eyes when people die, because the eyes are seen as a gateway for the soul. So, with the logo, where the man in a top hat also has coins over his eyes, it has a little anti-colonial meaning [of] "death to the colonists".'

All items are wholly designed by the skate crew and produced in-store. Waf even has its own tailor. Some of the proceeds from clothing sales feed back to the skaters and the scene. The brand's pop-ups around the world are always cleaned out, with kids queuing up to buy every board, shirt and poster they can. Waf's first skate video, *Jide*, also brought international attention to the brand.

From the beginning, streetwear brand Supreme in London has supported Waf, sometimes providing skate gear for free and also more simply in terms of offering inspiration. But many brands from Europe and the US have approached Waf for collaborations and have been turned away: the kinds of brands, says Jomi, that treat Waf like a charity case