



All images: @Via East

Handloomed Hues

Via East is a portal that is solely focused on handloom saris that are sourced directly from weavers. **Bindu Gopal Rao** introduces to us the wide spectrum of its handloomed treasures.

Via East is an online brand that focuses on Indian textiles and the myriad art forms associated with it. The platform showcases a range of saris woven with different textile techniques. The brand has its design philosophy rooted in love for good craftsmanship, simplicity, and elegance. The kind of saris Via East retails include embellished, embroidered, chequered, striped and printed ones; and Benarasi, chanderi, Gadwal, *jamdani*, Kanjeevaram, Maheshwari, Mangalagiri, Paithani, printed saris, Sambalpuri, traditional silk (with woven borders and motifs) and Kota saris. They are available in several materials too—all of which



adhere to its handloom philosophy. The outcome: saris in chiffon, cotton, crepe, georgette, kora silk, kosa silk, linen, linen cotton, linen silk, matka silk, muga silk, muslin silk, organza, silk, silk cotton, tissue, tussar silk, and satin. You can also choose to shop by colour and they even have a special festive edit with some hand-picked saris for the perfect occasion. Deeksha Sharma, founder, Via East, tells us about the brand's journey in this exclusive conversation.

"I REALISED THAT HANDLOOM PRODUCTS AS A CATEGORY WERE UNDER-REPRESENTED ON THESE CHANNELS."



TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR EARLY DAYS.

I have been involved with the fashion industry for over 14 years now. I graduated from National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), where I got significant exposure to the Indian textile industry. The experience also expanded my horizon towards modern fashion aesthetics and the intricacies of how the fashion industry works in India. Post that, I worked with both offline and online retailers. I was one of the earliest team members of Myntra and worked there for several years; joining the company at an early stage gave me the opportunity to witness and participate in its stellar growth journey. Through this experience, I got a deep, intuitive understanding of the e-commerce space.

WHEN AND WHY DID YOU START VIA EAST?

I started Via East in 2017. While working with large online and offline retailers, I realised that handloom products as a category were under-represented on these channels. I also felt that it was difficult for modern women to purchase saris that met their aesthetic expectations and



BRAND PROFILE



have simple and understated designs. Although the internet user-base is rapidly expanding in India, there are not enough channels available to women where they can find a large collection of saris that also meets their design expectations.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WORK WITH INDIAN HANDLOOMS?

I think Indian handlooms represent a lot more to people than just products. They are deeply rooted in our tradition and history. I feel that this tradition is worth preserving. While I am absolutely in favour of globalisation, I feel that it is also important to preserve something that connects us to our roots and gives us a sense of individuality. I can personally connect with the feeling because I inherited an old Benarasi heirloom from my mother that holds a very special place in my heart and I know this to be true for many women. I wouldn't want future generations to not feel that same sense of belongingness.

WHERE ARE YOUR SARIS SOURCED FROM?

We source saris from all over India but specifically focus on Benarasi and Chanderi. We also get saris from Jaipur, Bhagalpur, Kanchipuram, Kota, and some other places.

WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

The fact that the work we do has an impact on the lives of those who toil endlessly and are less fortunate inspires me and my team the most.

We do our work with a sense of responsibility and ethics. In the long run, we want to scale up the platform and thus, provide significant economic opportunities to Indian craftspeople.

DO YOU HAVE SARIS WOVEN SPECIFICALLY? HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE WEAVERS YOU WORK WITH?

Currently, we do not have saris woven specifically. We rely on the creativity of the craftspeople, most of whom come from a long line of weavers possessing a huge repository of designs and techniques, and are continuously innovating. We choose weavers based on their aesthetic sensibilities and techniques. We focus on simple but traditional designs and work with those who have a similar approach.

HOW RECEPTIVE ARE CONSUMERS TO THE PRICE PREMIUM FOR HANDLOOM PRODUCTS?

I think that most of our customers understand the hardwork that goes into producing a handloom sari and are fairly receptive to the prices. That being said, we try to price our saris in a way that is fair to both our customers and weavers.

SARIS ARE SEEING A HUGE REVIVAL TODAY, HOW CAN PLATFORMS LIKE VIA EAST HELP?

One big way that I can think of is by making sari-shopping easier. It has always been difficult for women to buy saris; one has to go through a large number of designs to find something

that they like. On top of that, it involves going to traditional markets, which, let's face it, can be tough. Other than this, youthful, online brands also have designs and fabrics that are rethought for modern women. Such platforms cater to the evolving needs of women and are selling saris that can be worn at work, dinners, and other casual events.

WHAT ARE SOME FASHION TRENDS THAT YOU SEE IN 2020?

In the ethnic space, I see quite the opposite of what one might call trends. I see a revival of interest in traditional and vintage motifs. Most of our customers still opt for the most well-established and time-honoured palette and designs.

TELL US ABOUT THE USP OF YOUR PLATFORM AND HOW IT IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS.

Our platform focuses on simplicity and honesty. We try to declutter every possible aspect of our platform and present to our customers the facts

“OUR PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IS REAL AND RAW.”

in the most straightforward way. We purposely stay away from exaggeration. We choose designs that are beautiful in their subtlety and represent our saris in a way that most Indian women can relate to. Our portrayal of women is real and raw, which is how we think it should be.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

In the future, we plan to work more closely with our weavers and understand their rich history and culture and pass on this knowledge to our customers in terms of designs. We also plan to focus more on wedding and occasion wear and perhaps add a few more categories adjacent to saris. ■

