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WHERE CULTURE & DESIGN COLLIDE



Inspired by the traditional craft techniques, vibrant colours, and textures from their homeland Africa and ancestral land, India, Viveka and Rucita Vassen have embarked on creating the wondrous and magical world of Ananta.

Words Thuvashnie Govender

With Viveka's background in fashion and Rucita's in graphic design, the birth of their studio seems almost destined. Using their skills, shared visions and culture, the sisters re-imagine traditional techniques to design collectable pieces that play with the FUN in fun-ctional.

Their purpose is to uplift humanity through creativity, economically empower craft communities and create a visual language that represents their identity and cross-over of cultures. Muse chats to Ananta, a multi-disciplinary design studio by sister-duo Viveka and Rucita Vassen.

Congratulations on making this year's Design Indaba's Emerging Creatives Class!

Thank you! It's been so amazing to get recognition and exposure through the platform. When we started our studio, this was something we wanted to work towards, so we are very grateful to Design Indaba for this incredible opportunity and for seeing the potential in our work. We are looking forward to learning and growing.

You two are a super-sister duo; what is it like working together?

We've always been besties and are in sync on so many levels, which makes working together effortless and fun. We get excited about the same things – to be able to share that

only amplifies the energy. We also know each other so well that we can communicate with just a glance or look. We knew after we both studied in the design fields that we would eventually build a creative business together. As sisters, it's always been us together on the ride – this is just the next one.

The story behind the name

When going through a shortlist of options, Ananta instantly resonated with both of us. Ananta is a Sanskrit word meaning 'infinite' or 'endless', accurately reflecting how we feel about creativity, design and all the exciting possibilities that lie ahead. It speaks to the circular concept of creation – there's no beginning or end,



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making us conscious of our design process and ensuring that we create collectable pieces that are loved for a lifetime and beyond.

We were also drawn to the familial sound and depth of the ancient Sanskrit language in naming our brand and pieces. This, for us, was the perfect way to honour our Indian heritage in all that we create with our African makers and craft communities.

Describe your work and styles

Bold, vibrant and offbeat! Our work is playful and joyful, reminding us of our brighter, lighter, more childlike selves through their very function. At the same time, it is filled with meaning and purpose.

Inspiration

As designers, our brains are hardwired to see the beauty in everything and to soak up inspiration from all around us. If we had to pinpoint what we are most fascinated by, it would be craft, culture and artisans. We're inspired by the richness of cultures and traditional craft techniques. Indian and African cultures are alive with vibrant colours, bold patterns and textures, which have shaped our signature design style.

India's influence goes beyond aesthetics. Their exploration and preservation of traditional crafts is remarkable, as well as the emphasis on storytelling and meaningful narratives.

From street vendors to chain stores and high-end brands, there is a celebration and continuous reinvention of handmade crafts, all while supporting and uplifting artisan communities. This dedication to craftsmanship and humanness has been a huge driving force behind our work, inspiring us to create with purpose.

We're also encouraged by the artisans and crafters who've inherited and continue to master traditional techniques passed down through generations. Their talent is so innate and unpretentious. They live simply and humbly, not seeking recognition.

This motivates us to support these artisans, and create beautiful and meaningful pieces, ensuring that their skills and stories continue to be shared with the generations ahead.

Navigating a new business during the pandemic

Ironically at a time when there was so much uncertainty in the world, is when we became certain of what we wanted to do. Lockdown gave us the time and freedom to explore the type of business we wanted to build and the impact we wanted to create through design. So, for us, it was an exciting time. We chose to see the pandemic as an opportunity to play and experiment, which helped us discover our creative voice.

We also have a daily breathwork and meditation practice, which helps us with our mental well-being. This kept us in a positive mind during the pandemic and helped us channel our creativity.

Impact on the creative industry

We aim to be more than a design studio. Our goal is to create a movement and platform dedicated to making a positive and lasting social impact. We want to build an impact business that economically empowers under-resourced communities and positively contributes to the environment and a more conscious world. We want to bring our artisans and makers to the forefront and honour their skills by creating pieces with beauty, purpose and social impact.

We also believe in a circular economy and aspire to create sustainable, ethical and eco-conscious products. For example, we use fabric offcuts, end-of-roll textiles, upcycled textiles and waste materials wherever possible. Our makers are very special to us, and we feel it's important to celebrate and credit them as their heart and soul goes into producing our pieces. Each piece includes the maker's name and where they are from to acknowledge their artistic talents.

We believe in transparency and traceability ensuring openness,



honesty and accountability. Much of our time goes into researching things like eco-packaging, suppliers and artisans and we want to share this with others and contribute to a more inclusive creative industry.

Advice to other duo teams

A shared vision and purpose will keep you aligned and focused on the same



goal and outcome. Even if you have different approaches and strengths, you'll move forward together if you know you want to get to the same place.

The future

We've been working on a vegan handbag collection, which we will be launching soon. We are also excited to



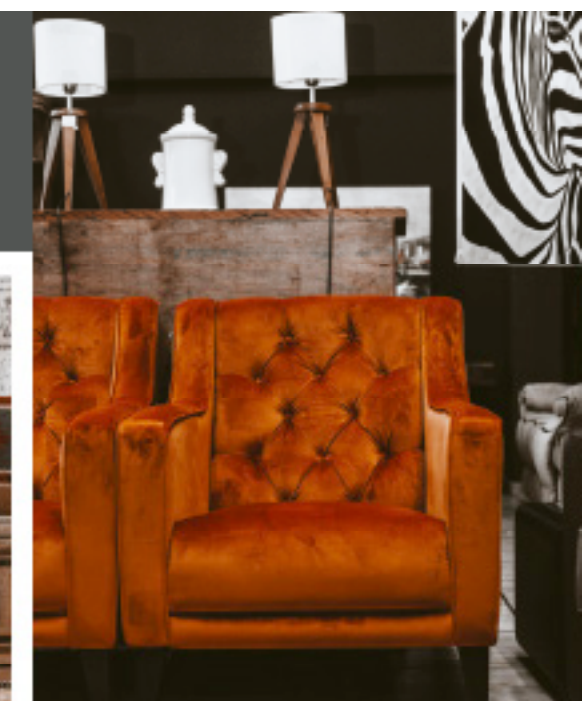
be designing an Airbnb apartment, which has pushed us creatively. With bigger spaces, we can explore and experiment with different materials.

We have so many ideas so there will be much more to come. 🙌

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