

Interiors

Add some ethics to your home aesthetics

Artisan homewares from companies supporting craftspeople will make your decor look good and do good, writes Madeleine Howell

There is little doubt that spending so much time in our homes has sparked an interest in emotionally resonant pieces: furniture and homeware which is inspiring, rather than homogenous, which has cultural significance, and a meaningful story. At a time when our homes are in greater need than ever of cheering interiors with heart and soul, the best purchases of 2021 are ones which will make our home/work/life balance feel more joyful. And, increasingly, we want to invest in handmade products sold by ethical

companies. Alarminglly the textiles industry now accounts for more greenhouse gas emissions than international aviation and shipping combined, according to Tom Bailey of new grassroots climate movement The Jump (takethejump.org), which advocates “less stuff, more joy”. So, for those who want to challenge throwaway culture, here’s our pick of the new ethical companies championing craftspeople from all over the world, selling ethical products that are also colourful, luxurious and elegant.

A RUM FELLOW

Caroline Lindsell, 42, and Dylan O’Shea, 40, are dedicated to designing handmade textiles and statement interior pieces woven in Guatemala, and flat-weave rugs from India. They live in London with daughters Coco, seven, and Juno, three.

“There’s a movement towards making conscious choices. Rather than consumerism for consumerism’s sake, people are choosing to surround themselves with things that resonate,” says Dylan O’Shea. “I read Development Studies at uni, looking at processes of change in developing countries. I like the idea of enabling change – giving people the capacity to change things for themselves through fair exchange.”

“When I met Caroline, she’d been working in fashion design in London and America and was in need of a change, tired of the relentless pace and the constant need for something new. We wanted to create a design studio based on a principled way of working, with a mission. Caroline has an unerring eye for colour, scale and line, and we’re both drawn to geometric patterns, which led us to Guatemala, where the brocade fabric woven by Mayan women is a living part of everyday life.”

“We found handmade textile heaven there. Our aim is to preserve the legacy of the craft while presenting it in a new way to a wider audience, allowing it to breathe in a different air and work in new contexts – reinterpreting the designs for a contemporary setting.”

“We bring work directly to the women, so they can earn from home

and champion their ancient, indigenous ‘jaspe’ wooden, portable backstrap loom weaving culture and the treadle loom techniques introduced by the Spanish in the 1500s, without leaving their community or their families.”

“Without an in-between taking a cut, artisan processes are inherently sustainable and engender better working conditions. Our weavers’ looms are powered by their hands and feet. It’s a physical, small-batch process with little waste, and our partnership with our weavers is symbiotic.”

“There’s a certain tactile quality to the fabric, which is extremely beautiful, with an imperceptible irregularity – every time I see it, the detail still blows me away. It brings warmth and a story to a room. Beyond Central America, Indian flat weave rugs are a centuries-old tradition, and we wanted to work with the masters of the craft. The name A Rum Fellow plays on an idea we had of a bold, brave renegade, someone who strays from the beaten track to source something out-of-the-ordinary, that can’t be found anywhere else.”

“Good design enhances the space we live in. Great design changes the world we live in,” adds Caroline Lindsell.

arumfellow.com



NATALE DINIAMI, SARA K BLANCO PHOTOGRAPHY



ZAN ARTEFACTS

Traditionally handcrafted decorative baskets and trays, woven by women in Iran and founded by musician-in-exile Golazin Ardestani

“Kapu baskets are woven with the leaves of date palm trees (*tamam pish*) and colourful wool (*tamam kamva*). The technique, found in the villages of the Khuzestan province, is a traditional art form passed from mothers to daughters for more than 6,000 years.”

“I grew up in the ancient city of Isfahan in western Iran, but I left my family in Iran to pursue a career in music in England and the US. I can’t go back, because female solo singers were banned in Iran after the Islamic Revolution in 1980, and face punishment.”

“Sharing the craft of Iran’s rural women is a small step towards equality. Zan Artefacts gives them self-confidence, when for so long they’ve been dependent on husbands, fathers and brothers. Zan means ‘woman’ in Farsi, and I want them to know they have a skill, worthy of being shared with the world, and that they are valued and loved. It gives them financial independence and a livelihood, but also hope, meaning and purpose.”

“I launched Zan Artefacts in November, and for their work to be part of the V&A’s Epic Iran exhibition – which is open now until September, cele-

brating the art, design and cultural heritage of Persia – is something I’d only dreamed of.”

“It’s difficult to find the women who make them. I have a team of women who go directly to villages to find them: there are no middle men. My sister in Iran is a big part of the chain, and while restrictions on travelling due to the pandemic made logistics difficult, we didn’t let it stop us. Each basket takes between two to four days to be made, and we ensure they receive a fair price. Bringing their art into people’s homes gives me joy and happiness. They’re so colourful – and when everything is dark and grey it’s important to bring colour and energy into our lives, and to connect with natural materials.”

“With pom-pom topped lids and diamond patterns, every basket and tray is given a feminine name, and each piece tells the story of the artisan who created it: ‘Dokhi’ means little girl, ‘Nanjoon’ means grandmother. The date palm trees they are woven from have been cultivated in Iran since the time of the Achaemenid Empire (founded 550BC).”

“I want the world to know the true Iran. I saw the

good and the bad, the beauty and the ugliness: every country has a good side and a bad side. Yes, Iran is a country where women are suppressed: a land where we are forbidden to sing publicly, or take the freedom to ride a bicycle for granted. But there are so many other aspects to it – the food, the culture, the nature. It’s not only a dark place, a desert where people always wear black: it’s actually very colourful. The pink salt lake, Maharlou Lake, is magnificent. Isfahan is renowned for roses, so we give pink rosebuds with every basket.”

“I use them for storage, and for styling. I like them right in front of my eyes, so that when I wake up and see them, I choose happiness and love. With love, we can do anything in this world: we can conquer, and we can wield its power for change. When I was a child, my mother had many kapus, and kept her sewing kits in them. She was 13 when she was pushed to marry my dad, and made her own bridal dress: it was in her blood to sew, design and create.”

“They eventually became lovers, and my mother went from one place to another with her sewing kits, teaching other women to sew. I adore her: she’s my role model. She’s still in Iran, and we speak every day.”

zanartefacts.com





▲ The panels of brocade (£600) are woven by Mayan women



▲ Palapo fabric, used for the sofa and cushions, £195 per metre



▲ A handcrafted Coyolate brocade cushion, £360



▲ Palomar brocade (£900) on chair back; Hikira rug, from £1,620

THREE MORE enriching ARTISAN-LED enterprises



Tamay and Me

A British/Vietnamese team: Ly Ta May (Tamay) taught traditional Mien embroidery to Londoner Hannah Cowie. Together, they make embroidered jackets, homewares and accessories, providing reliable, flexible employment for ethnic minority communities in north Vietnam. tamayandme.com



Kalinko

Sophie Garnier of Kalinko works exclusively with families of craftspeople from Myanmar. They do not use middlemen: purchase costs go straight to the makers. Garnier aims to provide at least 500 families with sufficient, sustainable income for an improved standard of living, health and education. Think rattan lampshades, coffee tables and Moses baskets, and elegant glassware for the table. kalinko.com



Gone Rural

Sustainable coasters, placemats and bread-baskets, handmade in Swaziland. Founder Jenny Thorne works with over 780 women artisans, reimagining the traditional weaving techniques of Eswatini. gonerural.co.uk

CHESKIE

Handmade objets d'art and handwoven textiles by artisans in India, Cambodia, Vietnam and Mexico, from family duo Cheskie Baker-Margolis, 30, and her mother Karen Baker, 59

Cheskie Baker-Margolis

"When I was growing up, my mother and I would always seek out local craftspeople on trips abroad. I can remember falling in love with the history of weaving and the idea of exploring other cultures through fabric in South America. I studied textiles at Central St Martins. After doing various internships, I took the leap to become an entrepreneur – encouraged by my mother, who had already discovered the Mexican artisans who make our silverware.

"First, I travelled to India to find the masters in traditional woven methods. I wanted to work as directly with them as I could, literally sitting at the loom by their side and learning from them. The idea was to source and create 'remarkable' pieces, in that when people remark on them, you can tell them exactly

where it was made, who by, and how. I wanted to sell things you don't find anywhere else. I love it when people ask us questions, and wake up to the importance of how things are made.

"The challenge of the pandemic has been not being able to talk with customers in person, or to visit our artisans. We don't try to compete with mass production in terms of price – their work is part of our global heritage. If we don't preserve it, we'll lose it. Keeping their craft going is what drives me."

Karen Baker

"Great craftsmanship is laborious. We lose something important when we want everything done immediately, and when we don't accept that it takes time to create something beautiful. I'm a great fan of the arts and crafts move-

ment, which is all about bringing the extraordinary into day-to-day life. I find it deeply exciting to find craftspeople producing things with their hands that can just blow you away – objets d'art that raise the tone of the everyday.

"We use our hand-beaten Mexican jugs for water with every meal. William Morris said: 'Have nothing in your home that you don't know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.' For me, that's what it's all about. The artisans we work with give us so much time, and are so thrilled to introduce us to their craft. As a result, we connect with and value the work going into it on a much deeper, more rewarding level. My own home in Herefordshire is full of such objects: our homes are an extension of who we are as people, and what's important to us."

cheskie.co.uk



▲ For Cheskie and her mother Karen, the main drive for their business is to celebrate great craftsmanship, and to preserve it

INTRODUCING CHESKIE'S ARTISANS...



HAND-BEATEN MEXICAN HOLLOWWARE

"Recycled silver and copper is smelted in a hole dug in the earth, and then taken to the home of a family of artisans in Michoacán to be hammered into jugs. They then travel to a third team of artisans, who fashion the mosaicked handles in the shapes of parrots, lizards and seahorses in abalone shell, malachite or lapis lazuli."

◀ Pair of cream jugs, £270



COTTON HAND-WOVEN NAPKINS WITH TASSELS, FROM INDIA, £20

"These are woven by Ramji, a talented craftsman from Gujarat in western India, and are for both the everyday table and for special occasions (they go in a washing machine on a 30-degree cycle). We sit with Ramji for hours, merging our styles."

▼ Napkin, £20



CAMBODIAN SILK WOVEN TEXTILES

"We work with a cooperative led by a man named Sar Toch and the brilliant American weaver Carol Cassidy of Lao Textiles (laotextiles.com) in a challenging province called Preah Vihear. Landmines are still being cleared there. The people there need support and have been through a lot, not least the genocide led by the Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot in the 1970s. The work of these artisans is exquisite, hand-dyed and hand-spun pure silk – expensive, and mostly made to order."

► Silk dressing gown, £1,200



MARQUETRY, LACQUERWARE AND EGGSHELL INLAY MADE IN CAMBODIA

"Furniture, panelling, and elegantly shaped bowls and dishes, created by a group of artisans in Siem Reap led by French artisan Eric Stocker (stocker-studio.com). For the inlay, they painstakingly crush chicken and duck shells, and apply layer upon layer to mango wood with tweezers. The lacquerware is made with natural lacquer from the sap of Asian lacquer trees, each piece dried and sanded seven times for the deep lustre of the ancient masters, while the straw marquetry uses rye straw from Burgundy."

▼ Marquetry console, £3,600



◀ The kapu baskets (from £15) and tray sets (£98) bring cheer into the home, says Golazin Ardestani, far left