

'30 Years Anin'

Features | 2017-07-14

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by Martha Mukaiwa



The first thing you may notice about House of Anin's products are the names. The understated and embroidered monikers on the back of scatter cushions that hint at the person who wrought them in a subtle acknowledgment of the hand behind the embroidery.

It's a nice touch included by even better people. Heidi von Hase who gathered a group of Nama women from Hoachanas under a camelthorn tree 30 years ago to see what they could do and Anabel and Stephan Loubser who have recently taken over House of Anin's acclaimed reigns with a renewed focus on painstaking hand embroidery in a world where the focus is faster, factory and by the boatload.

For those who don't know the story, Anabel Loubser tells it well.

A short and shining tale of a creative mother plucked from the city's comforts to live on a farm with her successful Swakara farmer husband whose heart was set ablaze in her witnessing of the dire poverty of the people in the neighbouring village.

Gathering the women together to see what skills they could put to use while their husbands worked on the

farms, she soon identified the Nama women's talent for embroidery, a skill learnt from missionary women in the early 1900s and passed down from generation to generation.

Employing over 300 women at the height of House of Anin's 30 years which saw the proudly Namibian textile company export the finest bed linen and home textiles to Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, the UK, the USA and Norway while earning pride of place in houses and lodges in Namibia, today Anin has scaled down considerably in an authentic, one-of-a-kind return to its roots.

Marrying industrial designer Stephan's eye and practicality and Anabel, a surface pattern designer's expertise, Anin is currently combining the homely art of hand embroidery with a modern aesthetic it hopes will continue to appeal to international buyers while charming far more patrons here at home.

"Design is big feature because we both studied design," says Anabel. "Though we're back in Hoachanas and focusing more on hand embroidery, we are really interested in breaking the stigma of embroidery as naïve design."

Angling toward the contemporary but very strict with regard to sticking to Namibian subject matter like plants, trees, wildlife and the many birds from which Anin (Nama for "many birds") gets its name, the Loubsters believe there is certainly some exciting middle ground.

A glimpse of this can be seen at the Omba Gallery where '30 Years Anin', an exhibit of hand embroidered artefacts and products produced since 1987, is on display. Beautifully curated by the Loubsters themselves and opened by Cathy McRoberts on 28 June, the exhibition features the very first Anin piece embroidered by Ellis Lukas who has been with the company since the beginning.

Neat, novel and luxurious in its strict use of 200 thread count first grade linen, cotton and cotton percale fabrics, Anin's exhibition presents the company through the years beginning with a colourful guinea fowl standing near a grass rimmed pond embroidered on a black background.

"Anabel did the grass," says Stephan, but Anabel doesn't recall.

What she does remember is that as her mother built the company, doled out fabrics and threads, drew designs and encouraged the women to draw their own, and that there was a lot of singing. Joyful Nama songs to which the children joined in.

Though they no longer meet under the camelthorn tree but rather at Hoachanas' Namibia Development Centre and government-built SME Centre, the sense of community, upliftment, legacy and family remains.

Lena Harases, who has been with Anin for 25 years', daughter will welcome you at the House of Anin stall at the Craft Centre and Greta Hoases, who has been with Anin for over 15 years, is the smiling sales assistant at their shop at Bougain Villas.

Continuing to empower families through their embroiderers in Hoachanas, their finishers in the city and

their sales team at their sites in Windhoek, Anin is a Namibian brand to be proud of and one intent on putting the country on the map while underscoring embroidery as an art form.

With 30 years in the bag and another 30 on the horizon, asked what their hopes are for the next three decades, the Loubsters are as humble as ever.

“To really uplift the community, make a difference, go international and change perceptions about hand embroidery”.

A big dream born under a little tree and well on its way.

'30 Years Anin', a retrospective exhibition at the Omba Gallery displaying and selling vintage and current items produced over the last 30 years, will be on show until 17 July. Contact info@anin.com.na and visit anin.com.na for more information.

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