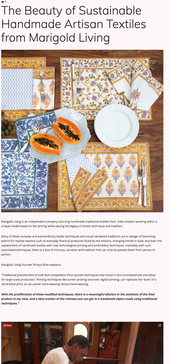
The Beauty of Sustainable Handmade Artisan Textiles from Marigold Living



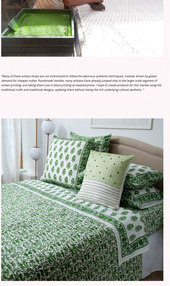
Marigold Living is an independent company sourcing handmade traditional textiles from India artisans working within a unique handmade process that spring while saving the legacy of ancient techniques and creation.

Many of these complex and extraordinarily textile technique and visual hardwork traditions are in danger of becoming extinct. Marigold Living reacts such an everyday. Practical pieces inspired by the artisans, changing trends in style, and the replacement of hand-made textiles with new technological printing and embroidery techniques, inevitably with such a rich heritage comes the loss of tradition, knowledge, aesthetics and tradition that can only be passed down from person to person.

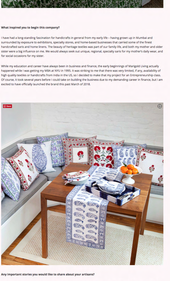
Marigold Living founder Shreya Shah explains:

"Traditional practitioners of craft face competition from quicker techniques that result in less inconsistencies and allow for more production. Marigold Living's mission is to preserve these ancient craft techniques. Digital printing can replicate the look of a handmade piece and it is not necessarily always bad for preserving culture.

With the justification of these modified techniques, there is a meaningful dilution in the aesthetics of the final product in my view, and a slow erosion of the richness we can get in a handmade object made using traditional techniques."



"Many of these artisan shops are not mentioned in fame the laborious authentic techniques. Instead, driven by global demand for cheaper Indian 'handmade' textiles, many artisans have already jumped ship to the larger scale segment of textile production, which is mechanized and has a lower quality of craft. Marigold Living's mission is to preserve these ancient craft techniques and traditional designs, supporting them without losing the rich underlying cultural aesthetics."



What inspired you to begin this company?

I have had a long-standing fascination for handcrafts in general from my early life – having grown up in Mumbai and commuted to Ahmedabad in exhibitions, specialty shows, and home-based businesses has carried some of the finest handcrafted saris and home-linens. The beauty of heritage textile was part of our family life, and both my mother and older sister were in the textile business. We would always visit artisan groups, regional, specially due to the mothers'-daughters-and-for-social occasions for saris.

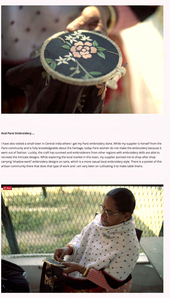
While my education and career have always been in business and finance, the early beginnings of Marigold Living actually happened while I was getting my MBA at IIM in 1999. It was so thing to me that there was very limited, if any, availability of high quality weaves or handcrafts from India in the US, so I decided to make that my project for an Entrepreneurship class. Marigold Living was incorporated in Ahmedabad in 2000 and I moved to the US to my dismantling career in Finance, but I am excited to now officially launched the brand this past March of 2018.

Any important stories you would like to share about your artisans?

In my view, the bigger story of artisans in India is their inherent knowledge of techniques – weaving, hand-printing, wood-carving, embroidery, etc. Unfortunately, the economics of these craftsmen are not sustainable in the modern world and with a lack of interest, the aesthetic and its regard and community. They kept making their own heritage that is passed down through generations. In our modern day consumerism, we are quite unaware of the wealth of knowledge that is at the risk of being lost. Marigold Living is a small contribution towards preserving this heritage. We are not a charity organization, we are making things that men can for centuries. They are not fully able to capitalize on it, due to lack of exposure and education to make things that would be exciting and beautiful for a modern day consumer.

Tell us more about the Women Artisans…

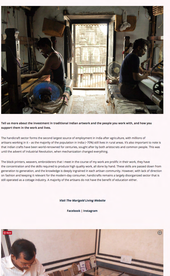
The women artisans often work on their craft alongside working in their homes and taking care of their families. For example, my aunt was the first tailor of clothing of women's dress for women in a remote rural region at the border of India and Pakistan. Her daughter-in-law, who is a very talented artisan herself, is now carrying the family business. It is still quite unbelievable(and the women have been taught to do this applique work by their families over generations.



The entire atmosphere is flexible, and women work at a their own pace and get paid per piece completed. The area would require government permission to even visit, but my supplier organizes this work, sending the textiles to them and assigning pieces to women looking for work. The process can take up to 3 months to get an order completed.

And Parsi Embroidery…

Have also visited a small town in Central India where I get my Parsi embroidery done. While my supplier is herself from the Parsi community and is fully knowledgeable about the heritage, today Parsi women do not make the embroidery because it requires very intricate work, and they have moved on to more contemporary and modern pursuits. Marigold Living has tried to increase the include designs. While watching the local women in the town, my supplier pointed out to me after that they carrying "Parsiness"and "embroidery designs in saris, which is a more casual level embroidery style. There is a paradox of this where unfortunately think that does not qual of work and I am not keen on including it in India-Made items.



Can you tell us a bit about a few of the traditional printing techniques used?

Handblock printing, block printing, and batik are the top printing are a few of the various techniques I have used so far in my collections. Block printing is the process of hand-stamping elaborate designs engraved on wooden blocks onto cotton or silk fabric. Batik is a process of dyeing fabric using a combination of wax and dyes. Batik is a very time-consuming process typically made with dual or wax, and then peeled or dye-off both. Once the block is removed, the dye-painting patterns remain in white against a striking colored background.

Bandhani tie-dye printing is where several points in the fabric are tightly tied with thread to create numerous dots, before dipping the fabric into vats of colorful dye. The tied knots are then opened, forming a delightful pattern of white spots against the colored background.

Tell us more about the movement in traditional Indian artwork and the people you work with, and how you support them in the work and lives.

The handicraft sector forms the second-largest source of employment in India after agriculture, with millions of craftspeople, artisans, and their families depending on this industry for their livelihoods. Indian textiles are well-known and are a key Indian cultural base been world-renowned for centuries, sought after by both artisan-lies and eminent people. This was until the advent of Industrial Revolution, when mechanization changed everything.

The black-printed, woven, woodcut, embroideries that make a the course of the world, are prolific in their work, they have the concentration and the skills required to produce high quality work, at density hand. These skills are passed down from generation to generation, and are a part of the culture of the artisan. Unfortunately, the craftsmen are not able to make a living at fashion and keeping it relevant for the modern day consumer. Traditionally weavers a largely disorganized sector that is still operated as a cottage industry. A majority of the artisans do not have the benefit of education either.

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