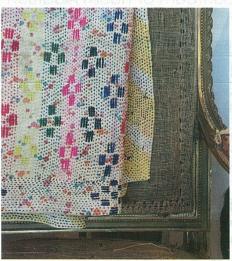
TASTEMAKER

COURTNEY BARTON

Courtney Barton



Tossed over a chair, blanketing a bed, or spread across a table, the one-of-a-kind kanthas add a pop of color, texture, and global interest to your space. We handpick each throw directly from the women stitching them, so our assortment is always highly edited and well curated.

Even though Courtney Barton attended LSU and graduated with a degree in Apparel Design and Textile Science, it was her husband's job transfer to Malaysia that really put her on today's path. She is the principal of Mela & Roam, a company specializing in old handmade textiles.

Where are you originally from? If not here, what brought you to Houston?

I'm originally from Louisiana and moved to Houston when my husband and I married in 2005. He works in oil and gas, so Houston has been home for 10 years now.

How did Mela & Roam begin, and tell explain the origin of the name?

In 2009, my husband and I moved to Malaysia for his job. I spent my time soaking up the culture and met many artists and wonderful people during my travels around Southeast Asia. I often asked locals for recommendations and that would snowball –before long I would be taken to a cousin's neighbor's friend's aunt's house to see their basement, a stockpile of antique textiles. I became fascinated with the people and their passion for their craft, and also the product itself.

This is where the name "Mela" comes from –it's a Hindi word that means a fair where different communities would gather to sell and trade their village's wares. "Roam" because I don't have a brick and mortar storefront, but rather I sell through local design markets, traveling trunk shows, online, or by appointment. Being from Louisiana, I also love that in Cajun French "Mais La," which sounds the same as "Mela" means, "Well, would you look at that!"

In May of 2011, after settling back in Houston, I bought space at a local antique show on a whim and had my overseas contacts rush products to me. The dohars were purchased in multiples and customers began reordering immediately. Dohars are hand-loomed from 100 percent cotton, light as a feather, and serve as the ultimate blanket for hot & humid temperatures. In other words, they're perfectly suited for Southern homes. I've never received more than two dohars in the same print and about 90 percent of my stock is one-of-a-kind, so when customers fall in love with one particular piece they know it's likely they'll never see it again.

What is your background?

After graduating from LSU in Apparel Design & Textile Science with a minor in Business, I moved to New York and had the honor of working as an embroidery designer for Chado Ralph Rucci. While I've always had an inherent love for the handmade, working under couturier Ralph Rucci took my passion to another level.

Do you have an office and staff? If so, where?

I balance the business with staying home with our two young children, so I office out of my house near downtown Houston. It's nice to have clients drop in, and I help them design bedrooms, spruce up a sofa, or just grab a few gifts, and they can also see how I utilize the dohars, pillows, throws and furniture in my own day-to-day living spaces.

I am fortunate enough to have an incredibly talented part-time employee who is invaluable at shows and behind-the-scene operations.



A whimsical assemblage of textiles are right at home in this little boy's room: block printed "Palm" pillow, vintage kantha-turned-pillow with fabric tassels, hand-stitched striped bedcover, and an old Japanese carp flag dangling from the ceiling



(Photo courtesy of Urban Grace Interiors) Dohars are generously sized and easy to launder, making them the perfect lightweight blanket to complement your comfiest chairs.

Where can prospective customers buy your creations?

I have a Web site that I strive to keep frequently updated since much of what I offer is one-of-a-kind or custom. Locally, I participate in shows such as The Vintique Flea and DASH (Design Antiques Show Houston), take appointments at my house, and host an annual trunk show in December that's become one of my favorite events of the year! Also, my furniture can be purchased through One Kings Lane.

Tell me about what you sell, and perhaps the inspiration behind

In today's big-box world, it is crucial to preserve generational traditions that carry a history, quality, and sentiment that defies generic mass-produced goods. I love the element of surprise in giving ethnic global finds a modern aesthetic, and my customers do too. Textiles and textile-products will always be the core of my business, but I'm not afraid to bring in other pieces as well. Whether that's home décor, jewelry, art, or random one-off curios, I believe my clients are as excited and inspired by well-designed, ever-changing offerings as I am.

What are your personal favorites?

On one of my trips to India, I bought a gorgeous old phulkari, an embroidered silk and cotton ceremonial wedding shawl that has since



(Photo courtesy of Urban Grace Interiors) Mela & Roam's textiles were used throughout *Coastal Living's* 2012 Ultimate Designer Beach House in Rosemary Beach, Florida.



Mela & Roam is well known for subdued Indian block prints. Pillows and blankets in soft, natural tones effortlessly blend into any décor.

been draped across my desk chair. Clients often inquired about it, so I spent nearly a year amassing a collection of vintage pieces in near-perfect condition. These incredible blankets are flying out the door, and I love that they are given another life with clients here in Texas – and one even making its way to Greece!

The majority of my textiles are made on hand-looms and printed or embroidered utilizing centuries-old techniques. Often the larger-sized dohars will have seams so that no fabric is wasted and every scrap used. I adore that quality and find it makes the pieces even more special. Creative resourcefulness is something I treasure most about the artisans I work with.

Who are some of your customers and how do they use your product line?

My customers have varying styles, but all share a love for quality and heirloom-worthy pieces with a storied past. My favorite client is someone who can take the most over-the-top ethnic textile, say a fully embroidered dowry bag or neon phulkari, and effortlessly mix it into a traditional setting. Surprisingly, the majority of my clients have traditional taste.

These indigenous pieces elevate a room and keep it from feeling "expected." A bit of quirkiness and something unpredicted is a must for every room.

Getting Personal

Do you travel much? If so where? What is your favorite place — for inspiration and pleasure?

I recently had a new baby, so I took this past year off from traveling and instead relied on the loyal relationships I made with the artisans and friends in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, India, Thailand and Cambodia. I'm not partial to Southeast Asia, but it's what I love and know well, so the majority of my pieces will always be come from that part of the world. I will start planning my next trip soon and can't wait to bring my husband and our two boys along.

For me, inspiration comes in the form of people and color. And you don't have to travel far for that. The South is full of colorful characters, my Grandfather Ory being one of the finest, so my love for all things unique and bright is certainly connected to my upbringing.

Do you have family here? Do you have pets? What do you like to do in your spare time?

My family is in Louisiana, so I spend much time up and down I-10. I enjoy domestic hobbies; I love to cook, tend to our unruly garden, splash in muddy puddles with my boys, and invite friends over for good food and great laughs.

For Mela & Roam information: www.melaandroam.com



Mela & Roam's pillows and dohar blankets are block printed using traditional methods that date back centuries. Each piece is woven and printed entirely by hand.

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