



homegrown

MACARLA CHURCH SOURCES HOMEWARES AS EXOTIC AS THEY ARE ETHICAL FOR HER GLOBAL BAZAAR IN MURWILLUMBAH, NSW.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE

“I WAS LIVING IN PERU 13 years ago, volunteering with an NGO, and working with a group of women who were weavers,” says Macarla Church, co-founder of Murwillumbah homewares bazaar Basera. “These women would spend a month weaving something – it was a whole process. They would look after the alpaca, shear the wool, then dye the wool with berries and plants they’d grown and harvested. Finally, they’d get to the actual weaving. The whole process was really community based and lovely, but for a month’s work weaving beautiful textiles, they would end up selling at a tourist market for something like 20 US dollars. It kind of broke my heart.”

Spurred on by a desire to create meaningful change for these women, Macarla reasoned the best way to help was to provide access to a real income; something she knew would change their lives, and their community, for the better.

“When I came back to Australia, Mum and I were talking, and we both wanted to create a platform where the women could sell their products,” recalls Macarla, 43. “We knew if we bought from them at a reasonable price, it would uplift them, and it would create a business for us too. That’s kind of how it all started.”

Fast-forward 13 years and Macarla and her mother, Lynette Church, 69, now have a thriving global market of ‘homewares with a difference’ sourced from more than 20 countries, including far-flung places such as Uzbekistan, India, Morocco and Ghana. Never deviating from their original commitment to ethical, fair-trade principles, Macarla and Lynette vet each and every group they work with to ensure they are operating in a way that guarantees a sustainable income for the artisans who create the goods.

“I had a lot of friends from the NGO who had scattered to different parts of the world – that was how the initial

connections came in,” explains Macarla. “We’re now at the point where groups contact us, to let us know what they’re doing and see if we’re interested in their products.

“There’s a real vetting process that goes with that – whether they’re fair-trade certified or they adhere to fair-trade standards. If we can, we go over and vet groups ourselves, otherwise, we work with already established fair-trade groups, just to make sure the ethics are sound.”

Macarla also collaborates with the artisans they buy from, to ensure their stunning, often intricate and traditional creations are appealing to Australian consumers. “A lot of people have an image of fair-trade [that is] really daggy,” says Macarla. “If we go into a group that already has these amazing weaving skills, and they’re doing little pencil cases, for example, we’ll get them to do tablecloths or scarves or runners – so we use what they already do, but just make sure that the product fits the Western market.”

More than merely a noble ambition, Macarla and Lynette’s little business has created big opportunities for those less fortunate, including the Peruvian women who started it all. “The Peruvian weavers ended up forming a co-op to keep the weaving traditions in the region alive,” says Macarla. “They have gone on to sell internationally to high-end brands and create a steady stream of income for the village.”

That’s a win for humanity, the local community and Basera’s proud founders. The business continues to expand and grow. “For the first time, we’re launching a wholesale line of hand block-printed linens, which will come out this year, and then next year, we’re pushing into the clothing more with hand block-printed fabrics and beautiful embroidery,” says Macarla. “It’s all very exciting.” *CF*
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