



a different cloth

Textile designer Sally Campbell is a devoted woman of the cloth: her exquisite fabrics are contemporary heirlooms.

SALLY CAMPBELL LOVES textiles. Practically and passionately, *adores* them. After 25 years of handling, admiring and studying textiles from the sidelines of costume and set design for the Australian film industry, fabrics have emerged from a flirtation on the side to a fully-fledged affair.

And what fabrics. Working with skilled artisans from remote villages in India, Campbell coaxes traditional homespun cottons, linen and silk yarns into unique hand-woven, hand-dyed and hand-stitched home furnishings that are show-stopping, museum-worthy, modern-day heirlooms.

Her first collection of quilts, appliquéd curtains, cushions and table linens was launched at Sydney's Shapiro Gallery just three years ago, selling out quickly to appreciative collectors and spawning a devoted following of textile lovers all ages.

Campbell discovered the hand-woven and hand-embroidered clothing that ignited

her passion for traditional crafts while filming throughout Asia and India and visiting tribal areas during the 1970s. After a visit to the famous Ahemdabad calico museum in Gujrat, studying the origins of fabrics she had collected over many years, Campbell decided she wanted to come and work in India and design her own. "It was a dream, really. I dived in the deep end," she says simply.

With the aid of interpreters, Campbell works with local craftspeople to create her unique collections. Women in the deserts near the Pakistan border stitch the fine cream on white appliqué, while another desert tribe in Rajasthan is renowned for vegetable dye block printing. Much of the work is produced in Bengal, where Campbell travels by plane and 4WD into remote villages which specialize in hand-weaving, natural dyes and exquisite hand-stitching and hand-quilting. >



Indigo-dyed block prints and hand-stitched patchwork quilts, **LEFT**, cover a guest bed in the Sydney home of textiles designer Sally Campbell. The double-sided Victorian terrace, **ABOVE**, is furnished with fabrics and objects collected over many years of travel. Campbell, **BELOW**, a former film-set and costume designer, finds inspiration for her designs from contemporary paintings, books and oriental ceramics.



PHOTOGRAPHER: CHRIS COURT PRODUCER: ALEXANDRA GORDON



Black coral on a bedroom mantle, **LEFT**, came from a movie set. **BELOW**: old saris, re-worked into contemporary patchwork. The hall, **RIGHT**, features antique Bengali silk shawls transformed into cushions on a Chinese bench, beneath a Chinoise mirror.



Introducing pale, muted colours, broad stitches and re-interpreting patchwork, Campbell translates traditional colours and designs in a very western way

A colourful medley of cushions, quilts, curtains and table linen, **ABOVE**, spills from cabinets in Campbell's showroom. The dining room, **BELOW**, with Thonet chairs ("they work with everything") around a table covered in a Campbell linen. A guest bedroom, **FAR RIGHT**, provides a canvas for a bespoke quilt.

< It's intense and time-consuming work; the loom set-up alone can take up to a month. It will take a year to make just six patchwork quilts from old saris, while a single hand-woven kantha-stitched silk quilt might take eight months. Each handmade piece is unique.

While harnessing the traditional skills, Campbell is careful to avoid being labelled 'ethnic'. "The thing is to make them modern," she says. By introducing pale and muted colours or using patches very differently from the way patchwork is traditionally done – as a feature rather than as the traditional lining – Campbell translates the colours and designs in a western way. Instead of the minute stitching that takes 18 months to make a single quilt destined to become a family heirloom, she uses large stitches to make graphic, modern designs that can be made in six weeks, and become affordable in the process.

In her Sydney home, an 1880s double-sided terrace ("one of only ten in Sydney, all of them in this street") that she shares with her partner, documentary filmmaker Gregory Stitt, Campbell's textiles are given free rein. Exuberantly and riotously they cover sofas, hang as curtains, as quilts and cushion covers, tablecloths, hand towels, tea towels – "anything you can possibly use fabric for!" Anchoring the soft furnishings are objects, paintings and furniture collected from travels over many years.

A wooden chest from Japan, an old Chinese hall seat, a rustic coffee table and Wali tribal paintings from India: it's a graphic mix that plays out through the myriad of rooms,

enticing, and complementing each other without becoming overwhelming. "Surprisingly, it works" she says.

On the day *Vogue Living* visits, Campbell is busy packing for her first exhibition in Auckland, to be followed in September by a show with art dealer Philip Bacon at Brisbane's A Day On Earth gallery. Knee-deep in cloth, her enthusiasm is palpable. Campbell has also designed a small range of clothing using hand-dyed and hand-woven fabrics: traditional Japanese pinafore dresses made from ikat and block-printed shirts with a modern design. "I'm just having fun" she insists. "One thing grows from another, and now I'm looking at the possibility of designing rugs – but one thing at a time!" **HELEN REDMOND**
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