

PRESS RELEASE

Valérie Barkowski
TWISTING THE WORLD, ONE STITCH AT A TIME

Driven by a passion for ancestral craft traditions and the dialogue between global cultures culled from a lifetime of travel, Valerie Barkowski has passionately been creating sophisticated, timeless home linens for over two decades. ‘Slow’ by nature — long before it became a movement — she has faithfully infused impeccable craftsmanship with sustainability and authenticity.

“I can spend hours watching an artist’s hands — they’re mesmerizing,” the Belgian designer recalls. Nimble fingers stitching magic with just a needle and thread. Hypnotic hands kneading bread. Gifted hands gracefully transforming simple raw materials with timeless traditions.

“What drives me is keeping these centuries-old skills alive. When I arrived in Marrakech in 1996, I was fascinated by stories of young brides hand-embellishing their trousseaux and naturally wanted my own embroidered bedding! Sadly I discovered this was all but an abandoned tradition. It proved impossible to find even the linen, much less the embroiderers, in the Marrakech souks. This is how it all began: my quest to revive these centuries-old techniques.” Valérie was soon scouring the far reaches of Morocco in search of textiles and these skilled women hidden behind closed doors. Three years and “immense patience and respect” later, her first collection was born. In the process, single-handedly reviving forgotten needlework traditions.

Her first pompom-festooned pieces, much revered and often imitated, remain a key reference. Passementerie, tassels, hand-finishes and knitted textiles followed, boldly reinterpreted and thoroughly contemporary, yet steeped with historical respect.

“I’ve always immersed myself in studying the creative process, never trying to interfere with an artisan’s hand. Who’s a designer without skilled craftspeople? Instead I’ve harnessed the artistry of these time-tested techniques and given them a daring contemporary twist, a fresh relevance, which still remain timeless.”

Fascinated by the dialogue between cultures, the former art and interior design student — a serial nomad — has combed the planet in search of inspiration. “For me, travel is a vital, conceptual stimuli. It fuels my creativity with color, new vibrations and sensorial experiences that invariably kindle a new story... a new concept.” Just like her textiles take you on a visual journey infused with purity and authenticity.

20+ years on, the designer, art lover and dreamer has also taken her exacting design process to knitwear, block-print, handmade paper and weaving projects with collaborations in India, Russia, Vietnam and Europe. All the while growing her exquisitely edited, Marrakech-based collection.

There's no better backdrop for the V. Barkowski lifestyle than Dar Kawa, her original Marrakech bolthole and now stylish riad-guesthouse, just minutes from both the atelier and boutique in the bustling heart of the Medina. This whitewashed oasis —the perfect synthesis of traditional style and restrained modernity, the very DNA of the V.B. brand — showcases in equal aplomb her sophisticated homewares collection, design flare and 'slow' sustainable, organic lifestyle.

"Marrakech is a fantastic base but my creativity needs constant refueling!" And it's a lifetime compilation of global adventures that's infused, until now, Valerie Barkowski's artistic spirit. But those journeys are changing.

SUSTAINABILITY IS A LIFESTYLE

"This pandemic has reinforced my concern to take my work and personal lifestyle decisions to the next level to contribute every day to a better planet. I'm now focused on alternative paths involving less travel to minimize my carbon footprint, yet still fuel my senses. And I'm doubling my energy finding sustainable solutions to develop 'responsible' products while preserving ancient craft traditions both locally in Marrakech and beyond. This centuries-old artisan savoir-faire constitutes a living legacy that must be preserved."

Valerie takes her conscious choices to the grocery store, local restaurants and well beyond. "We're bombarded by an onslaught of exotic edibles from all over the world... like air-freighted organic garlic from Argentina and Peruvian avocados with their catastrophic environmental impact. On the otherhand, I believe that buying a hand-woven yak hair scarf in Tibet, 'chamba' black ceramics from Colombia or hand-embroidered Moroccan bed linen is actually 'ethical shopping' because it helps preserve so many time-tested, millennial-old craft traditions while ensuring the livelihoods of the craftspeople." A "shop-smart" message from the designer and longtime advocate of Glocalization: think globally, act locally. "Buying 'glocal' is essential today; even more paramount tomorrow! Reject fast consumption and support 'hand-made' goods — even those from afar."

“I started twenty years ago instinctively making sustainable choices that made me an outsider: vehemently avoiding mass production, fast fashion and successive assembly-line collections. From Day 1, I produced on-demand and on-order to minimize overproduction and embraced zero-waste. And for me, direct personal dialogue with clients is essential; life is, after all, a compilation of human exchanges! Today, it’s rewarding knowing my deliberate choices have ensured my projects have been consistently ‘slow’ and sustainable long before it was fashionable.”

Such small, simple acts and mindful values are the catalyst to transform conventional consumption into an ethical consumer reality. Indeed Valérie’s genuine, conscious and coherent choices are the organic extension of her multifaceted, ultra-creative universe.

BIO EXPRESS

A 360° artistic director, designer and visionary, Valerie Barkowski has channeled her abundant creativity on a vast array of projects and collaborations — product consulting, boutique concepts and home interior design — and trademark brands conceived from A to Z: Mia Zia (sold in 2007), Bandit Queen, No-Mad in India... Today, more than ever, Valérie Barkowski remains engaged on her eponymous V. Barkowski collection launched in 1997. Her first Marrakech boutique opened in 2016 in the heart of the medina; an e-shop followed in early 2020. "Most of my collection is made to order; essentially bespoke products made-to-measure in a wide choice of colors and finishes. As everything is handmade, the repertoire is endless," she says.

Valérie Barkowski is gratified her original signature pompom collection remains current two decades on, still coveted by her loyal clientele of decorators and private collectors. "I’ve always created products to stand the test of time: our throw-away culture is heartbreaking. Hopefully my linens will be passed on to the next generation, just as we did in the past. I love when clients reminiscence about their 'emotional' connection to my linens... recalling exceptional memories, special occasions.”

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VALERIE BARKOWSKI

valeriebarkowski.com

e-shop : www.valeriebarkowski.shop

le riad : www.darkawa.net