

# STYLE

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## Knitting the Earth and crafters together

*Run by husband-and-wife fiber lovers, Yarn Passions focuses exclusively on importing organic and fair-trade yarns*

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Imported by Yarn Passions, some of Peru Naturtex's fair-trade cotton yarns are naturally colored in hues of olive, cream or tan.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



Yarn Passion skeins for sale at Booday.

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Left, above and below: Yarn Passions' eponymous label features colorful yarns made using non-toxic dyes by Kent Suarez.

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Hand-dyed sock yarn by Australian company The Yarn Cafe, one of the brands imported by Yarn Passions.

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Husband and wife Kent and Anita Suarez (張綺樺) both know how to spin a good yarn. But when Kent spins a yarn, he literally spins yarn — with wool roving on drop spindles. Anita began knitting and crocheting three years ago and now teaches both crafts.

Last year, Anita became frustrated with the lack of organic, hand-dyed yarns for sale in Taiwan.

So the Suarezes did what every fiber lover dreams about and launched their own yarn company last summer.

Fittingly called Yarn Passions (愛毛線), the company specializes in importing yarn harvested, prepared and spun using environmentally friendly practices. Their current lineup features luxury fibers like buttery merino, lofty Peruvian cotton and velvety baby alpaca. Kent also hand-dyes yarn for Yarn Passions' own label.

"In Taiwan, people tend to think that organic is only food," says Anita. "But the fact is we can be organic while

we are doing what we like, too."

Booday (磨菇) and Earth Tree (地球樹), a fair-trade goods store, recently began carrying products imported by Yarn Passions. The company also sells yarn through its Web site from an international lineup of suppliers, including Japan's Mother Earth, Australia's The Yarn Cafe and Woolganic, Trelliske Organic in New Zealand and Peru Naturtex Partners. The latter is also labeled fair trade by FLO-CERT, an inspection and certification organization.

"We were particularly interested in Peru because of the social organization that works with farmers there to make sure that they have a sustainable source of income other than growing drugs, for example, and to make sure that the cooperatives and the indigenous people get fair pay for what they do," says Kent.

Mother Earth, which enjoys a cult following among crafters in Japan, dyes yarns using plant materials like herbs,



Anita, left, and Kent Suarez share a love of working with fiber and a commitment to animal welfare and the environment.

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acorns and tree bark. Trelliske Organic, a farm that supplies wool and meat, focuses on humane animal husbandry.

"We are animal welfare volunteers, so we also care about how animals are treated," says Anita. In addition to

their four pet cats (also yarn lovers), the Suarezes are also currently fostering three stray kittens.

Kent uses low-impact dyes and non-toxic mordants (substances used to fix dye in fiber) for Yarn Passions' eponymous label. He has created variegated color ways with coffee bean grounds discarded by Starbucks and tea leaves; he also wants to start growing plants that can be used to produce pigments, including marigolds and onions, on the couple's balcony.

"I like making things from scratch, no matter what it is. I'm the kind of person who would not just want to cook a meal, but want to make it from scratch and grow the vegetables on my balcony and so on," says Kent. He adds: "If there were a sheep farm nearby I'd be out there shearing the sheep."

All of Yarn Passions' dyeing is done in the Suarezes' kitchen and bathroom. Kent first re-skeins and binds the yarn before scouring it to remove natural waxes and oil from the fiber, presoaks

it to remove air bubbles and then places the yarn in a carefully mixed dye bath that is kept simmering for an hour until the color is absorbed.

Kent and Anita usually glean inspiration for their yarns from artwork, but some Yarn Passions colors are the result of happy accidents. Hummingbird, which mixes green, russet, cream and tan hues, was the result of a dye bath that separated into two different colors.

While one of Yarn Passions' specialties is colorful hand-dyed yarn (in addition to Kent's creations, they also sell variegated skeins from the Yarn Cafe), the Suarezes are also excited about cotton with naturally occurring pigment.

"Most people only know of white cotton, but naturally colored cotton is making a resurgence among knitters globally," says Kent.

Peru Naturtex Partners' Pakucho Original 100% Organic Natural Color Cotton yarn ranges from sandy browns

to soothing creams and olive greens. Unlike dyed yarns, naturally colored cotton won't fade or bleed; certain colors darken when washed.

In addition to eventually opening a studio for Anita's classes and Kent's dyeing, the Suarezes hope to expand their company, import yarns in higher volume so they can bring prices down, and increase the number of outlets that carry their products. Anita plans to develop educational seminars about organic and fair-trade fibers with Earth Tree.

"Of course we are a business, we want to make a little bit of money, but we also want to educate people that we are responsible for the environment, that we have to take care of the environment and also the animals," says Anita.

To order yarn or arrange a class with Anita, visit Yarn Passions' Web site (in Chinese and English) at [tw.myblog.yahoo.com/yarnpassions-yarnpassions](http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/yarnpassions-yarnpassions)