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The Indian rug brand with a holistic approach to business has just launched its first two-part catalogue. Rachel Meek investigates Jaipur Rugs’ intent to create a two-way connection between client and source.
A business problem is a people problem. If people are happy there will be a happy company and happy products for customers.

N K Chaudhary, Founder of Jaipur Rugs

Amy values and ethical awareness run deep at Jaipur Rugs. Founder N K Chaudhary entered the weaving industry with two looms, nine weavers and $200 borrowed from his father in 1978. Since then he has nurtured a global business, all the while keeping ancient Indian philosophies at heart. His five children are all closely involved, but it is not only the individual virtues of his direct family that are recognised. ‘Business leaders too often put profits before people and this is detrimental to the entire organisation. Employees are a vital part of an organisation and must be treated with respect and trust,’ reads one of NKC’s blogs.

These core values have resulted in a consistent commitment to ensure sustainable growth. In recent years, NKC felt that he and his team at the head office were in danger of losing touch with the very grass roots that their business stemmed from. He explains: ‘I realised that if we do not listen to the front line, our company will not survive in the future. We needed a way to connect with uneducated weavers in rural locations, who not only have wisdom but creativity too.’

Several inventive enterprises have sprouted as a result, breaking down professional and social hierarchies and working in conjunction with the Jaipur Rugs Foundation’s Grassroots Leadership Programme (carried out in partnership with the British Council), which has trained 25 female Bunkar Sakhis (Weaver’s Companions) into local managerial roles. So far, four US-based designers who are novices to rug design have visited the company and have created postcard-sized artworks in ink. Along with a photograph of the artist, this then finds its way to the boxer of their woven work, who in turn is invited to create an artwork to send to the weaver with their portrait. This token of appreciation, recognition and respect is entirely in keeping with the holistic approach of Jaipur Rugs. The philosophies in action set an example of the holistic approach of Jaipur Rugs.

In fact, one of the most popular designs from the Project Engage collection grew out of the latter initiative in the village of Narhah in Rajasthan. The potential for the original rug, created by three weavers working side by side, had at first been overlooked. But under the savagery direction of Design Director Kaival Chaudhary, the piece was reinstated as Anthar, meaning ‘difference’ in Hindi. With a colour palette adapted to western tastes, the pattern misalignment can be read afresh as an authentic quirk of the kind found in tribal weavings of old. Fitting impeccably with the zeitgeist for inviting an element of chance into the creative process (think Abraham Cruzvillegas’ current Tate Modern turbine hall installation Empy LoL, or the recent reissue of Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt’s Oblique Strategies card game), Anthar went on to win an Excellent Product Design Special Mention at the German Design Awards 2016.

The commitment to conscious capitalism is obviously strong, but just how to convey this to a clientele far removed from the vibrant communities that benefit is a challenge in itself, one that Jaipur Rugs has tackled with a new two-part catalogue that clearly separates the products into two distinct price brackets. A departure from the weave-to-order business model, these contain rugs that are in stock and available for immediate purchase.

Tastefully compiled with the utmost care and attention to detail, they contain stunning black and white photography by two Jaipur managers, Sharan Menon and Shekhar Nirmal, and Durban-based photographer Clinton Friedman. Book 1 contains rugs made in Uttar Pradesh. The maps, weaver profiles and portraits place the products in context, poetically connecting the products in context, poetically connecting consumer with producer. But it is by no means a one-way street. Another incentive – ‘Hi5 to weavers’ – invites weavers to create postcard-sized artworks in ink. Along with a photograph of the artist, this then finds its way to the boxer of their woven work, who in turn is invited to create an artwork to send to the weaver with their portrait. This token of appreciation, recognition and respect is entirely in keeping with the holistic approach of Jaipur Rugs.

Ted Grant is quoted as saying: ‘When you photograph people in colour, you photograph their clothes. But when you photograph people in black and white, you photograph their souls.’ And it is the soul of India that Jaipur is attempting to convey through its catalogues.

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www.jaipurrugs.com