

A premium African surf brand with global appeal

 By Lauren Hartzenberg

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Little over a year ago, three friends with thriving creative careers embarked on a mission to combine their love of Africa with their passion for surfing. Thus, Mami Wata was born, a premium African brand of surf apparel and accessories with an undeniable global appeal.



It hasn't taken long for the world to notice. Mami Wata is sold on New York's e-commerce business platform, Oxosi, and in the General Admission store in Los Angeles. It was also one of the South African brands showcased in the [Le BHV/Marais exhibition](#) in Paris. Locally, the surf range has been selected to be sold in the Southern Guild Concept store at the V&A Waterfront as well as the Old Biscuit Mill and Lifestyle Surf Shop.

Creative brains behind the brand

"South Africa enjoys an established reputation in the international surfing community, having set the benchmark for modern surf brands through companies like Gotcha and Instinct in the late 70s and 80s. Today, there are a few local surf brands, but not one global African surf brand. Nothing on the level of Quiksilver, Billabong, RVCA or Vans, all of which own the surf apparel space in Africa. The look and feel of these brands have become generic and international/western," explains Nick Dutton, co-founder and CEO of Mami Wata.



Dutton is a published novelist and has spent the past twenty years in advertising, while co-founder Andy Davis has been a journalist, magazine editor, filmmaker, publisher and entrepreneur, and currently publishes *Zigzag* surf magazine. Rounding out the founding trio is Peet Pienaar, a recognised artist and designer who has produced work for the likes of *New York Times*, MTV, Corn me Des Garcon, Diesel, Camper, FIFA, IBM and Nando's. He is also the designer behind Bos Ice Tea, with designs, posters and artworks in 12 international museum collections.

Considering the creative brains behind the brand, it's little wonder then that Mami Wata's launch video, *Woza - The African Surf Film*, [scooped a Bronze Lion](#) at the Cannes Festival of Creativity and Best Cinematography at the Patagonia Film Festival. It has also

"We're passionate about Africa, surf and design. Africa's got some of the world's best waves, yet there aren't any brands telling that story. Africa is the new frontier, not just of surf exploration. The continent has fostered many indigenous surfing cultures and this is a great story to tell. We want to take our locally made and designed surf gear and apparel to the world," says Dutton.

In the spirit of [Entrepreneur Month](#), Dutton shares Mami Wata's journey so far, and what they're planning next.

▣ ***You all had successful careers prior to the launch of Mami Wata. What inspired the move into surf apparel and accessories?***

Opportunity. We love Africa, surf, design and adventure and believe there's a clear place in the world for an African surf brand that manufactures quality apparel, accessories and equipment in Africa.

▣ ***Where does the name 'Mami Wata' come from?***

'Mami Wata' is West African pidgin English literally meaning 'Mama Water'... 'Mother Ocean' if you prefer. From Madagascar to Morocco, Liberia to Mozambique, Mami Wata is the legend of the African water spirit that appears in the shape of a mermaid. It is said that those who she takes for her lovers, return with a new spirit and become more successful and good looking.



▣ ***Describe the Mami Wata design aesthetic.***

Africa meets Peet Pienaar. Peet is the design genius behind our brand and is world famous for his edgy work.

▣ ***How does the local surfing apparel market compare globally?***

There are a few interesting smaller brands in some key markets, but largely it's the same as it is here - everything looks exactly the same and none of it is African!



▣ ***Some of the biggest struggles and major highlights on your small business journey so far?***

Our biggest struggle has been launching a surf brand with board shorts and tee shirts at the start of winter. That wasn't the plan. Things take longer, especially when you haven't done them before. However, that may turn out to have been the best thing to happen to us. We've learnt a shit load in the past six months, just in time for summer.

Major highlights – our launch film has won some very prestigious awards globally, but I still love it when people who have been wearing the product tell us how pleased they are with it and how impressed they are with the quality.

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■ ***In your opinion, what are the key skills and traits entrepreneurs need in order to succeed?***

Perseverance, agility, belief, a sense of humour and some more perseverance.

■ ***What's next for Mami Wata?***

We're opening a pop-up store in the Bo Kaap in Cape Town at the start of November. The primary focus of the store will be retail, where we showcase our beautiful products and give people a chance to actually feel the brand in their hands. Come and check it out. Will have some large bananas, beautiful surf boards and fantastic apparel. There will be a store launch, so keep an eye out for it.

Shop [Mami Wata online](#) and connect with the brand on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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