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Traditional Weavers Of Guatemala: Their Stories, Their Lives



Synopsis

Against the backdrop of Guatemala, this book presents portraits of artisans working in the ancient traditions of the Maya paired with insights into the creation of the textiles and the events that have affected their work. Weaving, spinning, and basket making have sustained the Maya economically and culturally against the pressures of change and a 36-year civil war that decimated their population. Their persistence in continuing traditional art has created some of the loveliest, most colorful textiles the world has ever known. Artisans share their personal histories, hopes, and dreams along with the products of their hands and looms. Their stories show determination in the face of unimaginable loss and hardship which instill an appreciation for the textiles themselves and for the strong people who create them.

Book Information

Paperback: 152 pages

Publisher: Thrums Books (September 1, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0983886075

ISBN-13: 978-0983886075

Product Dimensions: 10 x 0.5 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (16 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #652,821 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 inÂ Books > History > Americas > Central America > Guatemala #108 inÂ Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Mayan #262 inÂ Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Crafts & Hobbies > Needlecrafts & Textile Crafts > Weaving

Customer Reviews

This book is wonderful - so intimate and engaging. The photographs complement the words perfectly. The stories are enchanting and inspiring. Local words and textile terms are easily incorporated and explained. I felt as if I were in the room with the authors and artisans, listening to each of them tell their stories. A helpful feature is that pages explaining the history of Guatemala are interspersed with the artisans' stories. The flavor of Guatemala comes through so well. Especially fine was the inviting introduction - lots of information, simply told. It was a cozy time of getting to know the authors, a perfect set-up for going with them on the journey that follows. Clearly they had more than ample expertise, heart and the sense of adventure needed to undertake this venture.

Stunning photographs of Guatemalans in their traditional dress illustrate exquisite examples of fiber art. In this book you will meet seemingly ordinary people who have demonstrated extraordinary courage and conviction. Hardships are interwoven with stories of laughter and joy, along with commitment to family and dedication to their art. I'll definitely share this book when I talk about my trips to Guatemala. Friends who have an interest in fiber art or Maya art and culture will love it. People who value inspiring stories will cherish it. I am deeply impressed by the Guatemalans who shared their lives and the respectful framework in which they are presented.

I have just finished my third reading of this beautiful book. The first reading was to devour the stunning photos and breeze through the stories of 20 traditional artisans, reading for story line. The second reading was to slowly savor the beauty of Guatemala, of the artisans and of the textiles so clearly captured in Joe Coca's photos that fill this book. I read to deeply feel and let myself be moved by the sensitively told stories of people's lives and their crafts as shared with the authors, Guatemalan Teresa Cordón and weaver Deborah Chandler. In between and ongoing I've taken the buffet approach; I flip through the book only looking for photos of working hands, or faces, or landscape, or a certain textile technique. With a more careful reading of the text and ongoing examination of the pictures I am understanding many things about the textiles and the weavers that I missed the first time. It is a book to be savored. Between the stories of the artisans are very helpful sidebars about Guatemalan cultures and history. The book designer should be credited too because the photo layout and sidebars complement and help clarify the stories. There are thoughtful little touches like the end pages with glossary and index printed on paper of a slightly different colored so they can be found quickly. This beautiful book will bring pleasure to anyone who loves Guatemala, or traditional textiles, or beautiful photos, or preservation of diverse cultures.

I'm not a weaver, or any other kind of textile artist. You probably are, or you wouldn't be looking at this book. But even if you're not, if you like stunning photography and engaging, informative stories about interesting people and their art, you'll like Traditional Weavers of Guatemala. When I started thumbing through a copy, the lush photography by Joe Coca grabbed me and pulled me into the book. After several minutes of indulgence, I started to get curious about who those people were and what they were doing. So I started to read the stories. The book comprises vignettes about the people who create the distinctive Guatemalan textile art - weavers mostly, but also dyers, spinners, and others. Each story is partly about techniques and other

technical information from the artisans, which mostly went over my head, and partly about the people themselves – “ the struggles and adventures that shaped their lives and informed their art – “ which captivated me. You’ll want to read about Antonio Ramirez Sosof, who had to give up his job as a lumberjack to avoid a guerrilla war, only to become a self-taught embroiderer whose work has been sold around the world. Then there’s Susana Lopez, who left home as a child to avoid an arranged marriage and became a successful entrepreneur in weaving and farming. There are 20 stories like these – “ little capsules of human strength, hope, and achievement – “ plus many short articles about Guatemalan culture, history. Chandler and Cordon obviously know their way around textile arts, and around Guatemala as well. Their informal, conversational style makes for an enjoyable read. While the book contains plenty of useful information for those who know a warp from a weft, it is not a ‘how to’ manual, so you won’t get bogged down in step-by-step instructions. On the other hand, even I found myself learning something about fabric crafts.

This is a book that will remain a treasured part of my library. Though their words and pictures authors Deborah Chandler and Teresa Cordon and photographer Joe Coca not only stunningly portray 20 Guatemalan artists, but in so doing teach us not only about Mayan and Guatemalan history and culture, but also about the technicalities of weaving, spinning, embroidery and basketmaking, all in terms understandable to the lay person. The glossary was also very useful. The lives and aspirations of these women and men will stay with me for a long time. The artists have managed to overcome so much to create such elegant beauty. I’ve already given two copies of this book as gifts and I’m sure I will continue to have it as a favorite gift item for a long time to come. I also found it very useful to read before my upcoming trip to Guatemala so that I can become a more educated consumer of textiles when I am there.

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