

style



PHOTO: PAUL BEATY

Thread Rich

A Glencoe woman returns from a mission of service with a close-knit circle of friends and a fair trade product line. By Sherry Thomas

Sitting in her Glencoe family's sun-drenched living room one afternoon over Thanksgiving break, surrounded by art and artifacts from around the globe, Mayu founder Kate Robertson teasingly says, "I tell my parents, well it's all your fault. You're the ones who took me everywhere."

They are also the ones who supported her decision to serve two years in the Peace Corps after graduating from University of Colorado in Boulder. But Cookie and Ned Robertson might not have expected that a family friend's offer to market a few of Kate's imported hand-knit alpaca

accessories at a Winnetka church bazaar seven years ago would inadvertently help their daughter launch what has grown into a thriving, eco-friendly product line.

Mayu, which sells one-of-a-kind alpaca accessories hand knit by artisans in rural Peru, is the

direct result of the relationships Kate built during her Peace Corps service — both with the talented female artisans in the rural mountain village where she lived, and with Juan, her luxury alpaca wool vendor in downtown Lima.

Kate laughs when she talks about her original assignment in Peru, which was to help a group of local cheese makers improve their product and market it more effectively. But it didn't take long for the artisans to catch her eye — both with their extraordinary skill and with their need for expertise in how to market their hand-knit creations to the mainstream consumer.

"They range in age from 27 to 55 or so, and they all learned to knit when they were 5 years old," she explains. "But they've never known what Americans like. They were using this synthetic material, with neon colors (for the tourist products) but they would spin their own sheep wool for themselves."

Through the Peace Corps, Kate was able to get a small grant to finance the purchase of wool "and a little bit of alpaca." Then, as she puts it, "I found the really good stuff, which is what we use for Mayu."

"Mayu means river in Quechua (the native language spoken in her rural Peruvian village)," she explains. "But it was also from my host sister. Her name was Marjorie and they called her Mayu."

The women were thrilled to be using such warm, luxurious materials so Kate took a few thousand dollars of her own money and bought scarves, blankets, sweaters and other items to bring home to Glencoe. Some were given to friends and family as gifts but it was the alpaca merchandise a family friend sold at a Winnetka church bazaar that gave Kate enough of a financial boost to take her enterprise to the next level.

"They can pretty much knit anything," Kate says, "and now I have a designer."

Art Institute of Chicago-educated textile



Kate Robertson has been working with these Peruvian artisans since arriving in their village in 2004, teaching them everything from how to use the Internet to order materials to quality control and presentation.

designer Laddhavan Sutana was snagged to create new lines of high-end alpaca accessories, and more than five years after leaving Peru, Kate Robertson has her Mayu products sold in shops and boutiques throughout Australia, Chicago and Canada, in addition to her website (www.shopmayu.com.) And as she's taking iPhone snapshots and Skyping with her artisans and alpaca vendor in Peru, our 29-year-old eco-entrepreneur is attending the Thunderbird School of Global Management in Phoenix. She expects to receive her MBA in May.

"I have always wanted to own a business. I always wanted either a clothing store or a restaurant," confesses the 1999 New Trier Township High School graduate, who has served on the board of Chicago Fair Trade and worked at the Refugee Resettlement Agency in Uptown while building Mayu. "But I've also always been seeking adventure, and always loved to travel, so I like dealing with somewhere abroad."

But the thing that Kate is most proud of so far is her commitment to ethical sourcing and fair trade. "You have to know where your raw materials come from," she says. "And I work directly with my artisans."

In March, Kate will be having another global adventure. For six weeks she and other international MBA students from Arizona will be working with people in Uganda on a project funded by Exxon Mobil that makes and markets solar lamps. It will be a good experience for her, but her heart remains with Mayu and the artisans who have become like an extended family. "Mayu means river in Quechua (the native language spoken in her ru-

ral Peruvian village)," she explains. "But it was also from my host sister. Her name was Marjorie and they called her Mayu."

Whatever is next for Kate and Mayu, she knows one thing. She wants to continue working with the Peruvian women she started her business with, and continue to help them grow as entrepreneurs. "I have learned so much from them and I look forward to continuing." [📌](#)



All Mayu products are hand-knit in Peru using luxurious alpaca wool. Since shearing an alpaca (closely related to and resembling a llama) is not harmful to the animal, alpaca products are considered to be very eco-friendly. The items shown are from Mayu's winter collection at www.shopmayu.com.



■ Each wall and intimate nook in the Warnocks' Winnetka home is graced with canvasses you'd expect to see in a public art museum.

Joie de Vivre

How a Winnetka couple created the home of their dreams on the shores of Lake Michigan.

By Thomas Connors

TODD WARNOCK IS JAZZED.

He's done his 25-mile bike ride, chilled in his outdoor Jacuzzi, and this afternoon, he's having a guitar lesson. "I'm learning 'London Calling,' by the

Clash." After that, there's a little speech to write for a dinner in honor of a friend. Wittingly enthusiastic, impressively energetic, Warnock is one of those rare breeds — the kind of fellow whose appetite for

life can make anyone else feel a total slug. But there's nothing egotistical about him. Like a Little Leaguer who's hit his first home run, he's just thrilled — and happy to share his delight.

Several years ago, Warnock set his sights on a three-acre Winnetka property overlooking Lake Michigan. When the time was right, he snapped it up without ever setting foot inside the house that stood there. He had plans for something finer; a classically proportioned home custom designed to please his aesthetic sensibility and meet the needs of his wife, Liz, and their two children. "I wanted a home that looked like it had been here a hundred years."

To achieve his goal, Warnock turned to Chicago architect Paul Florian, whose work ranges from utterly contemporary commercial projects to traditional homes infused with a highly personal reading of historic styles. Florian, who had worked with the Warnocks on their previous Winnetka home notes, "When we do residential projects, we really think of them as portraiture. We don't impose a style on clients. We listen to them, and the process results in something that reflects their way of living and their character, their interests. Here we had two people who are traditionalists, but creative."

In projecting the time-kissed quality the owners sought, Florian opted for a vernacular English style with Palladian elements, cast in old Cream City brick from Wisconsin. "Mixing styles suggests the house may be older than it is," explains Florian. "The front of the house is formal, symmetrical and the back is sort of higgledy-piggledy.

The inspiration for that was a Jacobean house I stayed in once in Britain. The front façade was rebuilt in the Georgian period, so you had a very composed new elevation, while the back was a random composition of added parts."

At the Warnock home, those contrasting elevations express what lies within. The formal spaces — grand foyer, living room and dining room — are arranged at the front of the house; kitchen, informal dining area, and family room are strung along the rear. Florian employed a wide array of moldings, varied ceiling heights, hallways, and stepped-down rooms to not only underscore the individual function of each space, but to convey the impression of a house that has been added to over time.

The décor, which the Warnocks executed themselves (with an occasional assist from Martin Horner of Soucie Horner Ltd), is defined by English and Italian antiques sourced locally, in

New York and abroad. And every purchase holds a memory, whether it's a pair of chairs acquired at Porte de Clignancourt, the big flea market in Paris, or the knocker on the front door, discovered in a junk shop in Indianapolis.

"I remember we were in the Cotswolds one time," relates Liz, "and we saw this woman leaning from a window in curlers. Later we decided to go antiquing, and it turned out that that woman in curlers owned the shop we found ourselves in. She was very prim and proper, and we thought, 'Oh gosh, if she only knew we'd seen her leaning out the window like that with no makeup.'"

While the Warnocks enjoy entertaining (they throw a big caroling party every December) the house they've built is a home, not a showplace. Their comfort comes first. Pointing to a pair of chairs off the foyer, Liz laughs, "I saw those in the window of an antiques shop in Winnetka and planned to put them in the living room, but thought it was starting to look like a funeral parlor in there with too many places to sit."

Perhaps no room in the house captures the couple so clearly as the second-story art studio, a soaring, sunlit space with an adjacent rooftop terrace. "Liz and I have been day painters for a long time," says Todd. "And with painting and drawing, set-up is critical. Packing and unpacking your materials all the time is intolerable. If you have to leave to do something else, you want to be able to leave everything so that you can go back and quickly get back into the mindset you were in. That's why we built this."

Art isn't just a Sunday pastime for the Warnocks, as evidenced by the paintings throughout the house. There are canvases by Liz's grandmother, a highly-talented amateur who loved to capture the places she traveled to on her jaunts to Europe. In Todd's office, there's a curious allegorical work by School of the Art Institute professor, Marion Kryczkaby, a still life comprising a vodka bottle, package of cigarettes and a can of salmon. Elsewhere, the walls are graced by the 19th- and early-20th-century works of Midwest Impressionists, most of them — Frederick Fursman, Albert Krehbiel, Francis Chapin, Thomas Tallmadge, Edgar Rupprecht — associated with Ox-Bow, the art school in Saugatuck, Michigan affiliated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



Chicago architect Paul Florian used a variety of moldings, varied ceiling heights and designed stepped-down rooms, highlighting the individual functions of each space.



■ All of the Warnocks' antiques, which lean toward English and Italian treasures sourced from New York, abroad and closer to home, evoke specific memories, making even the simplest stroll through their home an opportunity to exchange stories and personal adventures.


Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, Ox-Bow was founded by Fursman and Walter Marshall Clute, instructors at the Art Institute. Envisioned as a retreat from the din and industry of the city (the campus comprises 115-acres of dunes, forests and trails), Ox-Bow remains a valued getaway, a bucolic haven in which to study and work. Over the years, it has welcomed Richard Artschwager, Joan Mitchell, Claes Oldenburg, Leon Golub, Richard Haas and Ed Paschke, among many others.

Todd, a Michigan native, spent his summers at a family cottage down the beach from Ox-Bow. Although he didn't take classes there, he and his

brother hiked the grounds and fished in the compound's lagoon. About fifteen years ago, after a chance encounter with an Ox-Bow board member

"Mixing styles suggests the house may be older than it is," says Florian. "The front façade was rebuilt in the Georgian period, so you had a very composed new elevation, while the back was a random composition of added parts."

on the squash court of the University Club of Chicago, he became a supporter of the institution and eight years ago, became chairman of its board. The Warnocks have since endowed the campus with two dormitories and contributed to the acquisition of nearby acreage that was likely to have been lost to development.

Standing before a Fursman landscape in the foyer of his home, marveling at the artist's use of color to capture light and shadow, Todd studies the canvas as if he is seeing it for the very first time. And, not unexpectedly, he cannot contain his enthusiasm. "Look! Look at that purple! Fantastic." 

styleBOOK

Star Power: Chicago-area designer Dana Levy of Dana Rebecca Designs www.danarebeccadesigns.com has already caught the attention of such celebrities as Salma Hayek, Olivia Wilde, Ashley Tisdale, Megan Fox and Carrie Underwood. Now you can find her hand-crafted luxury diamond and gemstone jewelry at Frances Heffernan, 810 W. Elm St., Winnetka, 847/446-2112 or Enaz, 309 Happ Road, Northfield, 847/433-6466.



► **Samantha Lynn Earrings:**
These blue topaz and white gold earrings are the perfect way to add a little sparkle to the new decade. \$1,800. Also available in pink quartz and gold \$1,760.



► **Lindsey Elizabeth:**
Stunning and sophisticated, this gold and white agate ring features 1.2 carats of diamonds. \$4,400



► **Lisa Michelle:**
Luxury has never been so simple. This diamond and gold ring is finished with black onyx. \$1,540



► **Liza Beth:**
A modern heirloom in the making, these carved, one-of-a-kind rubilite (rubies) and gold earrings are destined to wow for generations to come. \$15,400