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Decor That Makes a Difference

Style your home in good conscience

BY ANDREA HODGINS

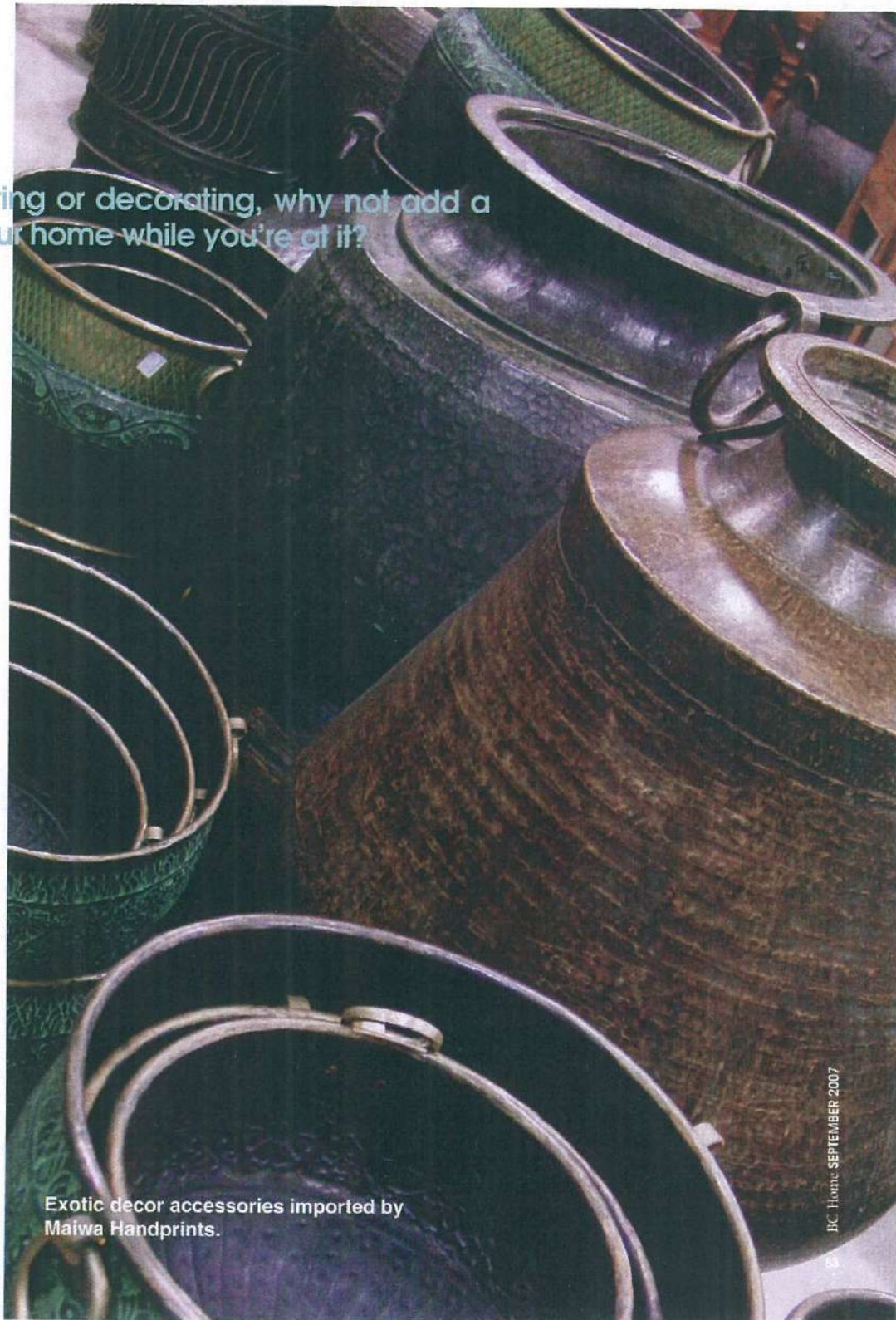
Whether you're renovating or decorating, why not add a humanitarian twist to your home while you're at it?

Socially conscious retailers in British Columbia offer a diverse selection of building materials or home accessories whose sales play a vital role in supporting those struggling with poverty. *BC Home* visits three of these retailers.

ReStoring Your Home

Do-it-yourselfers: Get your fix at Habitat for Humanity's home improvement outlet ReStore. The movie industry, contractors, wholesalers, demolition crews and individuals donate quality new and used materials here. Manufacturers and retailers drop off end-of-line, scratch-and-dent, discontinued inventory and paint mistakes. Windows, doors, hardware, cupboards, cabinets, flooring, tiles, blinds, lighting fixtures, appliances and even the kitchen sink are just some of what's on offer at deeply discounted prices. ReStore does double good as it also helps keep excess goods from clogging up the landfills.

Founded in Winnipeg, this chain has hundreds of stores around the world, including 54 in Canada. Items are donated daily and funds generated from retail sales help finance building projects for the non-profit organization Habitat for Humanity International. According to Jo-Ann Pickering, manager of the Prince George ReStore, any money made stays in the community. Habitat maximizes profit by staffing stores mainly with volunteers, some of whom have developmental disabilities. Volunteers also come together



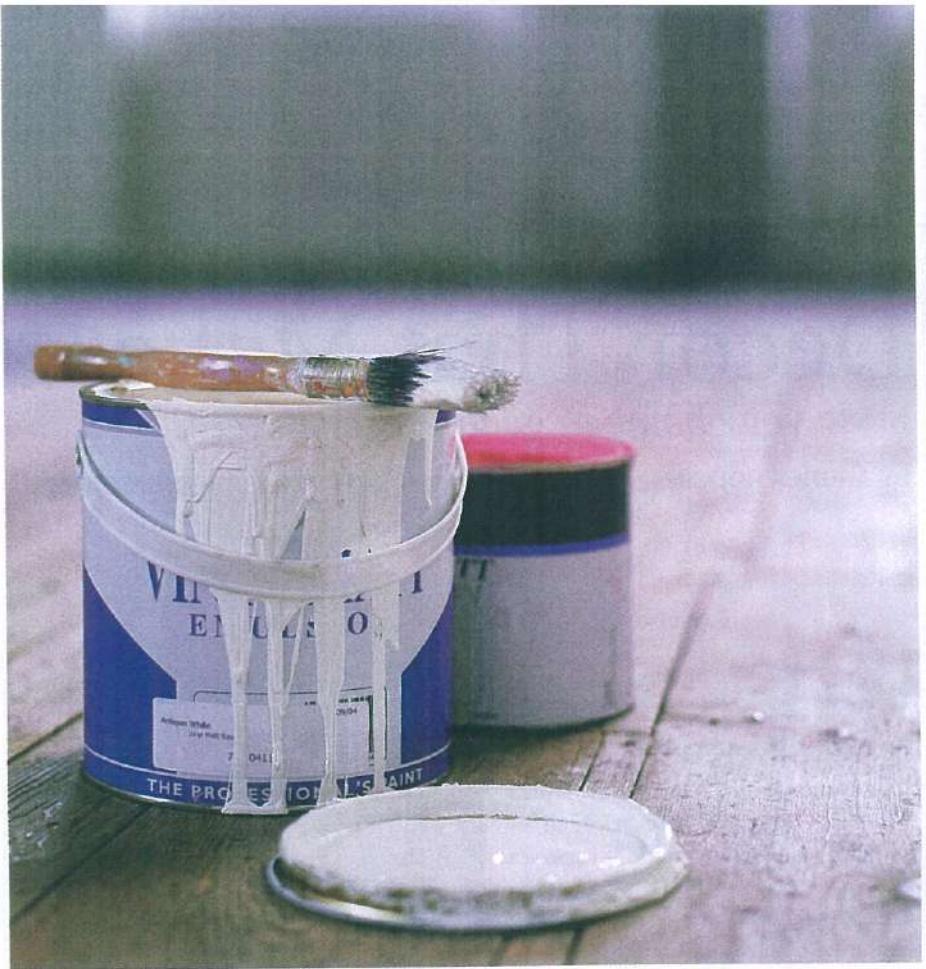
Exotic decor accessories imported by Maiwa Handprints.

Right: Savvy buyers at ReStore scoop up bargains like mismatched paint.

to build affordable homes for local families in need. Since its inception in 1985, Habitat has built more than 200,000 homes in 100 countries.

Village People

While we're talking numbers, stop by fair trade craft emporium Ten Thousand Villages for exotic home accent pieces. Unemployed or underemployed artisans who are mainly women in over 30 developing countries work with Villages' buyers who visit a few times each year. Craftspeople receive fair wages, advances on orders and the security of repeat business. They're able to earn two to four times more than if they sold their products on their own since they'd often



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need to undercut their prices to compete. Buyers also ensure working conditions are decent and the environment is not exploited.

At Villages, stake your claim on gorgeous Indonesian reclaimed tropical hardwood tables, chairs and benches salvaged from old bridges or unearthed from farmers' fields. Make a bold statement with earth-toned Peruvian wool wall hangings. Looking for a way to add a touch of class to a nook? Check out the buttery smooth Kenyan kisii stone carvings. Exquisitely woven raffia, banana fibre or kaisa grass baskets created by Ugandan and Bangladeshi artisans spice up any table. Villages also carries an array of onyx lamps, bookends and candleholders as well as hand-printed and embroidered cushions which add punch to a couch or chair. Pick up a bamboo screen to hide clutter or an artfully decorated mirror to polish off your front entrance.

Kelowna Villages store manager Carell Cristoll says, "Interior designers visit our stores often looking for unique or 'world fusion' items."

A founding member of the International Fair Trade Association, this ethically minded retailer celebrated its 60th anniversary last year. Over 160 stores span Canada and the United States. To keep prices competitive, Villages employs few paid staff and relies on many volunteers to assist customers. The store's parent organization is the Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and development agency of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in North America.

Leaving a Positive Social Handprint

Another socially conscious boutique offering eclectic upscale home decor pieces is Maiwa Handprints in Granville Island's Net Loft. Step into this stylish haven and you'll find intricately embroidered, block-printed and hand-woven linens and bedding naturally dyed and available in rich ochres, terra cottas, indigos and shades of nutmeg, to name a few. Some of their hottest sellers are cotton duvet covers and fitted sheets with an Islamic style of block printing from India known as *ajrakh*. "People just love it," says owner Charlotte Kwon. "It's very sophisticated work."

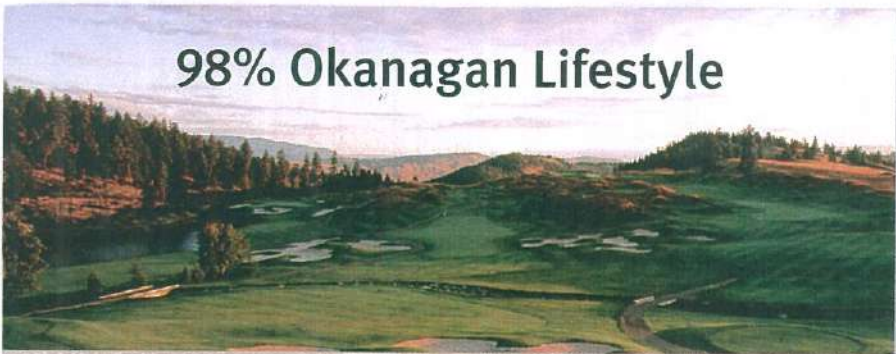


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Above: Looking for something really different – and with a fair trade record? Linens and bedding at Maiwa Handprints boast the rich terra cotta, indigo and nutmeg colour ranges that reflect the warm climate of their origins.

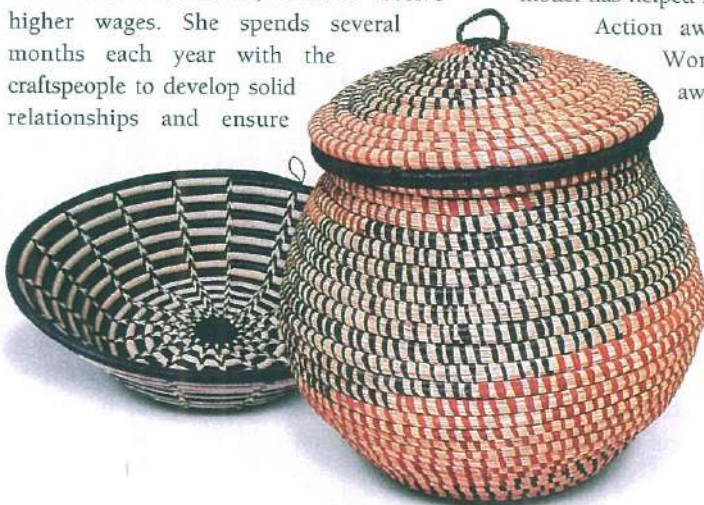
In business since 1986, Kwon's enterprise has helped support over 2,000 impoverished craftspeople in Turkey, Morocco, Laos and Bangladesh. She thoroughly researches the artisans before partnering with them, pays fair compensation and gives them at least 50 per cent up front. As Kwon prefers not to work with middlemen, artisans receive higher wages. She spends several months each year with the craftspeople to develop solid relationships and ensure

products are of the highest quality. Artisans are given control to decide on the delivery schedule and design choices. Kwon even provides them with ideas for how they can market their products to other sources to earn additional income. "Our books are very transparent," notes Kwon. This business model has helped her earn an Ethics in Action award and a YWCA Women of Distinction award.

But not only textiles

are showcased in Maiwa. You'll find stately engraved brass urns, elaborate antique and reproduction hand-painted hardwood cabinets and bookcases, doors and tables, and distinctive rugs as well as ornate iron drawer pulls, hinges and candleholders.

To gain access to a larger selection of products and consult with Kwon and her staff, interior decorators and designers frequent Maiwa Design Studio East located in an East Vancouver warehouse. Open to the public, the space is packed with international creations – especially furniture. Rainbow-plucked tablecloths, napkins and other textiles line a seemingly endless row of shelves like book stacks in a library. While walking amid the vast selection of the design studio's home furnishings, you can't help but feel a sense of hope for those less fortunate thanks to retailers like ReStore, Ten Thousand Villages and Maiwa. "It's amazing what a little store can do," Kwon concludes. Indeed. ■



Left: Intricate basketware is a staple at Ten Thousand Villages' stores.

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