



FASHION

Fabric reborn

With the help of a **Ho Chi Minh**-based brand, an exquisite, all-but-extinct Vietnamese silk fabric enjoys a revival **BY JOSHUA ZUKAS**

Dubbed “the queen of silk”, *lanh my a* is sought after for its inky aesthetic, achieved after a weeks-long dyeing process using the fruit of *mac nua* (*diospyros mollis*) trees. It’s said to have dandified Vietnamese elites from the early 20th century.

The fabric caught the attention of the international design community in the 1950s, and it soon became a lucrative export. Unfortunately for the craft – and the artisanal community that produced it – synthetic materials crowded it out in the 1970s, forcing ateliers to close shop.

Fast forward to the 1990s, French designer Rose Morant, who used to live part-time in Vietnam and is an advocate of Vietnamese craftsmanship, got wind of the outmoded silk. As an artist, Morant works with a variety of materials, from lacquer and gold leaf, to metal, wood, fabric and flower powder. She travelled to Tan

Chau in the Mekong Delta – west of Ho Chi Minh City and the ancestral home of *lanh my a* – in search of artisans that could still produce it.

There, Morant found that much like lacquer, *lanh my a* is labour intensive and time-consuming. It involves a meticulous process of layering colour to create a beguiling mirror-like sheen. Still, she was able to convince the local artisanal community to restart the ateliers. Soon, boutique designers across the world were putting in orders for the fabric, which took on the name lacquer silk.

These days, Vietnam’s premium silk is produced in Bao Loc in the Central Highlands (north of Ho Chi Minh City) where

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temperatures are cooler and silkworms thrive. It then travels 400km southwest to Tan Chau to undergo the intensive dyeing process and become *lanh my a*. This exquisite material has started to attract and inspire local fashion houses.

One such company is Metiseko (metiseko.com), a sustainable clothing brand established in 2011. Metiseko’s flagship shop, a bright boutique with lacquered furniture and tropical foliage, is at 101 Dong Khoi Street, near the Ho Chi Minh City Opera House.

Late last year, Metiseko launched its Verticale Hanoi collection, an homage to Vietnam’s capital that incorporates *lanh my a* into the designs. Notable pieces include the lacquer pelican, a blazer dress with invisible snap buttons, and the lacquer fantail, a loose-fit, wide-collared blazer.

“It is a challenge to defend Vietnamese craftsmanship on a high-end level,” says Audrey Charles, Metiseko’s creative director. Perhaps with the continued elevation of traditional crafts like *lanh my a*, that is set to change. Metiseko already has plans to release a capsule collection that blends their original print designs with *lanh my a*.