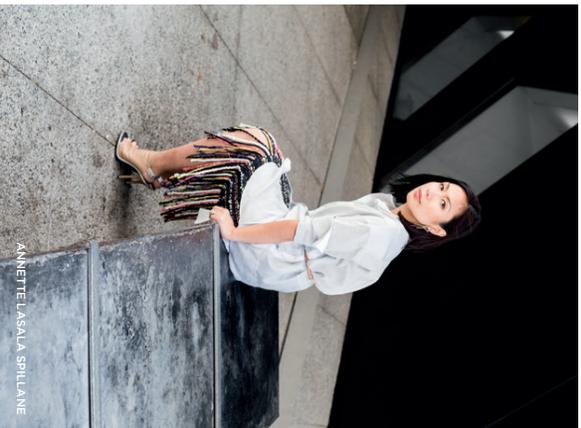


TARA

The-of-the-moment jewelry brand
creating long-term change for Filipino artisans



ANNETTE LASALA SPILLANE



Words by CARLY SMITH

The idea of being “fashion-forward” often comes with negative connotations of a disposable and flippancy attitude to consumption. However, the Filipino native Annette Lasala Spillane is redefining the concept with her contemporary line of timeless, community-driven jewelry.

After 11 years working at an accounting firm, Annette decided to quit her job and travel the world with her husband for a year, re-evaluating her priorities and reconnecting with her childhood home in the Philippines. This experience inspired her to launch TARA (The Artisan Row Accessories) in 2014, a jewelry brand founded on the premise of stimulating the Filipino economy and providing a better life for local artisans.

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Annette visits the Philippines three to four times a year to collaborate and maintain relationships with these craftspeople, her inspirational Instagram feed helps to encourage supportive communities and she approaches her work with nonprofits with an uplifting feminist mentality.

Thanks to her impeccable taste, Annette designs collections that help to combat the ephemerality of trends. Each piece is customisable and can be worn either simply or stacked and layered. TARA's timeless pieces never go out of style, are adaptable enough to feel fresh and current, and have a long-term impact in the lives of their wearers and makers, resulting in a true feel-good fashion fix.

How does TARA change the lives of artisans in the Philippines?
First and foremost it has changed their lives financially through a steady stream of income. Perhaps more importantly, it has been empowering for them to feel a sense of ownership and immense pride over the work that they do. Just knowing that women out there in the world see their pieces, connect and fall in love with them and buy them with their hard-earned money is mind-blowing. It's a huge confidence booster.

Why did you decide to make your pieces customisable?
I've always loved jewelry and pounce on every chance to acquire it. Across the years I've built up a collection of amazing pieces. While I love classic and essential designs (diamond or pearl studs, for example) sometimes I just want to have a fashion moment. The dream was to own a timeless jewelry wardrobe that could nonetheless change up to the minute. Plus, I'm always on the road. I want to carry as little as possible, yet still wear eye-catching pieces.

How did growing up in the Philippines affect your style?
Living in perpetual summers that just bleed into the next, I never shy away from colour. Gen-Z yellow, bring it on!

What is your view of modern feminism and how does it relate to what you do?

Having grown up in the Philippines where we democratically elected two female presidents by 2010, one of them a housewife, moving to the US was a bit of a culture shock. It appears as if the messaging around feminism in the US is meant only for the privileged, those with high-powered careers. I think that our definition of feminism today needs to encompass equal rights and opportunities for women across all races, generations and careers. It means that we have to rethink our family unit and our policies so that women can go after what they want – whether that's to stay at home, work part time, start and raise money for a business or pursue leadership roles in their careers. It's our job as women to support each other no matter what path we choose to happiness. I am very conscious about thanking the women in my life feel that they can come to me and be understood and heard.

What type of work do you do with nonprofits?

I work with Tayay Sa Kauswagan, Inc., a nonprofit microfinance company that loans money to entrepreneurial craftspeople so that they can start their own businesses. I help them host workshops for artisans who want to develop their products. We've hired consultants who are experts in their respective fields to co-host these workshops in the TSKI headquarters.

Annette's Guide to the Philippines

SLEEP

The Peninsula Manila. They make a mean halo-halo (a shared-ice dessert).

EAT

When in Manila I never miss the chance to eat at Mecha Uma, 12/10, Inagitan and Locavore. Special mention also to Toyo Eatery for the incredibly friendly service – sometimes they'll even send you off with a loaf of homemade bread if you tell them how much you love it. For out-of-town spots, Antomo's in Tagaytay is always a favourite, and if ever in Iloilo, Ted's Oldtimer is famed for its batchoy noodles.

DO

Island hopping. Boracay and Palawan are favourites of mine.

SHOP

The Rockwell Center in Makati offers the most variety, from the curation of designer goods at Univers to artisanal products in the Power Plant Mall, with Amanza's resort-ready bags and accessories in Cura V. I love visiting Carl Jan Cruz's studio in Taguig for the best denim pieces and popping into Aphro and Lamai in the Alley at Kerrivin Plaza for home goods and accessories.