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A Very Specific Indian Textile Printing Technique Comes to Moda Operandi

The process of making Marigold Living's textiles is intricate, weather-dependent, and something you've likely never heard of

By Rebecca Stadlen Amir

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The three pillows, appropriately situated next to a vase of colorful flowers. Here, the Lily-Embroidered Silk Pillow is most prominently featured.

Photo: SGBMade

Block-print lovers, rejoice–Indian textile brand Marigold Living, known for its botanical printed table linens and bedding, is launching an exclusive collaboration with Moda Operandi.

After a buzzed-about debut at last year's *AD* Design Show, and an impressive encore this spring, the New York-based brand has teamed up with the e-commerce platform to develop a line of luxury pillows that combine traditional block-printing with more elevated dyeing and embroidery techniques.

The new collection, available on the Moda Operandi website, includes three vibrantly hued tussar silk pillows featuring intricate botanical prints and embroideries. The inspiration for the pillows came from the motifs found on the *pallu* of an Indian sari (the most intricately detailed part of the garment that is draped over the shoulder). Like all of Marigold Living's products, the pillows are made in India. Founder Shreya Shah's taste for Indian textiles and handicrafts was cultivated while growing up in Mumbai.

The Dahlia-Embroidered Silk Pillow.

Photo: SGBMade

The poppy, dahlia, and lily flower designs are first block-printed by hand onto the silk. They are then embellished with fine lines of embroidery using techniques local to different regions of India. "The embroidery is what elevates it, and what makes it completely so much more fabulous," Shah tells AD PRO. "When you combine embroidery and print, you can create so much drama."

Unlike the traditional block-printing methods used in the brand's previous collections, the new pillows are made using a unique centuries-old printing technique known as color discharge. Popular during the 19th century, this process allows bright colors to be printed onto a darker, previously dyed fabric.

Along with the colors, the dye has two special elements mixed into it: the discharging agent and the illuminating agent. These are responsible for a chemical reaction that makes the printing process so complex. Once each layer of the design is stamped onto the hand-dyed silk base, the fabric is steamed. The steam causes the discharging agent to react with the darker color of the silk, replacing the pre-existing color on the printed areas with the illuminating, brighter hues.

The Poppy-Embroidered Silk Pillow features three distinct blooms.

Photo: SGBMade

"The most challenging part of this is that when you steam it, everyone waits with bated breath hoping that it all looks good," Shah says of the color-discharge process. "Things could really surprise you or disappoint you. It's like a mystery and then it reveals itself."

Each pillow takes six to eight weeks to produce, and relies heavily on the cooperation of nature. "Even though the process has been perfected, everything is very moisture-driven," explains Shah. "If it's more humid, like during the monsoons, [the textiles] cannot be printed because that much humidity means that everything just disperses." During the last phase of production, intricate running stitches, back stitches, and stem stitches are used to outline each motif and highlight the subtle printed shapes.

Just like the Marigold Living brand itself, the collection of pillows is meant to represent Indian culture. "There are so many beautiful crafts in India," says Shah. "Block prints, of course, are the most fascinating. I'm now doing embroidery and want to make sure that people appreciate Indian artisanship at this level as well. Each one of these techniques is extremely beautiful."