



HERALD SUN HOME - Oct 10th 2009

design

A love affair with a traditional Indian craft inspired a range of handmade floor rugs that's all natural

>> **Words Laeta Antonysen**

When it comes to floor rugs, Jodie Fried knows her weaves. In fact, she knows them so well she can tell you which family's loom it was woven on, and in which Indian village. Jodie, together with her business partner, Sally Pottharst, recently launched Armadillo&Co, a striking collection of hand-crafted floor rugs made from 100 per cent natural fibres, including wool, jute, cotton and hemp.

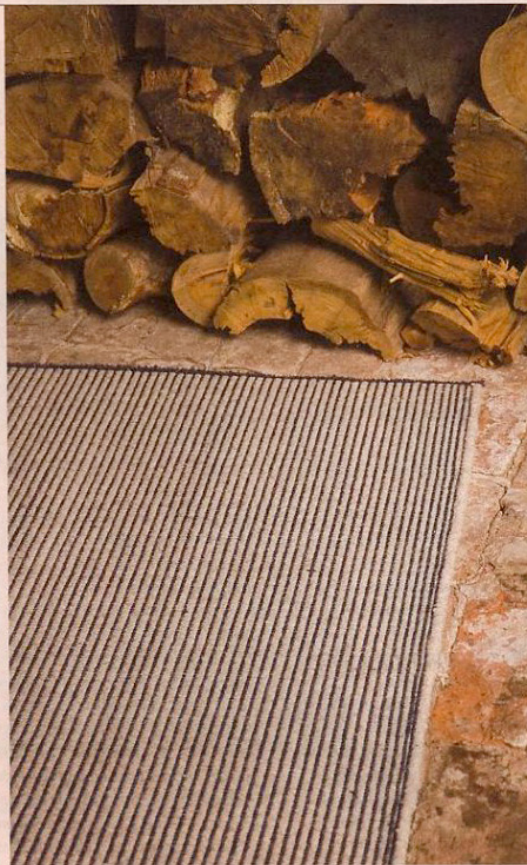
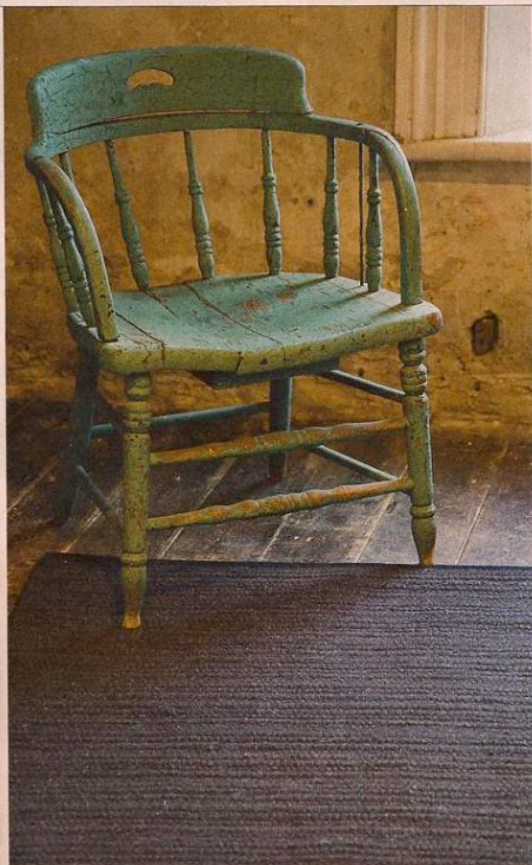
The pair, who met while collaborating on a rug project for Jodie's other homewares business, Bholu, design and import beautiful, natural woven floor rugs made by traditional weavers in villages in India's Uttar Pradesh region.

Jodie says many of the villagers in the famed handloom-and-weaving state are like family to her now.

"I've been working with some of them for more than two-and-a-half years, and when you work with people so closely, you really get to know them," she says. "A lot of the work these people do is handed down from generation to generation, so there is the grandfather right down to the grandson, all working together.

"What they do is an art form. It is a really intricate form of weaving.

Dream weavers



which is quite labour intensive. You really get to know the families and you even get to recognise particular weaves. You know where it comes from, you know the hands that have made it."

For Sydney-based Jodie, a costume designer who has worked on TV shows and films, including *Candy* with Heath Ledger and, most recently, *Last Ride* with Hugo Weaving, India is like a second home. "It is one of those places you either love or hate – for me it was obviously love," she says.

Jodie first travelled there for work in 1999 and, after surviving an earthquake, decided to stay on to help the villagers rebuild their homes.

From that, Bholu was born, as was her working partnership with Sally.

Sally, who has a background in the rug industry, says the pair recognised a hole in the Australian marketplace when it came to beautiful handmade rugs with a classical, textural feel to them.

"We already were working with many talented artisans in India ... and knew we could provide more of an income to this community when we realised the potential behind this project," Sally says.

Armadillo&Co, named for the armour-plated shell of an armadillo

(like the hard-wearing rugs), is a Fair Trade company that does not use child labour and pays above-average wages. Part of the proceeds also go back to the weavers and their communities.

Together, with money raised from Bholu sales, the businesses have already helped build eight new schools, as well as provided much-needed medical supplies to villages.

"Although Armadillo&Co is a brand-new company (it launched in July), it is an extension of a large mission that I have been on for some time," Jodie says.

"That mission is Fair Trade awareness. We are trying to encourage people to recognise what they are buying – to stop and ask themselves: 'Has this been made by hand or done by a machine?' For people to take responsibility and to give something back.

"That throw-away consumerism is so yesterday. People are now proud to have products that are recycled or lovingly hand-crafted, products that have a story attached to them. We are just part of that storytelling process."

>> Photography: Armadillo&Co

postscript



with
Sally Pottharst &
Jodie Fried (right)

Label
Armadillo&Co

What
Hand-crafted natural-fibre floor rugs

Sold at
Stores including Hermon &
Hermon, Richmond, and
Southwood Home, Fitzroy North

Expect to pay
\$260 for a 0.9m x 1.8m nest-
weave hemp rug, \$785 for a 1.7m
x 2.4m wool honeycomb-weave
rug, \$1990 for a 3m x 4m wool
rope-weave rug.

Your favourite piece?
Jodie: "I love the rope weave. The
rugs all have different personalities,
but the rope weave is a really
beautiful, sophisticated design."

More information
www.armadillo-co.com

In the loop

The rugs come in a variety of weaves, colours and materials (far left and inset)

Shade effect

A charcoal-coloured rug in a willow weave adds a dramatic touch (above, far left)

Back to nature

The rope-weave rug will bring a natural element to any room (above left)