



THE NATURE OF PAMPA

argentinian lady victoria aguirre
and australian dude carlyon wilson
are weaving stories of south america
through photos and rugs.



Can you tell us a bit about your backgrounds? Victoria:

I grew up between the city of Buenos Aires and the farmland to the south. My family owns a beautiful farm in a province of Argentina called La Pampa. I finished a degree in advertising, and then studied photography. After travelling and working as a photojournalist, I ended up where I am today: falling in love with an Australian and starting up Pampa, a dream come true. Carlyon: I am an air-conditioning technician by trade. Nothing to do with rugs or design, I know! But when you're in and out of people's homes and commercial spaces for 10 years, and have an interest in what people do with their surroundings, you tend to develop an eye for what works.

What's your connection to Argentina? C: My strongest connection would obviously be my amazing girlfriend, Vicky! V: I'm so proud of my Latin roots. I was born into a family where heritage and culture are very important. I always remember my grandfather saying, "Knowing where you come from will make it easier during those years when you are finding out where you want to go."

Can you tell us a bit about Pampa? C: Pampa brings beautiful, hand-woven rugs from remote communities in Argentina to the people of Australia. We like to tell the story behind these pieces and their artists through our photography. V: Pampa unites territories through art. It represents a lifestyle, a way of seeing and giving certain values to things, moments and ways. Ideally Pampa will become a brand that represents creative art in different forms. We want to explore, preserve and empower – at the moment we are doing that through woven art rugs and our photography.

Where did the initial idea for the project come from?

V: I think Pampa started years and years ago, when I was a child on the farm. I used to ride horses all day, inventing tales and games with my brothers, sister and cousins. Sometimes we pretended we were all indigenous natives from the Pampas; we rode barefoot without saddles as fast as we could, then we would hide from 'the Spanish'. Since I was a kid, the native community was a topic that always caught my attention. I was always reading books about Argentinian history and indigenous communities. Becoming a photographer and then finally meeting Carl, who is very like-minded, were also influences in the path to the beginning of Pampa. I guess Pampa was a result of my story, Carl's story, and now the story we are building together. C: We both noticed that it was very hard to come by good-quality Latin American rugs in Australia, and virtually impossible to find any originating from Argentina. We saw one rug in Brisbane and we basically looked at each other, instantly knowing what the other was thinking. Before we fell asleep that night, we made a decision that has brought us to where we are now. The thought of helping native communities keep their art alive by purchasing their pieces was a very appealing idea. We also get to tell their story through our photography, which we both have a passion for.

What does the word 'pampa' mean? V: Pampa means the fertile lowlands in South America. It also represents nature in a general manner. Therefore pampa is a commonly used word in South America. These rugs come from pampa; they come from the earth in such a natural and magical process.





Can you tell us a bit about the people who make your rugs?

V: The people who make these rugs are generally women. They are artists in all forms of living – how they manage to live an everyday life in connection with nature – and they are proud of their own traditions. The first two feelings we had when we met them were admiration and recognition. We couldn't talk much; just contemplate their art, their ways, their life. Admire their hands that spin, twist, dye and weave on their looms, every day, under the shade of an algarrobo tree. C: The process starts with caring for their livestock, which seem to just roam around the bush like wild animals. Wool is collected from the sheep and sometimes llamas, too; cleaned, handspun and then the dyeing process begins. The wool is usually dyed using natural substances from the local surroundings: tree roots, flowers, yerba (Argentinian tea), smoke and even crushed-up cactus beetles. After this time-consuming process they then start the magic on their looms, which are usually positioned under the shade of a tree close to their house. Each rug can take up to six weeks to complete, depending on the pattern and size of the rug and experience of the artist.

How do rugs connect with the cultures of Argentina? V: These rugs were being woven hundreds and hundreds years ago by mothers for their children when they left the house. They were used as bed coverings, and are still given to kids today. They are sacred offerings that will protect them throughout their lives. C: They connect so many people from so many different cultural backgrounds, in my opinion. You find them in the houses of the poorest of the poor, and the houses of the richest of the rich throughout Argentina.

How does your photography connect with the project? V: Our photography is our connection with Pampa. It's the voice of our

project; the way we communicate what we are and what we stand for. When I connect with what I'm photographing – it could be a weaver or a donkey or a big field – I feel like, "This is Pampa, this is why we are exploring, this is what we want to preserve and this is what we want to empower."

What can you tell us about the places the rugs come from?

C: Argentina is a very diverse country, much like Australia. Deserts, rainforests, plains, salt pans, mountains covered in snow, dry scrub. The rugs come from so many different regions and you can see that in the colour combinations – they match their surroundings. The one thing that all these places have in common is distance from the bigger cities. The lure of big city life is unfortunately a contributing factor to the slow demise of this art.

What do you love most about travelling around these kind of areas?

V: Genuine kindness, humility, natural beauty, simplicity and that magical Latin happiness that is visible all through Latin America, not only in Argentina. C: It feels and looks like you have stepped back in time in many of these small communities. Donkeys, houses made of mud bricks, no advertising in your face, no people glued to the television or kids to the PlayStation. The only sounds are of kids being kids, sheep being sheep, and donkeys being donkeys, maybe a bit wind through the trees, or a little thunder in the distance.

What did you learn while you were there? C: That heritage and traditions should be embraced. Every little piece that gets lost is one step closer to human diversity disappearing forever. I also learnt to be more patient and how to speak a little Spanish, which is still a work in progress! ✨