



selvedge THE FABRIC OF YOUR LIFE

THE FABRIC OF YOUR LIFE: KEEPING WARM





THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE

A Collaboration: Sofas & Stuff and The Centre For Traditional Textiles, Cusco, Peru





Andrew Cussins, the founder of Sofas & Stuff, is the third generation in a family involved in the furniture business. 'My father Manny was a real inspiration. He left school at thirteen in post-war Britain and would travel down from his home in Yorkshire to trawl the furniture markets of the East End in London. He understood better than anyone that business was about understanding your customer and he ended up building a business that had one hundred and twenty stores around the UK. My own career saw me set up Sofa Workshop when I was 27. It was a tremendously daunting part of my life and I nearly went bust on several occasions before the age of 30. We eventually managed to build that company up into a nationwide brand and I learnt a great deal. Today I am proud that several members of my family also work in the business.'

Sofas and Stuff specialize in high-end British-made sofas, with 90% of their offerings bespoke, orders. Their aim is never to merely sell pieces, but rather to work with customers to create a personal experience. Out of town showrooms—often located in renovated barns ensures every customer has all the tools at their disposal to create a bespoke solution—a wide selection of fabrics and shapes. Meeting with customers over coffee, conversations arise about their lifestyles and inspirations; ideas for the new sofa naturally spring up. The intimacy reflected in their approach is inspired by the quote from Maya Angelou: 'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.' ▶





During the pandemic, Andrew Cussins embarked on a journey to Perú, without leaving his home. Perusing his collection of *Selvedge Magazines*, Andrew decided to approach editor Polly Leonard to see if she had any connections with artisans who could make fabrics suitable for high-end upholstery. Polly arranged for samples to be sent from several makers, those produced by The Centre for Traditional Textiles in Cusco, Perú caught Andrew's eye. and he placed an order for 360 metres of cloth.

Nilda Callañaupa Alvarez, the founder of the centre, is a well-known Indigenous weaver and textile entrepreneur from Chinchero, Perú, who comes from a family of weavers, peasants and traders. After finishing high school in Chinchero, Nilda received a scholarship to attend the University in California, Berkeley where she studied art history. It was there that she decided to devote her life to promoting the Andean weaving of her homeland: 'I became aware that weaving in the Andes was disappearing as people were migrating to the cities or interested in other professions.' It was in the early 90s that Nilda began an ambitious cultural project involving ten rural communities around the Sacred Valley. Established in 1996, the Centre for Traditional Textiles of Cusco works with 500 adult weavers and 250 children who are committed to learning the craft of their ancestors. 'Our goal is to preserve the quality of textiles and to make sure that Inca and pre-Inca techniques from Nazca, Huari or Chimú—part of the heritage of Perú—will continue into the future. It is a great joy to find ways to make backstrap weaving that is so close to their hearts and follows the tradition of their ancestors, economically viable,' affirms Nilda. ▶





The Sofa & Stuff's commission was incredibly important for the communities, especially during the pandemic when the borders were closed and the income from tourism abruptly ceased. 'I went into the project without knowing much about Andean textiles. I simply trusted Polly and was fascinated to learn about the different techniques and the complexity that goes into making handmade textiles at this scale. There were a few surprises—matching the width of backstrap weaving and the requirements for upholstery meant the price doubled. However, after seeing the final product, I know they charged fairly. In fact, this project helped me find another side of myself one that is tolerant, patient and eager to be surprised...I am delighted with the result, a limited edition of sofas, stools and chairs,' shares Andrew.



Nilda reflects: 'The order was a real miracle. We learned so much through the process This was the first time we had produced large quantities with handspun and naturally dyed fibre and with so many hands involved. Each batch of fifty metres was made with different skills, yet great coordination. Through this process we learned the true meaning of communal work. Different communities, far from each other, had their hands and hopes in this order. The quality had to be consistent, because the pieces had to be joined together, so one mistake meant that everyone had to start over,' affirms Nilda. Moving forward, the Centre for Traditional Textiles in Cusco is now prepared for orders of this scale. Thanks to the positive attitude and flexibility of Andrew Cussins, the tenacity of Nilda Callañaupa Alvarez and the skills of the weavers from six Indigenous communities the project has been a resounding success. ♦♦♦ **Marcella Echavarría** www.sofasandstuff.com





Kristin Perers

