

A MAGAZINE ABOUT CONNECTING CULTURES AND INSPIRING ACTION.

HANDEYE

Scarfitecture

BY REBECA SCHILLER | DECEMBER 1, 2011



COURTESY OF RHEA ALEXANDER

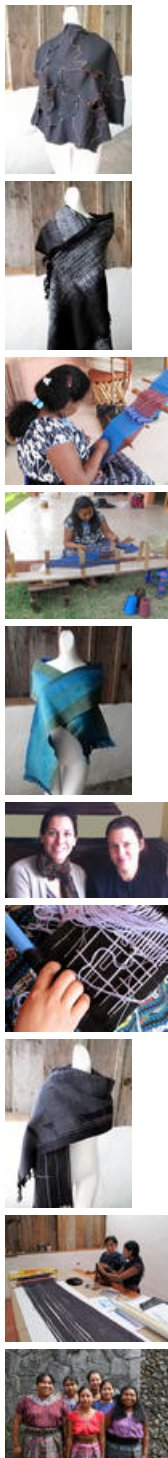
A venture in design

What do seven internationally recognized architects have in common with a group of Guatemalan women artisans? An exciting project that combines sophisticated designs with traditional weaving techniques to make wall hangings, shawls and scarves. The project is called: Scarfitecture: A Venture in Design, Sustainability and Impact Investing. These unique designs will be featured in a fashion show and silent auction on December 8, 2011 at a benefit in New York City for Ecolibri.

The project was initiated by Rhea Alexander, founder and president of DIGS.com and by founder and director of Ecolibri.org Dita Zakova. The goal of this ambitious collaboration was to build awareness of the skills and abilities of the Guatemalan women artisans. The architects' mission was to create an image, texture or painting on a 2m x 45cm sheet of paper, which would be turned into a scarf or shawl using traditional weaving, natural dyeing, sewing and embroidery techniques. The materials used were naturally dyed threads and reclaimed/recycled materials like old sweaters and other bits of clothing.

The idea of joining forces between the two disciplines started when Alexander and Zakova were first exploring the idea of working together. "We thought about asking a celebrity designer but it seemed mundane and not necessarily original. Then we thought about the fact that weaving is so structural and complex, like architecture. So this idea resonated and fit in with our mission," said Alexander.

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In selecting the team of architects the two women originally wanted to work with women architects, but given project constraints and availability, the list—for practical purposes—was narrowed down to who could actually meet the project deadlines. Once the seven architects were on board, project logistics and workflow between the architects and artisans and Alexander and Zakova were conducted daily via Skype or email to review ideas, photos and progress of each designs' evolution.

Among the architects who were involved in the project were Juan Carlos Matiz and Sara Mosele Matiz of Matiz Architecture and Design based in New York City. The couple worked with embroiderer and weaver Oralinda Mendoza Vasques and dyer Michaela Ujpan Mendoza. For his project, Matiz envisioned separately naturally dyed parts coming together and intrinsically connected. The scarf heavily depended on structure, which required boning and heavy seam building to achieve the proper rigidity. The wool for each section was dyed using organic materials like avocado skins and then woven into a heavy fabric that were cut into several uneven rectangular shapes adding a rib in between each section. The result was an aesthetically and constructible shawl.

Dutch architect Winka Dubbeldam of Archi-Tectonics design was based on texture, which was inspired by the fish and water of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala. The team's process was two-fold: first dye the fibers and then weave the base of the fabric. Considered one of the more labor-intensive projects because of the hand embroidery, Dubbeldam's first try was scrapped because the fabric was too heavy to achieve the design's intent of having the embroidery appear just as lovely from both the front and back. To make the scarf supple, naturally dyed cotton interwoven with Aleman— a rayon/cotton thread—was woven on a back-strap loom. Once the cloth was completed, it was embroidered with gold thread.

The juxtaposition between the high-tech world of the architects with the rural primitive techniques of the artisans was the heart and soul of the project, but also the most difficult to bridge mentally and aesthetically. Alexander says, "Dita helped the weavers invent new techniques they had never done before. Several artisans got into it and were very creative, embracing the unknown and development process while others were intimidated and only wanted to execute."

Through Zakova's tenacity, the project moved forward and the finished textiles made their grand debut during this past Fashion Week at New York City's The Textile Art Center. The result of collaboration was greeted with enthusiasm by the sustainable and fashion-savvy crowd while also capturing the interest of museum stores and galleries to carry the collection's pret-a-porter and haute-couture versions.

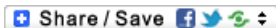
To learn more about all the participating architects and artisans, please visit <http://blogs.digs.com/scarfitecture> and Ecolibri.org. The benefit for Ecolibri will take place on Thursday, December 8, 2011 at 6 pm until 9pm. Location: 15 Broad Street, between Wall Street and Exchange Place, NYC. Entry donation is \$25.00. To attend, please contact info@digs.com by December 1st.



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