



The Shweshwe material in the above image was supplied by Bethany Home – a shelter for abused women. The home makes items to sell to the public, such as tablecloths, comforters, oven gloves and make up bags, to name but a few.

And so this vibrant tradition lives on in the rural villages of the Eastern Cape and Lesotho, it brightens South Africa's urban streets and transports South African heritage to the Paris catwalks.

Some say the name "shweshwe" describes the soft rustling sound of the fabric, others that it was named after King Moshoeshoe I of the Basotho when French missionaries gifted some of the cloth to him in the 1840s. Since 1948 Da Gama Textiles in the Eastern Cape has been manufacturing authentic shweshwe. Colloquially known as "shweshwe", its vibrant patterns were originally printed on indigo cloth brought to Africa about 2000 years ago by Arab and Indian merchants. Its popularity in South Africa grew in the 18th century when synthetic indigo was manufactured in, and exported from, Europe.

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