

The Global South: Courtney Barton of Mela & Roam

Designer Courtney Barton didn't expect to find herself chatting about her home state of Louisiana during a visit to the castle of the Maharaja in Udaipur, India, in the middle of the Holi Festival. "I struck up a conversation with the Maharaja's daughter, the Princess, who was my age, and she was peppering me with questions about whether or not I was in shock from all the colors, people, food, and smells in India," Barton remembers. "And I laughed and told her I was right at home because I grew up in Louisiana and India is like the Louisiana of the East—it's also a culture based on food, family, and celebration. She laughed and told me she couldn't agree with me more because she went to school at Tulane! It's a small, small world when you make connections like that."

And Barton (pictured below in India) has been making all manner of international connections since 2011 when she returned stateside to Texas and founded [Mela & Roam](#), a global import business specializing in one-of-a-kind textiles and home goods.



"I met so many artists and wonderful people traveling with my husband while we lived abroad and I became obsessed with the people and their passion for their community's craft," Barton says.

Today, Barton travels extensively, seeking new pieces from artisans in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, India, Thailand, and Cambodia. And while she collaborates closely with interior designers and architects around the United States to design custom work using her finds (for example, she recently completed a tent created to house a bed inside a barn for one client), many of the pieces from her travels are also available online, from shawls to custom bags and beyond. Here are a few of our favorite examples:



From left: Kantha shawl; essentials case designed in collaboration with [Stash Co.](#) in Texas; block printed fabric



Kantha pillows.

“I think it’s so important to support the handmade idea whether it’s crafted here in the South or abroad. Today, people want things quick, cheap, and perfect: the complete opposite of anything handmade! One of my favorite collaborations was taking Indian Kantha quilts and having a Texas bag maker craft weekenders out of the fabrics. The exotic textiles mixed with the precision and detailed tailoring from a Southern artisan was, quite literally, the best of both worlds.”



Although Barton's fabrics are block printed by hand, she also has a soft spot for the screen printing process (shown here in Barton's photo taken in Sangner, India). "I worked for a screen printer in high school and college so I was in love with seeing them print such large runs by hand."

She also creates custom upholstered pieces (an example follows below) using textiles from her journeys paired with frames found at Southern flea markets and vintage shops.



One of the many examples of Barton's custom upholstery pieces, in this case a reading chair covered in antique saris.

"I love taking formal Southern antiques or well-loved vintage chairs and giving them new life and a little edge with ethnic textiles. It's East meets West; old meets new."

Next, Barton plans to add jewelry to her ever-growing mix, "I buy what is truly beautiful, unique, handmade with love, and I'm constantly inspired by the world's ever-changing offerings."