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## Baye Fadioul Niang: A Brief Biography of an Ebeniste in Senegal

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# Baye Fadioul Niang

A Brief Biography of an Ebeniste in  
Senegal



Photo taken of Fadioul in July 1964

Katie Jo Niang

April 15, 2013

On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1923 Yacinthe and Nancy Niang welcomed a baby boy into their family. Exactly one week later, according to Muslim tradition, the baby boy was introduced as Baye Fadioul Niang. Fadioul grew up with a brother and sister in Saint Louis, located in the northwest corner of Senegal, West Africa. Later the family moved south to Kaolack, due to a shift in his father's state-elected position.

While in Kaolack, Fadioul discovered a growing interest and admiration for local furniture designers and builders, also known as “ebenistes” in French.<sup>1</sup> As a young child, he walked to the nearby shops and observed them during his free time. This interest grew into a passion and eventually a career. In 1945, at age 22, Fadioul began designing furniture as an apprentice in the state labor department of Kaolack. Even though he did not receive formal education in furniture design, he credits this training and experience in preparing him for his profession.

Lastly, Fadioul settled in Dakar, where he currently resides.<sup>2</sup> Before beginning his own furniture business in 1955, he worked for a French furniture company called Dericoure and then SAIB Wood.<sup>3</sup> Self-described as a traditional European designer of wood furniture, doors, and trim, Fadioul continually researched and followed European trends. He was a constant subscriber to materials such as French furniture magazines and home/office furniture catalogs that fueled his inspiration and personal creations. His travels to Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, and Israel also contributed to his continuing education. Fadioul's furniture orders quickly grew from family members to large government contracts.

While his business grew, so did his family. Fadioul married Amy Cole in 1962 and together they had eleven children. His eldest son, Yacinthe, was the child who was most interested in his business and worked under him while living at home. Yacinthe later moved on to establish his own furniture business separate from his father's. Although Fadioul hoped his children would carry on the family business, he was not disappointed that they found success in other careers.

Fadioul not only designed and constructed furniture, but was a popular informal educator in the business. His furniture shop became a center for education in *Menuserie* and *Ebenisterie*, which is the art of furniture making. On a regular basis, Fadioul held classes for children to attend. Furthermore, the justice department sent troubled teenagers to his shop as an opportunity to receive formal training and find a good job. Today, Fadioul proudly shares that these same children are now married, some of whom have children named after him.

A highlight of Fadioul's career took place in the late 1960's when Senegal's Prime Minister, Mamadou Dia, invited him to bid on a contract that would give him the opportunity to design furniture for Senegal's presidential palace and other government offices.<sup>4</sup> After winning the contract, Fadioul became one of the first Senegalese designers to create office furniture for the government. As one of their primary contractor's, he gained not only business relationships, but personal relationships with the Prime Minister and other government and religious leaders. Following the precedent he had set, Senegal passed a law that would only allow locally-made furniture in government offices.

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough discussion of the terms *charpentier*, *mensusier*, and *ebeniste*, see Leora Auslander's book *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*.

<sup>2</sup> This biographical sketch is based on information gathered during a personal visit to Dakar, Senegal in February 2013, and subsequent telephone interviews.

<sup>3</sup> Both companies are small furniture companies in Dakar. SAIB Wood is currently in operation, specializing in furnishings, kitchens, and baths.

<sup>4</sup> Senegal's first presidency occurred during this time. Leopold Sedar Senghor became president in September 1960 and managed the country's foreign relations. Prime minister, Mamadou Dia focused on Senegal's long-term development. After almost five terms as president, Senghor resigned in December of 1980.

In 2005 Fadioul retired from furniture making because of deteriorating eyesight. Every once in a while, he will visit local shops to check on what the “kids” – his former apprentices - are working on. Fadioul was and is a likeable and successful family and business man. As described by his children, he is a hub for entertainment, a leader, full of wisdom and stories, and always ensures that his faith is his guide. When asked to look back at his career, he noted he had everything and accomplished everything he ever desired. Now at ninety years old, even a stranger can see the truth in this the very first moment in meeting him.

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Photos taken in February 2013 of Fadioul's retired furniture shop located in HLM Montagne, Dakar, Senegal











Photos taken February 2013 of current furniture designs located in Cornich West, Dakar, Senegal











