

Interview

SHREYA SHAH

MARIGOLD LIVING

EST. 2009, NEW YORK, NY

Indian-born founder of Marigold Living Shreya Shah aims to preserve the ancient techniques and rich design heritage that sets Indian textiles apart. Each Marigold Living piece embodies a distinct cultural identity that is at once both relevant and contemporary.

Tell us about your path to becoming a designer.

I have had a long-standing fascination for everything handcrafted, particularly for authentically made, classic Indian textiles, since my days in college in Mumbai. I came to the US in 1995 to pursue an MBA in Finance followed by a career in banking in NYC. However, this passion to explore high-quality, handcrafted textiles from India kept resurfacing, and I started Marigold Living in 2009 as a side business.

While my training is not as a designer, my taste is for heritage Indian design, so it became a natural path to designing my collections by leveraging the wealth of motifs and patterns Indian culture offers, as my eye was well-trained in that aesthetic.

Tell us about your creative process.

The design and development process is free flowing, as is the schedule for releasing new designs. The creation of a final collection is a long and laborious process of collaboration with the artisan partners. It always involves several rounds of sampling to create something



Gota work pillows—a prestigious type of metal applique that originates from Rajasthan—and a stitched tie-dye merino wool throw by Marigold Living



A peek into the design process, testing colors and patterns together



The Aria table linens



Marigold Living's botanical pillows for Moda Operandi

that is both compelling, and that can be executed without too much complication.

The base inspiration is heritage Indian motifs and patterns—designs come from suppliers, textile pieces I have collected over the years for my home and my wardrobe, and the flow of imagery one sees being in the design business. Color inspiration comes from a broader source, with the baseline drawn from the Indian color palette, which has now evolved into a global- and Western-influenced taste after having lived in this environment for such a long time. Rich and ongoing exposure to museum exhibits in New York City influences me, as well as travels, magazines, social media, and fashion—plus, a good sense of interiors in the West all provide ideas for tweaking the underlying Indian color palette into a more universally appealing, overall aesthetic.

Describe the influence of India on your collection.

The beauty and the timeless appeal of Indian handcrafted textiles and heritage design comes from their centuries-old rich history: one that combines

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Shreya Shah, Marigold Living

influences from the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. These textiles have traveled the world for centuries across cultures and generations. That's a huge advantage in working with the traditional craft of block prints, as they have stood the test of time and there is a long-standing appreciation for them globally. To balance the traditional craft with contemporary design, it's important to bear the modern home decor in mind to keep classics looking chic.

What are the key things to keep in mind when working with artisans?

It is imperative to have genuine respect for the work, the knowledge, and the effort that goes into the making of high-quality, handcrafted textiles. Suppliers need to pay competitive wages to retain skilled artisans; suppliers also take care of their workers by advancing them funds for any personal emergencies or needs. As a business, staying reasonably flexible in terms of timelines helps avoid stressing your supplier, so they in turn can offer flexibility to their workers to take leave to suit their lifestyle in India, as culturally there are many festivals and social obligations that workers need to attend to have a good quality of life. It's important to understand the limitations of the process and the inherent variability in the output and to manage for that when selling, so the artisans and the supplier are not unduly pressured to meet your uninformed expectations.

What key sustainability standards do you follow?

My suppliers have solid knowledge and experience, and they export to Europe and other parts of the world. They use all approved dyes and follow responsible dye-disposal processes.



Some of Marigold Living's designs utilize a complex block printing and mud-resist indigo dyeing process known as Jahota printing. The patterns that are not meant to be blue in the final design are carefully block printed with a dye-resistant mud paste called "dabu." The fabric is then dusted with the fine desert sand of Rajasthan and dried in sunlight.



Artisans working on a traditional block print created by applying pigments



An artisan washing the dabu paste from an indigo-resist dyed design



An artisan embroidering Persian Blossom



An artisan printing the Lotus tablecloth



A bed made up in a variety of Marigold Living patterns

Fall 2022

MADE IN INDIA



Exchange of Materials & Traditions, Then and Now

Introduction by Sayali Goyal, founding editor of *Cocoa and Jasmine*

Textiles have been intertwined with the advancement of human civilization and everyday living for ages. From sacred rituals and surface decoration to daily attire they have long added meaning and warmth to human existence, and have always held a special pride-of-place in India. Local conditions across the vast sweep of the subcontinent over many thousands of years have given rise to the diversity of fabrics and techniques we see today. Their evolution has been determined by local

climatic, social, economic, and cultural factors and they are vivid manifestations of laborious mechanisms, learned and perfected over generations by skilled kaarigars (craftsmen).

India was an important stop on the Silk Route, which throughout its 1500 year history (starting around 200 BC) fueled the exchange of goods, wealth, ideas, religions, philosophies, scientific discoveries, and ways of living. Textiles and spices were India's primary exports during



this time, and India was renowned for its textile quality and robust trade relations with South and Far East Asia. The creativity of Indian artisans, in ancient times, led the Romans to describe muslin as 'woven air' and the love if it nearly emptied their coffers. By the 15th century, diverse textile networks spread from China to Africa. Lured by this commercial behemoth, the sixteenth century saw the arrival of the Portuguese through sea routes, followed by the Dutch and, finally, the British.

As Europeans landed on Indian shores, they were mesmerized by the superior materials and unique dying techniques of Indian textiles. Indian artisans were already adept at tailoring their products to different tastes, from Sri Lankan to Japanese to Indonesian. European traders would bring reference materials, such as Dutch botanical illustrations, to help artisans understand the newly opened European markets. The resulting Indian style of weaving and embroidery left a

lasting impression on global aesthetics with their floral patterns, sacred motifs, and geometric iconography.

Indienne-prints were carried on caravan routes through Persia and Turkey, onto the ships of sea merchants who facilitated the popularity of such prints in Marseille - an old French seaport, which became the cradle of Indienne and piqué fabrics well before the first half of the 18th century. In the 20th century, with the onset of the British Raj and the influences of Western imperialism, Indian clothing started to display a striking English flavor that surfaced initially in the upper class and later touched the masses. Indian textiles became highly popular in Europe, a trend evidenced by the adoption of words like calico, pyjama, gingham, dungaree, chintz, and khaki into the English lexicon.

Politics, economic, and trade policy have had profound effects on Indian textile production, from the English Calico bans of the mid-18th century to Victorian

policies that lead to the closure of many Indian mills to Mahatma Gandhi's popularization of khadi (handspun and hand-woven cotton) during his campaign for self-rule starting in the 1920s. The most impactful aspect of Indian textile traditions, however, is how the skill-sets and knowledge systems have survived the test of time. Today the industry is booming, thanks to an enormous raw material base, cottage industries skilled in hand-woven and handmade items, and the capital-intensive industrial mill sector.

According to the 2021-22 annual report by the Ministry of Textile, India holds a 4% share in the global trade in textiles and apparel. [1] Indeed, India's specializations in fine handicrafts, natural fibers, and unique weaving capabilities make it a much bigger supplier of high-end textiles than the statistic implies.

Contemporary textile connoisseurs and ateliers are fostering new associations and exchanges with artisans

to seek inspiration, build stronger enterprises, and make quality products. This is a suitable way to provide massive direct and indirect employment to people in rural and semi-urban areas, specifically women and marginalized communities. By reinvigorating textile cultures and heritage, we are now in the position to sensitively contribute to material knowledge, and meet the demands of consumers seeking responsible—and beautiful—textiles.

[1] http://texmin.nic.in/sites/default/files/AR_Ministry_of_Textiles_%202021-22_Eng.pdf

Images page 8: column 1 Inspiration courtesy of James Dunlop, Column 2-4 courtesy of Sayali Goyal

Images page 9: column 1 (top) courtesy of Marigold Living, (bottom) courtesy of Seema Krish, column 2 courtesy of Moti Mahon, column 3 courtesy of Armadillo Rugs, and column 4 courtesy of Malabar

Theme

Agra | Flower Garden

Agra is the home of the Taj Mahal, the masterpiece of Mughal architecture built in the 17th century by Shah Jahan. The Mughal dynasty ruled in Northern India for centuries. The Mughal emperors were patrons of the decorative arts and architecture and prized floral motifs, gardens and botanicals. Mughal floral decoration evolved over time, and many of the favorite expressions, such as the palampore (tree of life) are immensely popular to this day. Paisley, also known as butah, originally of Persian origin, was widely adopted in India, copied in Scotland, and is once again making a comeback. From traditionally woven shawls and carpets to heritage block-printed and chintz looks, the harvest of the Mughal gardens is still being enjoyed.

LOOKS

- Heritage design
- Block prints and block-print looks
- Multi-layered embroidery & appliqué techniques
- Decorative borders surrounding floral fields
- Mughal-style set floral bouquets
- Paisley & butah designs
- Scrolling foliage & flowers
- Palampore & tree of Life layouts
- Intricate scrolling florals



Marigold Living

the TEXTILE EYE



Pyar & Co



Marigold Living



Molly Mahon



Pyar & Co



Indian Art Carpets



Marigold Living



Pollack



Indian Art Carpets