

Leather
Lampshade

City of Miracles

By Payal Khandelwal

What started as a simple collaborative project in 2010 between two Netherlands based cousins has now become an important initiative — 'City of Miracles' is shaping up the lives of the *Pardeshi* community in Mumbai, India. The 'City of Miracles' collection was recently displayed at IMM Cologne 2013, the international furnishing show and their product Paper Vase Cover won the Interior Innovation Award at the event.

Pepe Heykoop had just graduated from the design academy Eindhoven in Netherlands when his cousin Laurien Meuter founded the Tiny Miracles Foundation. Tiny Miracles is a charitable organization which aims at the upliftment of the *Pardeshi* community in India, which consists of about 800 people living in the red light district of Mumbai. Talking about how the project started, Heykoop says, "She (Meuter) was looking for someone who could teach new skills to the community in Mumbai and I was looking for a team to self produce some of my designs. That's where the two worlds collided and our collaboration was set."

Leather Lampshade was the first product that came out of this interesting collaboration, followed by other products like Matka Vase, Paper Vase Cover, a lamp shade called 'Bamboo Diamond' and Copper Lampshade. "The *Pardeshi*

Laurien Meuter and
Pepe Heykoop

Pardeshi women
working on Copper
Lampshades.

community people are traditionally skilled cane workers. They can execute that skill with their eyes closed. The aim is to teach them how to make two new products every year," says the Dutch designer.

Interestingly, the intricate Bamboo Diamond was executed with the people from the community who did not know how to count. Post the project, however, they can. "Since the people we are working with are getting better each time, I am getting better in finding out the 'recipes' to execute new designs with them," he says.

One of such 'recipes' that he came up with is the Copper Lampshade which is specifically for the mothers in the community. "They are basically running the community and their family. They take care of the household, children and have to cook. However, whenever they have a few spare hours they can work on one segment of the copper lampshade at home and by the end of the day, when all the 13 segments are ready, they can be assembled in the workshop to make a lampshade." There are products which don't require complicated skills, Paper Vase Cover for instance, and thus, everybody from the community can participate in their production.

Most of the products are made out of waste materials. *Matka* vases, for example, involve recycling of old *matkas* (traditional Indian water carriers) and old discarded scraps of leather (waste material from the furniture industry). For Paper Vases, empty bottles are utilized. The Copper Lampshade is made of bamboo slices held together by copper wires stripped from old electricity cables.



Matka Vases



Leather
Lampshade

When asked, what is the kind of response that Heykoop has got for this collection commercially, he says, "The moment people get to know the vision of this production, the concept of giving the producers a face, teaching them skills, helping them with both healthcare and education through the Foundation, clients fall in love with our way of doing this."

By the end of 2020, 'City of Miracles' hopes to make the *Pardeshi* community self sustained and to increase the income of each adult family member from less than 0.75 euros to 8 euros per day (around Rs 574).

We hope to see more interesting designs and more development for the community as the collaboration goes on. If you want to learn how to make your own paper vase, Heykoop is generous enough to share the method with you on his website.

<http://www.pepeheykoop.nl/filter/bombay>



Paper Case Cover



Heykoop teaching
new skills to children
at a workshop.