

A store full of stories

Join the fair-trade movement at SiS International



Leslie Klipsch

These whimsical recycled-pop-can sculptures sold at SiS in Davenport are eco-friendly and fun.

BY LESLIE KLIPSCH

Perhaps it's the English major in me that first fell in love with SiS International Fair Trade Shop, a charming Davenport store where every single item on display has a captivating story.

The sweet, hand-sewn dolls in the back of the store are made by South African women widowed by AIDS who are able to make a dignified living through their craft. The brightly colored iPod cases hanging just inside are made out of recycled rice bags and sewn by rescued victims of human trafficking. The profits generated by the lovely greeting cards on display help support the Rwandan children orphaned by AIDS or genocide who made them. Each item purchased at SiS comes with literature explaining its fascinating origin, and Becke Dawson, the store's owner, can fill in whatever the label might lack.

Ms. Dawson has an interesting story as well. Over the last decade, she spent considerable time in India, traveling to be with her husband, who was employed there. Stuck in New Delhi traffic one hot day, her heart ached for the women she witnessed trying to make a living for their families by standing atop huge boulders and breaking rock with a hand pick.

"They were building their first interstate. It was over 100 degrees. I heard the 'tick, tick, tick' of a hand pick and looked up to see three women in

saris making gravel by hand. And to think they were the lucky ones that day. They had jobs ...” Ms. Dawson’s voice trails off as she recounts the moment.

Soon she discovered the fair-trade movement and educated herself about providing the link between beautiful, handcrafted products made by oppressed artisans and savvy consumers searching for unique, worldly style. She saw that fair trade offers a dignified solution to abject poverty, inequality and even human trafficking, and in August of 2011, she opened an oasis of ever-evolving international style right here in the Quad-Cities.

“We’re really all alike, which is why I named the store SiS — Sisters in Spirit. Selling viable, wonderful fair-trade products

is one way in which something can be done,” Ms. Dawson says in a determined tone.

According to the Fair World Project, an organization that promotes organic and fair-trade practices, the fair-trade movement shares “a vision of a world in which justice and sustainable development are at the heart of trade structures and practices, both home and abroad, so that everyone through their work can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood.”

The market-based social movement has certain production standards that must be upheld. For example, child and slave labor cannot be used in the production of any fair-trade-certified product. Producers, who are paid fair wages in advance of production, must be mindful of resources. The results of

you deserve...
CUSTOM

J. Marie Interiors

Hours:
Mon.-Fri.
10am-5pm

708 18th Avenue ~ Moline 309-762-2909
www.jmarieinterior.com

You are cordially invited to

OUR BIG FAT GREEK FESTIVAL!

Opa! 2 days of food, dancing & fun!

Friday, Sept. 21 ♦ Saturday, Sept. 22
11 a.m. – 11 p.m.

St. George Greek Orthodox Church
At the corner of 30th Street and 31st Avenue in Rock Island. Call 786-8163 for more information.

Admission \$2
Kids under 12 admitted free!
Carry-out window for Greek food to go!

Find us on facebook

Sponsored by:



Leslie Klipsch
Kantha art gained popularity when Julia Roberts carried a chic Kantha hobo bag in the movie 'Eat, Pray, Love.' Such chic, socially conscious style abounds at SiS.

these practices, as anyone who steps into SiS will quickly conclude, are unique, creative, and beautifully crafted products.

“You really have to experience fair trade to appreciate it,” Ms. Dawson says as she shows me a gorgeous display of Ecuadorian fused-glass art. “Many people have heard about it, but have never been exposed to it. When you walk into the front door of SiS, and you see the products and reach out to touch them, you immediately understand the quality. The quality is always fabulous.”

Ms. Dawson says she finds recent growth in the fair-trade industry inspiring. SiS stocks Shona sculptures from Zimbabwe; bone and olive-wood bowls and utensils from Kenya; rice-bag purses and accessories from Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia; as well as apparel from Maggie’s Organics, just a state away in

Wisconsin. She has enjoyed seeing the groups she has worked with over the years come up with new products, knowing it is a sign that their businesses are growing, and lives are being changed for the better. This growth is buoyed by conscious consumers armed with increasingly informed purchasing power.

Walk into SiS and expect to find beautiful, high-quality products; walk out feeling satisfied that your purchase mattered in some small way. As Ms. Dawson says, SiS is a store full of stories. Stories full of hope, dignity and, I might add, great globe-trotter style.

Ms. Dawson’s fair-trade favorites

After much prodding, Ms. Dawson tells me that she is partial to Kantha art, a folk art in which unique patterns and motifs are embroidered onto remnants of worn garments. Kantha originated in Bangladesh and West India and is still practiced today. Ms. Dawson says she fell in love with Kantha during her time in India and continues to appreciate the hand-stitched belts, scarves, bags, purses, blankets and throws. Each is made out of richly hued recycled saris, and the result is both functional and fashionable.



Leslie Klipsch
SiS is filled with attractive accessories that make great gifts for loved ones.

My fair-trade favorites

Besides the beautiful Indian textiles (in addition to the lovely Kantha art, SiS has gorgeous batik and hand-stamped table linens), there is an irresistible children's section tucked into the corner of the store. I love everything from the cozy cotton and felted-wool baby booties made by women in Guatemala to the jubilant recycled-pop-can instruments and animal sculptures made by African artisans.

Why you should go

Consider SiS your go-to gift shop. The colorful store is bursting with options for everyone from your best friend (delicate butterfly-wing earrings from Peru) to your teenage daughter (an embroidered clutch from

Guatemala) to your next-door neighbor (a whimsical soap stone sculpture from Kenya). Even your hard-to-shop-for father will enjoy a bar of fair-trade dark chocolate and a pound of Singing Rooster Haitian Coffee, or a Dopp kit made from recycled tire tubes. Not only will friends and family appreciate the thoughtful gifts, but they're bound to appreciate the far-reaching effect of their enjoyment.

When you should go

SiS International Shop is located at 108 E. 2nd St., Davenport. Store hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.



www.charmqc.com

Charm
BOUTIQUE

Tuesday - Thursday 11am-6pm
Friday 10am-5 pm • Saturday 10am-4 pm

563.332.1333

2509 53rd Avenue • Bettendorf, IA 52722



The Quad Cities' Best Breakfast!

Every Saturday and Sunday
starting at 8:00 am

SYMPOSIUM
Café

(563) 355-1070 • 4609 East 53rd Street #107 • Davenport, IA

September 12 • GOLD BOOK 9