



DESIGN PROFILE

Pampa

Fate brought Victoria Aguirre and Carl Wilson together and their label pays tribute to their passion for Argentina

EDITED BY MATILDA DUFFECY

Victoria, how and where did you meet? Carl and I met five years ago in a town called Arica in the Atacama Desert in Chile. I was covering a photographic/journalist story for an adventure mag from Argentina (where I'm from) and Carl was travelling alone on a one-year trip exploring and surfing all the way from Northern Mexico to the south of Chile. After travelling through Chile, Argentina and Brazil together, I said yes when he asked me to move to Australia.

How did Pampa come about? Victoria: In my first year in Australia, I was very homesick and didn't know what to do for work. I couldn't find the right path, but I knew I had to do something creative and challenging. Pampa was born in late 2013 from my nostalgic sense of missing home and from travelling with Carl through different places in South America and admiring nature, art and craft. Carl: My desire for a career change played a huge part, as well as Vicky's homesickness. We had seen the amazing work of artisans throughout South America and thought that we could achieve something by bringing a selection of what we love to Australia. Combining this idea with providing extra work and keeping traditions alive for remote communities, travelling and returning regularly to see Vicky's family seemed like a risk well worth taking right from the beginning.

Victoria, what are some of the stories that are woven through Pampa's history? During our travels, we seek out the finest rugs that we can find - this is one of the best parts of our job. Each collection of hand-woven rugs, cushions, throws and our photographic prints are named after the Argentinian landscape from where they originate, so everything has a deeply rooted sense of place. Natural dyes extracted from plants, vegetables, insects, minerals and smoke are used to colour the fibres, occasionally with the aid of synthetic dyes. The patterns and designs used are passed down through the generations. Every year, we learn more and more from these artisans; their lifestyles are so simple and genuine. These communities are in the middle of nowhere with no phone reception, no roads on maps, no signs - just directions drawn onto paper. The remoteness can make logistics very difficult at times. For instance, one of our partner weavers doesn't have phone reception, so the local bus driver drops off our designs on paper to his small village - it's the only way it can be done.



Victoria Aguirre and Carl Wilson's (opposite, top left) chance meeting in Chile has led to several journeys to the remote artisan communities of Argentina, where they have uncovered traditionally crafted woven rugs (this page, top right) for their label, Pampa. The remote Argentinian landscape (opposite, bottom) has also led to the creation of striking photographic prints (top left). Victoria's breathtaking images of horses (below right) were recently exhibited in stylist Megan Morton's Sydney studio and are now available to purchase online.



Could you tell us about the artisans who create the pieces? Our partner weavers live in remote villages. We believe in ethically made and fairly traded products. The profits each artisan makes are reinvested back into their family, and used for day-to-day expenses such as buying food and clothing, paying school fees, accessing medical care, and sourcing new tools and materials. Earning a fair wage has enabled our weavers to form their own co-operatives, giving individuals the benefit of sharing materials, ideas and workloads.

Your first Australian stockist was Koskela. How did this come about? We were living on the Gold Coast, and after we returned from Argentina with our first rug collection, we knew that we had to start in Sydney to get noticed. We had just spent all of our savings on rugs then packed up our small car and drove down. After days of knocking on homewares/furniture store doors, we thought "Well, why not dream big? Let's go to Koskela".

“Pampa would not exist if Vicky and I had not met by chance in Chile back in 2011”

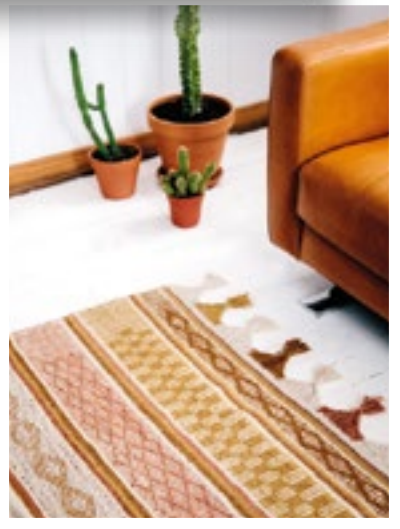
The next day, we had a showing with Sasha, the co-owner of Koskela. I still remember our nerves, walking in with two big suitcases of rugs and trying to explain what we were doing. Luckily for us, she just loved them and Pampa rugs have been stocked there ever since.

What have you learnt about starting a business that you wish you had known earlier? Victoria: I've learned to be patient. I wish I'd known more about the business side. We have made many mistakes along the way, but I feel we have learnt very valuable lessons, too. Carl: Computers! I could hardly use one before. I wish that I had some business and accounting experience. Thanks to YouTube, patience and advice from friends, I've got this far without any real disasters.

What will be new for Pampa in 2017? Victoria: Expanding our rug collections and bringing them to Australia with a more consistent flow. Hopefully, introducing our collections to California. We're also working on new photos for our print gallery.

Visit the showroom at Unit 4, 57 Centennial Circuit, Byron Bay.

For more details, visit pampa.com.au.



PHOTOGRAPHY: (PORTRAIT) BOBBY & TIDE (ALL OTHER IMAGES) VICTORIA AGUIRRE