



If you accept that entire continents are subject to the whims of fashion then Africa is currently in vogue. Diane von Furstenberg has cited this two volume set, *Inside Africa*, as an inspiration for her current collection, *Glamazon* and several exhibitions of African artists are currently on show as part of the Africa 2005 festival.

The exuberant covers of *Inside Africa* contain page after page of what the press release describes as 'dreamy interiors'. Actually the books also contain a few almost tangible depictions of everyday living amongst the perfectly framed shots of high maintenance highlife. It is these glimpses of the craftsmanship and attention to detail which go into the construction of a Dogon clay house in Mali or the stunning artistry of the painted interiors created by the Soninke people in the Selibabi region of Mauritania that raise the books above a voyeuristic trawl around Africa and make it a tribute to and affirmation of the basic human need for colour and beauty.

The photographer, Deidi von Schaewen, made fifteen journeys in the space of four years, visiting twenty African countries including Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Tunisia. Her photographs lend some eloquence to this glamorous but rather empty geography lesson. Weighty in a physical rather than an intellectual sense, *Inside Africa* offers a visual masterclass in the variety and splendour of the African continent: but the words somehow irritate and interfere. They offer an unsettling glimpse into a mind where terraces are 'to die for' and the word modest has a very loose definition. Is shoe designer Christian Louboutin's five bedroom converted fortress in Cairo really a 'modest' dwelling? - in a book that also documents the townships of Capetown and the "slum dwellers" that reside there? The stated goal of the books was to bring the reader 'the kind of interiors that defy description'. Perhaps - if the series continues worldwide - they could keep that promise? ●●● **Beth Smith**