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Essentials

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A HELPING HAND

Peruvian fashion brand Ankura accents style with sustainability

By **Sahar Khan**

When Peruvian entrepreneur Gustavo Espinoza was a college student, he interned with Geográfico de Cuencas Hidrográficas, an NGO that helped local farming communities in Northern Peru develop business plans to capitalize on their labor. That emotionally fulfilling experience stayed with Espinoza, now 33, who, in 2015, combined his entrepreneurial skills with altruism and launched Ankura, a high-end fashion brand with an ethical twist.

The Lima-based label is a study in responsible luxury. Espinoza uses only eco-friendly cotton, mulberry silk and baby alpaca—the latter, considered to be the most sumptuous of the alpaca strands, is sheared using an ancient Incan process that doesn't harm the animal. "After I finished my MBA in 2009, I was traveling around Peru and I learned that 80 percent of Peruvian alpaca is exported," says Espinoza. "I realized that if our artisans had easier access to working with alpaca it would provide a higher monetary value for them, and, therefore a higher quality of life."

The garments are crafted at one of two Lima workshops run by indigenous Andean families who use age-old manual weaving machines. The resulting debut collection, designed by Katia Luyo, a finalist in a design contest sponsored by Lima Fashion Week, is the aptly named Andean Mod I, which features dresses and separates that, while hinting at their Incan

heritage with geometric patterns, stay contemporary with clean lines and a subdued color palette threaded with occasional pops of color.

Espinoza centers Ankura around the Artisan Project, an initiative he introduced to help the Cantagallo community, a group of about 250 indigenous Shipibo families from the Amazon who left the forest 15 years ago to pursue better opportunities in Lima. But life in the capital hasn't been much easier for the Shipibo, who live adjacent to a garbage dump and support themselves by selling traditional Amazonian crafts. "Because of where they live, the families suffer from health problems as well as a lack of educational opportunities for their kids, who have to help them sell their wares in the streets," says Espinoza.

He employs 10 families from the community to create classic Shipibo-style bracelets handcrafted from Peruvian materials like Achira seed, baby silk (a mix of baby alpaca and mulberry silk) and silver 950. All proceeds from bracelet sales go toward a healthcare fund for the children of Cantagallo. "I get satisfaction in seeing that I create some value for these families," says Espinoza. "You see it in their faces, how proud they are of their work, of helping their kids and each other. Ankura helps them fulfill the reason they moved to Lima." ankurabrand.com

