

'Look for the story behind the beauty'

Authentically handmade? How to know amid mass production

By Alexandra Olson

Guatemalan women skilled in traditional Mayan beadwork technique have made chic pillows and pouches for West Elm. Hand-dyers in India, using petals collected from discarded Hindu temple floral offerings, help craft scarves for Eileen Fisher and Anthropologie. Baskets hand-woven in Rwanda are part of the home decor collection at Macy's.

Craftspeople in some of the poorest places on Earth are making unexpected inroads into the US retail market, expanding their clientele beyond museum shops and craft markets. A trend that started decades ago with the rise of fair trade-minded entrepreneurs has accelerated as growing international tourism creates demand for cultural products. Exports of artistic crafts from developing countries surged from \$9 billion in 2002 to \$23 billion in 2011, according to the most recent UNESCO report on the global creative economy.

The digital age has given rise to a growing number of ventures designed to create online markets for global crafts. More recently, exotic craftwork has piqued the interest of major fashion and home decor retailers striving to compete in the age of Amazon. Many are betting craftsmanship rooted in ancient traditions, combined with stories of social impact on artisan communities, will lure shoppers increasingly concerned about where and how products are made.

"We believe it is one of the elements that sets us apart and does well, and

there is a demand for it," said Doug Guiley, West Elm's senior vice-president of global sourcing at West Elm, where 20 percent of products are handmade. For shoppers, it is not always easy to know if something is truly handcrafted, or how much of their money is getting back to artisans across the globe. In an era of mass production and online shopping, here is some guidance for buying handmade.

Certify

There is no "fair trade" certification process for handicrafts as a category because the production processes vary widely. Organizations like Fair Trade USA certify some products that may be handcrafted, such as clothing and rugs. But safety and labor standards used for those items might be irrelevant for an individual basket weaver in a rural village.

More commonly, some retailers will label a handcrafted product as fair trade because it is sourced from a member of an organization such as the Fair Trade Federation.

Macy's partners with Global Goods Partners, a Fair Trade Federation member that sells crafts online and to retailers nationwide. Target last spring offered specially designed crafts from India, Kenya, Ecuador and Guatemala through a partnership with Accompany, an online venture does not belong to any fair trade organization but works with many enterprises that are.

A growing number of trade organiza-

tions are dedicated to maximizing profits for artisans, though tactics vary. Seek details on how artisans are compensated and how an organization monitors the labor and safety practices of their artisan partners.

Novica, a company partnered with National Geographic, allows artisans to set their own prices and maximizes profits for them with an integrated logistics system that cuts out intermediaries. Ten Thousand Villages, a nonprofit retailer and wholesaler founded in 1946, pays 50 percent to artisans upfront and the rest upon shipment, taking much of the risk away from the maker. Many newer online ventures have replicated that model.

How do you know if something is truly handmade? Some retailers label products handcrafted based on UNESCO's definition, which states that the "manual contribution of the artisan" must be "the most substantial component of the finished product." If there is no label, look for the story of the artisan who made the product. Online shopping has made this easier than ever.

Novica prides itself on its in-depth personal stories from a single mother in Ghana who makes jewelry to a Balinese artisan who went from selling door-to-door to owning a workshop that employs 28 people.

Some major brands have made storytelling a central part of their marketing effort, trying to stand out in the increasingly crowded universe of online



Fair trade-certified and handloom-woven wool and silk scarves made by North Indian artisans are displayed at Bhoomki, a Brooklyn store specializing in 'ethically-fashioned' and hand-crafted clothing and jewelry on Jan 23, in New York. (AP)

shopping. Eileen Fisher offers stories about Ethiopian knitters and hand-dyers in the Japanese village of Narumi. West Elm invites shoppers to watch videos about Filipino seagrass basket weavers and Peruvian carvers that craft mirrors using colonial-era techniques.

Maker

At boutiques, ask what is known about the maker of a product sold as handcrafted.

"There is no substitute for asking the person you are buying from questions: How much does the artist get, where does this come from? Have you

visited the place?," said Keith Recker, a member of the board of directors of the International Folk Art Alliance, whose flagship annual market in Santa Fe, New Mexico, lures top designers from brands including Donna Karan to explore crafts from more than 50 countries.

Stories behind handmade crafts don't always involve just one maker, or even just one country, in an age when artisans are striving to adapt to contemporary tastes and expectations for production and delivery.

Among West Elm's core products are silk hand-loomed pillows from India. The process begins with rural

women in the region of Bihar spinning silk cocoons into yarn and ends with the cutting and sewing at a production facility in New Delhi. Spreading out the production chain allows for faster work that helped turn the pillows into one of West Elm's core products, Guiley said.

Similarly, Global Goods Partners found a solution for women in Afghanistan's Kandahar region who are skilled at embroidery but where fabric is scarce, said Joan Shifrin, company's co-founder. The women make small embroidered pieces that are shipped to Colombia, where artisans attach it to gold-plated cuffs internally designed by Global Goods Partners.

Handicrafts might come at a premium in the US because of shipping costs but with more retailers getting in the game it is possible to shop around, compare prices and look for deals.

Exploring online selections is a good way to get an idea of the value of traditional crafts. Find a list of reputable vendors at Accompany's website or among the members of the Artisan Alliance, an initiative of the Aspen Institute to support artisan enterprise. Look for sales and deals on shipping around the holidays. Some sites offer free shipping on orders above a certain price.

Novica has an extensive loyalty program that includes rewards, lower shipping costs for frequent buyers and regular updates on special sales. Customers can also put a favorite artisan on a "watchlist" to stay updated on new offers and deals on particular items. (AP)

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Latest

Feb 1

YMCA extravaganza 2018: YMCA Kuwait conducting a Musical Evening at Indian Community School, Salmiya, Kuwait on Thursday, Feb 1, 2018 from 6 pm onwards. Musical Evening will be led by melodious Idea Star Singers, Joby John (Season 4) and Merin Gregory (Season 6) along with rising star of Kuwait, Anna Elizabeth Raju. All are welcome to this event. For more details please contact: 96624510, 97542985.

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Vegan diet continues to grow as a trend

Delicious and crowd-pleasing plant-based treats

By Katie Workman

Super Bowl spreads tend to be pretty meaty. They might be anchored by a big bowl of beef chili, some sloppy joes or burgers or just a big order of pepperoni pizzas. But what about taking a cue from some NFL players' diets and going plant-based instead?

In recent years, a number of pro football players have been eschewing meat in favor of vegetarian or even vegan diets. The thinking is that there can be enough protein and nutrients in plants to not only keep you strong, but maybe even up your performance.

Trent Williams from the Washington Redskins turned vegan in the past year, and teammates Arie Kouandjio and Isaiah Williams are following suit. Aaron Rodgers of the Green Bay Packers identifies himself as "mostly" vegan, as does the Patriots' Tom Brady (along with his wife, model Gisele Bundchen). Free agents Colin Kaepernick and Griff Whalen, and Tyrann Mathieu of the Arizona Cardinals eat vegan.

Plant-based eating continues to grow as a trend, whether that's full-on vegan (no dairy, eggs, honey or any product that comes from an animal), vegetarian (no meat or fish) or pescatarian (only fish in a vegetarian diet, but no poultry or meat). Proponents praise its benefits for the body and for the earth and its resources. But how do you make this diet the basis of a delicious and crowd-pleasing Super Bowl bash?

It's not as hard as you would think.



This undated photo provided by Katie Workman shows a nacho bar on a table inside a home in New York. (AP)

Going plant-based can be a good way to reframe your party and shake things up. **Some ideas:**

A Nacho Bar With a Ton of Toppings

Put out platters of hot cheesy nachos, and let people serve themselves and choose from an assortment of toppings: olives, simmered black or refried beans, salsa, sour cream, scallions, chopped tomatoes, sliced jalapenos, diced avocado or guacamole whatever strikes you as a good, meat-free addition to cheese-draped tortilla chips. Keep those hot platters of nachos coming out of the

oven every half hour or so.

A hummus pita station
Spread warm pitas with store-bought hummus, and give your guests a range of toppings to finish them off with. Pomegranate seeds, minced scallions, za'atar seasoning, sauteed diced butter-nut squash, chopped cucumber, roasted peppers, chopped greens. This can easily be a vegan offering.

A big pot of chili
Make that big pot of chili but keep it vegetarian/vegan. A variety of beans plus loads of vegetables like carrots, squash and tomatoes seasoned with

all those great Tex-Mex seasonings will satisfy that comfort-food craving without the meat.

A big grain and vegetable salad
Pick a favorite mixed-vegetable salad recipe and add a couple cups of your favorite cooked grain to add substance and texture. For instance, start with diced and sliced raw vegetables, such as zucchini, cherry tomatoes and red onions. Add some crisp-tender cooked vegetables like broccoli florets or slender green beans, and even some chopped lettuce with presence, like arugula or radicchio. Then toss with

your favorite vinaigrette and some cooked spelt, farro, millet or quinoa. Also easily vegan.

Crudite
Put out an assortment of raw vegetables with a simple homemade herb dip of 1/2 cup mayonnaise, 1/2 cup sour cream, and a handful of chopped fresh herbs, such as basil, oregano, thyme, chervil, parsley and cilantro. Add herbs until it is as flavorful as you wish, then season with salt and pepper to taste. Or sub in firm silken tofu for the dairy. There are a number of creamy tofu-based dips to try; search online or a vegan-friendly cookbook.

A beautiful cheese platter
Not for the vegans, but vegetarian-friendly, and supported with great crackers and slices of baguette. You can offer as few as three cheeses, such as a firm, aged cheese (a good cheddar, a Swiss-style cheese such as Gruyere, or a Spanish Manchego); a soft cheese (like a brie, camembert or St. Andre); and maybe a blue cheese. Supplement the platter and make it look pretty with handfuls of dried fruit, roasted nuts, and a condiment like pepper jelly or fig jam.
The list of possibilities goes on: crostini and bruschetta (think white bean spread topped with roasted peppers or shredded and sauteed Brussels sprouts); roasted sweet potato wedges; deviled eggs; vegetarian sushi; falafel; edamame; slaws suddenly the absence of meat doesn't seem so noticeable after all. (AP)

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Sweden



9. Visby

Visby is one of Scandinavia's preeminent medieval cities. Every August, it hosts its medieval week, complete with authentic dress, feasts and jousting. But you don't need to visit Visby in August to get a sense of its medieval history. Just follow the cobblestone streets that wind throughout the city, take a tour of its Old Town and visit the 13th-century church. You certainly can't miss the 13th-century wall that stretches three kilometers around the city and was once used as the city's defense from intruders.



10. Eskilstuna

Perched serenely on the banks of a sparkling river, Eskilstuna is a charming medieval city in southeast Sweden. The trees near the towering Klosters church boast great puffs of pink blossoms, making for cinematic springtime. The Parken Zoo features animals from all over the world, including an impressive Komodo Dragon.



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