

Interiors

Home UK World Companies Markets Global Economy Lex Comment
Arts Magazine Food & Drink House & Home Lunch with the FT Style Books Pursuits

March 7, 2014 6:21 pm

India's top designers join forces with traditional crafts sector

By Helen Chislett

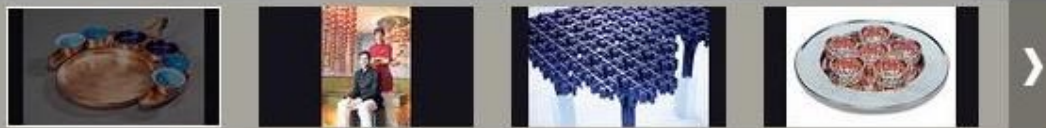
Share Print Clip

Comments

'We are showing crafts skills in a light that will dramatically change the way people think about the tagline 'made in India'



Crescent thaali set by Ayush Kasliwal, £245, anantayadecor.com



India was once a byword for upmarket goods when wealthy Europeans imported treasures such as embroidered silk, carved ivory furniture, silver tableware and rare gemstones. The splendour of the maharajas' palaces was legendary. The great Indian courts commissioned a cornucopia of fine objects including jewellery, inlaid weaponry, intricate floor coverings and, in the case of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), a golden throne.

“Made in . . . India”, held last month at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi, focused on how to preserve this tradition of fine craftsmanship and how brand value could be added to craft to ensure its survival in today’s market. It revealed an exciting collaboration between 23 of India’s top designers and those employed in the traditional crafts sector, showcasing furniture, lighting, textiles, fashion, tableware and decorative accessories. All products were displayed under a brand label, Samskara, created for the exhibition.



More

IN INTERIORS

[Interiors special — Milan's past masters](#)

[Interiors special — the genius of design](#)

[Design classic — the Louis Ghost chair](#)

[The best of Milan's Salone del Mobile](#)

“India has been dumbed down and become known as the place where retailers make things for the cheapest price, yet few countries have such a huge resource of skilled craftsmanship,” says Mahipat Singh, director of the retail consultancy group Minima.

Although he was not involved in the “Made in . . . India” exhibition, Singh has collaborated with Sunil Sethi, the show’s curator and design consultant, on other India-centric events, including one at the Tsum department store in Moscow under the theme “Riches of India”.

“You have to lead with luxury in every market, because then you produce merchandise that people appreciate – and in turn the craftspeople are also appreciated,” says Singh.

“Made in . . . India” was the inaugural event of an initiative by the global philanthropic foundation Be Open, founded by businesswoman and entrepreneur Yelena Baturina.

“We are showing crafts skills in a light that will dramatically change the way people think about the tagline ‘made in India’ – there is vast potential to reverse perceptions,” says Sethi, who is also president of the Fashion Design Council of India.

Be Open’s decision to finance the event, rather than craft communities directly, was based on the premise that the best way to keep craft traditions alive is to help provide access to new markets by strengthening ties with those working in the high-end sector. The foundation then encouraged designers and retailers to pay a fair rate to the craftspeople for their highly skilled work.



Joint Bowls set, £36 to £120; [devidedesign.in](#)

Among the most prominent contributors to “Made in . . . India” was Gunjan Gupta, founder of Wrap, an Indian lifestyle brand. She has long sought to reinvigorate India’s crafts sector by positioning it at the heart of the contemporary home.

Her designs often make reference to the iconography of India, such as the Potli-Potli chair which echoes the laundry sack that *dhobis* (washermen) carry on their shoulders or the Bori (jute sack) sofa that references the typical Indian warehouse packed with jute sacks.

Also at the show was Vibhor Sogani, who founded his eponymous studio in 1994, and produces elegant lighting, wall art and tableware, often inspired by nature. The Blue Moon set of coasters comprises of five sizes of coaster in stainless steel and wood that fit together into a silvery ellipse, while the Flight wall installation, in stainless steel, sparkles like water on a lake, complete with golden swans on the wing.

“ You have to lead with luxury in every market, because then you produce merchandise that people appreciate – and in turn the craftspeople are also appreciated ”

- Mahipat Singh

Sunil Sethi also had a presence at the exhibition as a designer – most striking is the black-and-white marble Lotus Effect table, a collaboration between the Sunil Sethi Design Alliance and Rahul Mishra, the renowned Indian fashion designer.

Thukral & Tagra are one of India’s best known artistic partnerships. For the exhibition, Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra have used traditional terracotta as cladding for audio/visual speakers and iPad docks, creating something more akin to sculpture.

Sahil & Sarthak (Sahil Bagga and Sarthak Sengupta) founded their design studio in 2009 and work with craftspeople from across India, from the northeast to the far south. One of their most appealing designs at the show is the Magia Nera, which doubles as a vase for stems or as a vessel for floating candles and petals. It was moulded from clay in Manipur, a region known for its black pottery, but is lined in lacquered gold leaf.

"We wanted a process of exchange with the craftspeople we worked with – rather than us visualising a form and asking them to produce it," says Bagga. In contrast, there is Sahil & Sarthak's silver-plated brass Pookalam chandelier, priced at £8,650, for which they deconstructed the geometric floral decoration seen commonly on the floors of temples in south India and gave it a 3D shape.



Peacock wall mural, £3,300, klovestudio.com

Klove, founded in 2005 by designers Prateek Jain and Gautam Seth, brings together the twin crafts of glass-blowing and metalworking to create ornate lights and accessories, such as its Peacock wall mural, priced at £3,300.

Other talents include Bombay Atelier, founded by Farzin Adenwalla, which focuses on handcrafted furniture with a

minimalistic aesthetic, such as the South Indian modern bed, valued at €2,800; Ayush Kasliwal, of AKFD, who also embraces a "less is more" aesthetic, as seen in his Shiva jug, tumblers and tray; and Anupam Poddar's Devi Design studio.

Fashion designers have also produced designs for interiors, such as the layered Lattice cushion by Pankaj and Nidhi Ahuja, priced at £240.

As Deepak Whorra, the fourth generation of silverware specialists Episode, says: "Our designers are full of fresh ideas, but they also need to consider the abilities of the craftsmen – some of whom are also fourth generation of our company – and to adapt traditional techniques with what consumers today want".

Although this was not a selling exhibition, most work is for sale direct from the designers concerned. There are also plans to auction many of the items at a future Be Open event, most likely at the Milan Salone next year.

RELATED TOPICS [Business of Luxury](#)