

By: Coleen Janeway
@skinfoodbodylove

ARTISANAL FASHION, LUXURY SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE

Stepping into founder Jennifer Moray's custom handmade hat studio you will feel an undeniable passion and enthusiasm not found in boutique accessories today. What becomes clear to the observer is how Jennifer thoughtfully and precisely considers her footprint in a very competitive and challenging market. She focuses on the bespoke custom aspect, tying in her years of experience working with artisans whose craft is second to none.

Immediately you enter her creative world and as she speaks you understand how she ties in her ideas and inspiration to create such amazing Ninakuru statement pieces. Translated from Quechua, the language of the Incan people, Ninakuru means "firefly", a wonderfully fitting name for the company, representing that true beauty radiates from within, and each of us have an inner glow worthy of being noticed.

Jennifer shared with me why it's not just about being a female entrepreneur anymore, you have to "do better" in your business practices. Ethical brands just make sense. "Only a few short years ago, a company such as NINAKURU which identified sustainable, ethical, fair trade and conscious business practices would have been seen by many as an outlier. Now, companies which adhere to these practices are not only well on their way to becoming understood, they are becoming

part of the establishment. This bodes well for mindful and conscious consumerism."

Personality and pizzazz, really the possibilities are endless, so how does she do it? Moray's design process is influenced by a lot of factors and it ultimately depends on who will be wearing the hat. The flow changes and is quite fluid. Whether she is designing for a seasonal collection or, developing a curated line for a retail partner, or making a bespoke hat for an individual customer.

There is no stopping this motivated boss babe, Jennifer creates and designs everyday. "I'm always trying out new ideas and combinations, new patterns and colors. When I design for NINAKURU, the creative process is really an intuitive one influenced by colors in nature, people I meet, places I travel, my mood, what attracts me. My best ideas come when I am designing without any guidelines or parameters."

So much to consider, how does one get started? Jennifer mentions, "When making a bespoke hat, the first thing I consider is the client's preferences and tendencies. We consider the shape of the face, skin tone and eye and hair color, hair textures and style preferences, the client's wardrobe palette, shoes and accessories they already own, and of course the purpose of the hat. Will

it be worn for sun protection? Garden parties? Events? Running errands around town? Then of course the client's preferences in colors and designs. Is this client a collector, or is this client hoping to create the perfect capsule wardrobe?"

Going the extra mile is just what she does. When Jennifer designs for a retail boutique, she will collaborate with the owners and buyers to curate private collections which align with their aesthetic and vibe. Moray shares, "We visit a lot of boutiques around the country and in any given town we often see the same accessory brands in most of the stores; the same collections repeated everywhere, which to me really takes away from the entire purpose of shopping at a boutique, wouldn't you agree?" Customers should be able to find one of kind treasures in boutiques, which is why Jennifer likes to design private, unique collections for stores.

Sharing her ultimate creative space, Jennifer fondly speaks about Ecuador. "I am deeply inspired working with my wonderfully talented artisans in Ecuador." "We derive strength, motivation and purpose not only for one another but through one another and when we're together, the creative process and flow of ideas is

electrifying. There is just so much shared gratitude and appreciation for one another's talents and this sets the stage for the creative process that follows. Also, being in Ecuador reminds me of why I started NINAKURU in the first place... to invest in people and create value through relationships."



Designing for your dream client. What would that be like for you? There are so many people I admire for their contributions and accomplishments in this world, says Jennifer. "Amal Clooney is a woman I admire deeply for her dedication to advancing social and legal justice, truth in media, philanthropy, and human rights. Plus, when I saw photographs of her civil wedding ceremony in Italy, wearing her Stella McCartney white suit and that wonderful broad brimmed hat, I thought Amal absolutely personified grace and elegance."

Ninakuru aims to design and produce beautifully handcrafted accessories which are holistically well-made, recognizing aesthetics and ethics are equally vital components in determining quality. Their goal is to create sustainable products maximizing customer satisfaction, empowering artisans, and minimizing negative environmental impacts.



They ensure their workers are paid dignified wages. They base wages not only on the cost of raw materials and the number of hours worked, but also the artisan's overall sense of contentment. We want them to walk away from each transaction feeling valued and appreciated. This is crucially important to the brand and Jennifer as the founder. Ninakuru, when possible, will use sustainable materials, including agave and toquilla fiber along with rainforest botanicals, not all of these materials are considered sustainable, but they are considered heritage and artisanal. A conscious decision was made to use leather in some of their accessories, for example, Ninakuru is partnered with one such group of artisans who are master leather craftsmen. Ninakuru wants to ensure this generational craft is supported and preserved.

Treasured sustainable fashion worth generational care, a tradition in the Ninakuru craftsmanship. The wool felt and Panama hats can last a lifetime and can be passed on as heirlooms, if taken care of properly. We provide a care instructional guide with every hat, so clients can properly store and preserve their purchase. Wool hats are slightly more forgiving than Panama hats, as wool felt can be reshaped with steam. The biggest threat to a wool hat are moths, so you will want to store them in a secured container or sealed storage bag for long term storage. Lint build-up can make your hat look dull over time but it's easy to remove with either lint tape or a common cleaning sponge. Using a clean sponge to quickly wipe off lint is an old hatters trick, which is very effective.

Panama hats require a little more care as they are made

from straw fibers which are at high risk for damage if exposed to water. Hanging them on a hat wall is an easy way to preserve and beautifully display your hats. Though tempting, we recommend leaving your Panama hat home when going to the beach, as the humidity can cause the fibers to swell, making your hat fit a little snug. If this occurs, one needs to simply wear it to stretch it back to size.

Like high quality leather shoes, over time Ninakuru's Panama hats will form to your head for a perfect fit. If your brim begins to curl or it bends due to improper storage, iron it on a flat surface on a medium setting, using a protective cloth to avoid scorching the straw. Steam is used to flatten the brims but when doing this at home be careful to use a light steam, as too much can overmoisten the fibers and cause them to inflate, creating a bumpy texture. Jennifer's protip: Make-up wipes are great for removing surface stains or make-up smudges.

Advantages of having a hat custom designed? First of all, the hat fits! Moray tells us "many retail stores don't carry size runs in hats, and prefer to just offer a "one size fits most" hat. However, hats, similar to jeans and dresses, can come in full size runs from XS-XL." "Most people I see in hats are wearing hats too big for them. Many people who come to me for private fittings say "I don't look good in hats" generally speaking, this is because they have never had a hat fitted properly."

So now you know customizing your next hat based on your unique facial and body proportions, makes a huge



difference in how a hat fits. Not everyone looks great in a long brim hat just as not everyone looks great in a short brim hat. For all those interested in creating capsule wardrobes, a bespoke hat is a great investment. You will want a hat that speaks to your current garments and one that is compatible with your lifestyle. Instead of buying five random hats in random colors, invest in one good hat that fits most your needs in one piece. Less is more. Find out more at ninakuru.com

