

All the fun of the fair

It's not just niche shops that are stocking fairtrade products. Now high street stores are getting in on the act, says **Barbara Chandler**

ETHICAL trading has become a hot topic. It is, of course, all about not exploiting the maker, to get the cheapest goods to your home. And if you care about this did you know it was Fairtrade Fortnight.

There are even promotional windows in M&S, which now claims the biggest range of Fairtrade cotton products on the high street. These are mostly clothes, with T-shirts going down a storm, but there are also linens — such as cotton fitted sheets (£18-£24), pillowcases (£7.50), towels and tea towels (£7.50 for three).

Christy (Britain's biggest towel brand, trading in England since 1850) has just introduced four soft neutral colours made entirely from Fairtrade cotton, directly from farmers in India at a fixed price to provide a regular, stable income. (Prices are £7.50 for a hand towel and £25 for a bath sheet).

Consumer demand is turning fairtrade into big

bucks. And the big brands are now reaping the commercial benefits of ethical trading practices developed over many years by numerous small traders — slowly and with difficulty.

Roy Scott, founder of One Village in Woodstock, Oxfordshire, has a track record of "alternative retailing" going back to the Sixties, before the Fairtrade tag was even invented. And the

beautiful crafts he now sells from a well-illustrated website (and at an Oxfordshire shop) don't actually bear the Fairtrade mark

because as yet this is restricted to a limited range of foods and fibres.

Instead, One Village and many other similar outfits belong to the British Association of Fair Trade Shops (BAFTS), which vets suppliers — see the full list at www.bafts.org.uk. Scott works with co-operatives, or workers' associations, adding a "community surcharge" to the price of products where viable. This money funds local projects such as hospitals and schools. Nevertheless, Scott has become a little cynical over the years.

"Fairtrade slips glibly off the tongue," he says. "But the world will always be grossly unfair and you simply do your best to make it as reasonable for suppliers as you can."

In this fight for equality, high quality is the strongest weapon. And One Village features — perhaps with surprising sophistication — age-old arts and craft techniques, with bed linen patterned by batik hot-wax and textiles woven by ikat (a tie-die process), with its distinctive zig-zag designs — as done in India since the sixth century.

Other cloths are adorned with intricate embroidery and bold block-printing. A brilliant bargain at One Village is a huge piece of natural-coloured softly striped hand-loomed cotton cloth measuring 200cm by 230cm for £48, with smaller sizes at £36 and £24. This site handily sells curtain clips for instant drapes (this particular fabric has carefully finished edges that won't fray).

Find also a good selection of feather-filled cushion pads, all ready to cover. See and buy at www.onevillage.org, or visit the One Village

Alison Satasi trekked to remote parts of India and South America to develop bed linens, blankets and throws for her Luma brand



David Green

store on the A44 in Woodstock, Oxfordshire (01608 811811).

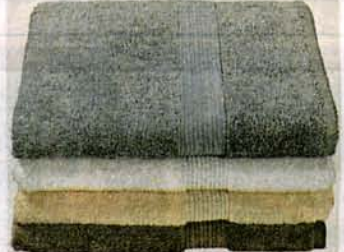
We've got used to seeing the Fairtrade label on coffee packets and bananas, but this is indeed an issue that's making waves in interiors. And, away from the big stores, attractive imported products for the home are now in some of London's more conscientious and adventurous shops. They are increasingly not just "good", but gorgeous, with an intrinsic handmade appeal.

Take Ganesha, for example, fair trading in Gabriel's Wharf near the Oxo Tower on the South Bank for more than 12 years, and now successfully spread over two units. Its aim is "to add as much value to handmade products as we can, through quality in design, making and selling. This puts more money into local communities." It is also a member of BAFTS.

For more information go to www.ganesha.co.uk/fairtrade.htm, which has a beguiling selection of fashion and furnishings, including its trendy brightly coloured Bollywood designs with Warhol-like patterns, devised with the printer in India.

In time for spring picnics are disposable — and even compostable — plates made from leaves. On Saturday, Ganesha will celebrate Fairtrade fortnight with a 10 per cent discount plus a book-signing by Miles Litvinoff, author of 50 Reasons To Buy Fairtrade, £7.99 (co-authored with John Madeley).

Luma promises "organic luxury ethically



Marks & Spencer's claims the biggest range of fair trade products on the high street, including towels

made". It is the brainchild of Barnes-based Alison Satasi, who trekked to remote parts of India and South America to develop bed linens, blankets and throws in chic deliberately understated designs for the top end of the trade. In India, Luma is a fair-trade partner with Oxfam and Greenpeace, which are helping Indian peasants to once again farm cotton on small plots. This rescues land from cocoa cultivation used for cocaine (www.lumadirect.com).

Other London fairtraders include Paper High with handmade paper. Record great thoughts in its leather-bound notebooks, and cherish your photos in handcrafted albums with thick paper interleaved with tissue.

Also check out the funky cushion covers and good gift selections at Fair Wind who are also the only furniture fair-trade supplier registered in London (47 Park Road, Crouch End, N8; 020 8374 6254; www.fairwindonline.com).



Rugs are a favourite fair trade product (see box)



Box of 20 leaf plates from Ganesha, 31cm, £4.99



SHYRDAKS — felt rugs made for 2,500 years in the remote Tien Shan mountains in Kyrgyzstan — have colourful cut and embroidered patterns. Each rug takes a master cutter and her team of makers from 10 to 20 days to make.

Tim Mook of Felt has set up a fair-trade agreement with these nomadic peoples, with a showroom at 26 Glenfield Road, SW12 (020 8772 0358; www.feltrugs.co.uk). Prices start from £400 to £5,000, which includes an extra five per cent for community projects.



Christy's fairtrade Indian cotton towels cost £7.50 for a hand towel and £25 for a bath sheet

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