

Designing Impact in Rural China

“...I began to realize the incredible dedication, determination, and resourcefulness of the Threads of Yunnan team. I learned from Threads to keep things in perspective, to keep a positive attitude, and to look for resourceful solutions.”

— Jamie Hayes,
volunteer designer



Ethnic Miao (front) and Yi (back) artisans in their traditional attire.



A Miao artisan enjoys new designs

As the only World Fair Trade Organization member in the country, SERRV partner Threads of Yunnan provides vital employment opportunities to ethnic women in the isolated Yunnan region. Their embroidery project creates income in an area lacking fairly paid, dignified work, especially for women.

Historically, Yunnan has been viewed as atypical within China because of its distance from the capital and large population of ethnic minorities. Minorities currently comprise 33% of the province's 46 million people and Yunnan has the most impoverished counties as well as the lowest literacy rate in all of China. Many of the women who work with Threads of Yunnan have never attended school.

By working with small-scale artisans, Threads of Yunnan improves the lives of ethnic minority women while also preserving their cultural traditions and raising their self-esteem. Of the 280 artisans they employ, many have doubled or even tripled their family income.

(continued on next page)



Jamie and artisans work on new designs

Fair wages help to prevent economic migration and allow Threads of Yunnan artisans to pay school fees for their children and invest in their family's future, greatly increasing their children's chances to survive and thrive. In addition to

financial benefits, the women receive training in literacy, hygiene, and nutrition.

Traditional embroidery is Threads of Yunnan's core handcraft, but because they do not currently have a designer on staff they have lacked new product designs which resulted in a drop in international sales.

In order to improve Threads of Yunnan's product line, SERRV sent pro bono professional designer Jamie Hayes to work on new styles and sample development with them. Jamie shared, "I was especially excited to develop new products for the Miao embroiderers. Their traditional cross-stitch is beautiful, but because it is typically worked on a certain type of cloth, the types of designs that they made were limited. I worked with them to develop new styles using the embroideries as appliques. I also encouraged them to try cross-stitch on some of the beautiful hemp cloth available in the region. At first the whole group cried, "It can't be done!" Then one brave embroiderer stepped up and said, "I'll try." She did an excellent job and inspired the rest of her team to jump in, too."

Jamie wanted to design products that upheld a delicate balance between preserving the cultural heritage of the embroiderers and incorporating current American design trends. During her six week stay with Threads of Yunnan, she helped to create several new product patterns, including two handbags, several accessories, and two Christmas tree skirts. By the end of the trip, they had developed almost 50 new samples!

With some of their new products debuting in our holiday catalog, we are excited about the accomplishments of Jamie and Threads of Yunnan.

While our orders from Threads of Yunnan had recently dwindled to one product, now we proudly feature six of their crafts in our catalog. Increased sales of their handcrafts will be used to purchase new sewing machines and provide school scholarships for local children.



SERRV Retailer Retreat

We kicked off our 2nd annual Retailer Retreat with a welcome address by Esther Mwanyama of Bombolulu Workshops in Kenya and Le Phuong My of Mai Handicrafts in Vietnam. This was a fantastic way to ground us in shared mission before delving into the nuts and bolts of running a retail store. Once again, Candi Horton of Baksheesh covered several utilitarian topics and we also heard from Renee Bowers of the Fair Trade Federation and Pushpika Freitas of MarketPlace: Handwork of India. We also took time to gauge customer service in competitive stores and to practice creating strong displays in a SERRV store. Our goal for the retreat was to offer practical support to retail store managers who are dedicated to building the market for fair trade.

One participant told us, "I am so glad to have been here this week. All the presentations are refreshing and have given me some extremely valuable ideas. I think this time will help to make some valuable changes to my store. Thank you!"

Learn more

about the Retailer Retreat and Design Camp on our YouTube channel.



[youtube.com/serrvtube](https://www.youtube.com/serrvtube)

SERRV Design Camps

SERRV directed two Design Camps this year, implementing our development agenda to empower fair trade artisan organizations. Our 4th annual US Design Camp was hosted in Madison, Wisconsin in September and one was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in late October.



We were pleased to welcome our first US Design Camp participant from Africa, along with guests from Vietnam and India. These merchandising directors joined us for peer and customer product critiques, competitive shopping, trend reports, home stays, and design workshops in Madison and Chicago. They also had time for a bit of sightseeing!

In Bangladesh, SERRV product designer Anne Brady traveled with pro bono professional designer Dana Morales to lead a 3-day workshop for designers from four of our artisan partners. Despite civil unrest and street protests occurring in Dhaka, everyone safely attended and greatly appreciated the opportunity.

As Dana shared, “The most rewarding job and satisfaction was to see the designers’ willingness to hear what I have to share with them, and their gratitude at the end of our training. I only hope this training helped them to develop new products that will have an impact on the life of all the artisans they work with. If we succeed, we will demonstrate that helping others is the only way will overcome poverty.”

Planting Seeds of Change



A Nepali student on her way to school.

Small investments, like the gift of solar lanterns in an Indian village where there is no electricity, can mean everything to an ambitious student struggling to do her homework.

A new high-quality sewing machine for a physically handicapped worker in Kenya can bring opportunity for increased family income in a country with minimal social services.

A modest scholarship for a Nepali girl can send her to school for a year and bring the promise of a better life.

And a day of product development training can mean a dramatic increase in sales for a Bangladeshi artisan and mother.

In Mali, SERRV and donors are assisting in building new housing for women and their children as they make the long recovery from surgery for obstetric fistula.

Your support for our Plant a Seed program brings practical benefits and new hope to people who are working to improve their lives. They also make meaningful holiday gifts!

Please consider a tax deductible* donation to support these or other SERRV development projects.

You can contribute now by visiting serrv.org/plantaseed or send a check in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Indicate which project you'd like to support or allow us to select the project most in need of funding.

Mothers in Mali, recovering from corrective surgery.



Eradicating poverty is about education and empowerment.

With knowledge and skills, hardworking artisans can develop successful, sustainable businesses that will provide for their families and communities for a lifetime.

Your **tax-deductible*** donation will allow us to support more struggling families in their journey to a better life.

Please support our work today. You can use the enclosed postage-paid envelope, donate online at serrv.org/donate, or call 1.800.423.0071.

*SERRV is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Visit www.serrv.org/donate for financial and regulation information.



SERRV International
500 Main Street
PO Box 365
New Windsor, MD 21776

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
WESTMINSTER, MD
PERMIT NO. 874

OUR MISSION

to eradicate poverty wherever it resides
by providing opportunity and support
to artisans and farmers worldwide

serrv.org
1.800.423.0071



2012 "Best in Fair Trade" winner!
*Outstanding Long-term
Commitment to Producers*



Frank with Srishti and Sunita at ACP. Sunita attended SERRV Design Camp 2012.

Photo: Joseph De Leo



From Nepal, just in time for the Holidays

SERRV has four handcraft partner groups in Nepal, a land-locked nation of majestic mountains yet debilitating poverty. We are inspired by the work of our Nepalese partners who strive to reach the lowest castes and shift the social system to improve their lives. This past summer, SERRV board member and professional designer Frank Millero volunteered to assist our Nepalese partners with new product designs. We are proud to introduce the first results of his work—a seasonal collection of felt ornaments!



"It was a pleasure to work with ACP's talented and committed staff. It was a true collaboration that allowed me to share my expertise and to learn from them in return. I was incredibly impressed and inspired by ACP's dedication to product quality, to fair trade, and to the people in their community."

- Frank Millero



Shop the
full collection
online at
serrv.org/acp

