

Indego Africa
Zine
Issue Four

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WHO WE ARE

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Indego Africa is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering artisan women in Africa through employment opportunities and education. Our mission? To help artisans lift themselves and their families out of poverty and become empowered businesswomen.

We partner with more than 1,100 women in Rwanda and Ghana to sell products that are designed by our Creative Director in New York City and handmade in Africa—combining traditional techniques, local materials, and amazing artisanal skill.

We provide our partners with access to the global market, and fair, consistent income for their artistry. We invest all of our profits from sales, coupled with grants and donations, into business education and vocational training programs for the artisans who handcraft our products and the youth in their communities.

Learn more at www.indegoafrica.org

THE CREATIVE ZINE

Welcome to our special creative issue of the Indego Africa Zine!

For the past ten years, we've been committed to creating a range of handcrafted products that bring beauty into the world through time-honored artistry and modern design. That's why we want to take you behind the scenes of some of our favorite photoshoots and give you an exclusive look at the design process behind our collections.

With a special feature on our creative trip to the Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda on page 14, this zine explores the inspiration behind our photography and product collections, and the vision we have for Indego's brand and artisan partnerships across Africa.

Featuring the children of our artisan partners at Ibaba Cooperative on page 8 and the granddaughters of the knitters at Handspun Hope Cooperative on page 4, our favorite shoots showcase the beautiful artistry and familial spirit inherent in all of the communities where we work.

Take a step into the design world of our Creative Director on page 28 and the branding strategy behind all things Indego with our Marketing and Brand Manager on page 24.

We're excited to share these personal perspectives and photo stories with you, and hope you feel inspired to tap into your own creativity!

Enjoy the beautiful images that lie ahead!

Sincerely,
The Indego Africa Team

PHOTO FEATURE: HANDSPUN KNITS FOR KIDS

LOCATION: MUSANZE, RWANDA



This photoshoot was one of the most enjoyable and breathtakingly beautiful shoots we've ever done.

At the foot of Rwanda's gorgeous Virunga Mountains lies the organic sheep farm of our partners at Handspun Hope Cooperative and True Vineyard Ministries. Veiled in a grey mist, the mountains served as an enchanting backdrop to the soft, muted, autumnal colors of the knits. Our models, the granddaughters of the knitters behind the collection, giggled as they chased sheep, lambs, and fluffy angora bunnies across the field.

This shoot was for our first full knitwear collection for kids, and we were absolutely blown away by the way it came together. The soft rain and fog that fell on the landscape added a special, dreamlike element to the day.

Take a peek at some of our favorite photographs from the day and prepare to have your breath taken away by the beauty, joy, and magic of our handspun knit shoot.



PHOTO FEATURE: THE IZI COLLECTION

LOCATION: RUTONGO, RWANDA



Our artisan partners' workshop at Ibaba Cooperative in Rutongo, Rwanda is, in a word, idyllic. Set atop one of Rwanda's one thousand rolling hills, it feels like a calm, breezy oasis from the bustling city of Kigali. With lush greenery and tropical pink flowers surrounding the space, the embroiderers sit barefoot on a blanket in the grass. With one peek over their shoulder, you are taken by the skill and heartfelt attention to detail in their work.

Indego's clothing collection for kids, made by the artisans at Umutima Cooperative in Nyambirambo, Rwanda has been a best-seller for years. We wanted to enhance this line by incorporating the beautiful hand-embroidery of Ibaba Cooperative.

Introducing the Izi Collection- a capsule collection of heirloom pieces to accompany our hand-embroidered bonnet collaboration with Briar Handmade.

Featuring the daughters of the embroiderers themselves, this photoshoot captures the talent, joy, and pride of a group of mothers working together to create beautiful, handmade pieces.

Take a peek at why we are so head over heels for the ladies (and girls!) of Ibaba!





**CREATIVE PROJECT FEATURE:
#WITHREFUGEES**

**LOCATION:
MAHAMA REFUGEE CAMP, RWANDA**

With Deirdre King & Brittany Barb



Last year, Indego launched an innovative partnership with UNHCR to provide 50 women refugees from Burundi, now living at the Mahama Refugee Camp in neighboring Rwanda, with vocational and educational training.

Our project at Mahama is focused on providing skills to and building opportunities for the women of the Akeza Cooperative. By employing these women in traditional craft and linking them to our market production, we are providing sustainable income-generating opportunities for female refugees and their families. We are looking beyond the camp and rooting their futures – and our wishes for their futures – in a combined skillset of craft + knowledge.

This photography project stems from a commitment to positive representation. These photographs aim to portray refugee women in a way that reflects courage and optimism in the face of their current challenges. As present and serious as the issues and tensions are within a refugee camp, we wanted to showcase an alternative theme: hope for the future. Having been granted access to the camp for this photography project for only a few hours at

a designated time and day, we could not wait for the best light, or the best season, or the best moment to capture the best image. But we, like these women, were hopeful. With a little searching, we were able to capture the inherent beauty underlying the rows of tents and dusty roads.

What was the inspiration and intention behind the project?

Deirdre: When we started working with refugee artisans, we knew we were working on a special project but found that we struggled to tell the story of these women, their displacement, and their present lives with just words. While in many ways their lives mirrored those of our current Rwandan and Ghanaian partners, their lives were touched and scarred in ways that were unique to them and to refugee communities worldwide. We wanted to tell that story in a way that went beyond pencil and paper, and decided that we had the tools to do it visually – through Brittany’s beautiful photography and the aesthetic vision of our company.

What kind of preparation went into making this photoshoot and project so successful? What did the behind-the-scenes



process look like at the camp?

Deirdre: Lots and lots of people (literally) on both sides of the world. Gaining access to the Mahama Refugee Camp was a huge challenge since we were on a tight schedule and our mission that day went beyond our usual day-to-day camp activities. We also needed to create the project vision and figure out how to bring that to life in a place we hadn’t spent very much time in and that came with its own unique set of challenges.

We asked the women to sew their own outfits using fabric we had gifted them – but didn’t see the end results until the day of the shoot (luckily, they did an amazing job!).

We wanted to create a pink raffia umbrella to stand out in the camp amongst the tents and crowds of people, but we didn’t get the right materials in time and ended up lugging an umbrella with about 25 coats of spray paint from New York City to Rwanda. Our team in Rwanda and the staff at the camp helped us with crowd control as the beautiful artisans in their matching outfits carried a huge pink umbrella across the grounds. I wish everyone could see what it looked like a few feet away from the photography reach. There was a ton of excitement and commotion – it was pretty unbelievable that the images came out the way they did!

In the end, while the preparation



and execution seemed like marathons, the post-production and editing processes that lay ahead for Brittany and us as a team ended up being just as stressful! Once we exited the camp gates, we only had the images we had captured that day; there were no redos or reshoots. That was a heavy load to carry back to the States. We knew we had to make this project work from only the content we collected in those few, short but unforgettable hours.

When you were shooting—how much of it was instinctual versus planned?

Brittany: In general, we always like to go into photoshoots with a “plan,” knowing full well that almost none of it will come out like we originally intended. I had only been to the Mahama Refugee Camp one other time before, so planning out every detail ahead of time would have been nearly impossible. We knew that we wanted to capture the strength and power of these women, and I think we did that in a very natural, “go with the flow” way.

What were the biggest challenges you encountered at the camp?

Brittany: One big challenge for me

was the number of people inadvertently getting in the shots or blocking my camera. It was definitely a bit chaotic at times. It might not look like it from the images, but behind me were often hundreds of children and adults wondering why we were walking around with a huge pink umbrella. We didn’t exactly blend in!

What was your most memorable moment from this photoshoot?

Brittany: My most memorable moment was shooting “Print 04.” (pictured right) Going in, I knew I really wanted to get an aerial shot, but I wasn’t able to get a ladder. The ladies at Mahama helped me carry out a table from the workspace and a stack of plastic chairs to photograph the women on the ground. As I climbed up the table and onto the chairs, the women held onto my legs and kept the table and chairs steady to make sure I didn’t fall. It felt like a physical manifestation of what we had been working toward for years, empowered women empowering women.

What did the photo editing process look like after you left the camp?

Brittany: After we left the camp,



we spent a few months editing, reviewing, editing again, and then starting all over again. It can be an overwhelming process, but for me there is no real rhyme or reason to it. I chose photographs that resonated with me and represented Indego and our artisan partners at Mahama in a strong, beautiful way.

Do you have a favorite photograph from the collection? What's the inspiration behind it?

Brittany: I do, it's "Print 04." I had the idea for this photograph in mind after leaving the Mahama Refugee Camp for the first time. I spent a very long time working on that image; I just felt really connected to everything in that moment. For me, the image is an abstract representation of community, and that is something that remains at the heart of Indego's work with refugees and artisans across Africa.

Deirdre: My favorite photographs are "Print 01" (pictured page 18) and "Print 02." (pictured bottom right) We really wanted to have some large-scale photos as part of the exhibit and I felt like these came out better than I ever could have imagined from both a visual and storytelling

perspective. For me, both of these images embody exactly what we wanted viewers to take away from the project- optimism and hope for the future.

What do you want viewers to take away from this project?

Brittany: It's important to me that a shift in perspective is taken away from this series, even if it's just the slightest change. It is so easy to put people in buckets, but every story is different. A refugee is more than a refugee. We hope these photos allow people to gain some insight into these women's lives and identities - not just as refugees, but also as craftspeople, mothers, friends, decision makers, and leaders.

Deirdre: The prints tell a story of solidarity, empowerment, and bright hope for the future. We believe these images show the peaceful power of women and the silent strength found in communities of women worldwide. We selected these moments to share because they not only capture the beauty of these women, their group, and their camaraderie, but they also show these women's search to find their own beauty and identities amidst an uncertain future.



BRANDSTRATEGY: SPOTLIGHT ON PHOTOGRAPHY

With Brittany Barb, Marketing & Brand Manager



What inspires your photography for Indego Africa?

I'm constantly inspired by all of the vibrant colors of Rwanda and Ghana. Whenever I get the opportunity to travel to either country I am left with months of endless inspiration. When I'm in New York, I look for inspiration in our products (how could you not find inspiration sitting in a room filled with pink baskets!?) - and throughout the city. There are so many little things that I find daily inspiration in!

What is one of your favorite photography

projects and why?

The #WithRefugees project was one of the most challenging photo-shoots we've ever done in terms of the actual location and editing process, but it was one of the greatest and most memorable experiences I have ever had.

The challenges were immense; Between the four hour journey to the camp and back, only being able to shoot for a few hours in a restricted area at noon, and the language and cultural barriers - the challenges were immense! But at the end of

the shoot it felt like we had really accomplished something big.

What is the best part about your job?

To be able to work for an organization that empowers women and has true, measurable impact is really a dream come true. I always knew I wanted to be in a creative field that benefited others, and somehow, I've found myself right in the middle of the perfect one. It is amazing to work for (and with) incredibly empowered women – it provides me with an endless amount of inspiration and hope. I get to spend my days working creatively for a company that I wholeheartedly believe in, and I don't think a lot of people get lucky enough to say that.

Describe your creative process when creating/executing a shoot or campaign.

My creative process is never the same. It's a lot of inspiration-gathering, shooting, re-shooting, editing, and re-editing!

How do you think photography has helped Indego Africa build a brand?

I think photography is a crucial part of building any brand (and an

increasingly crucial part of our daily lives). People are really visual and I love being able to showcase Indego's brand through bright, positive photography. It's so important to me that we treat the photography and storytelling of our products the same way that they were created, with time and thoughtfulness. Some of these items take weeks to make, passing through multiple hands before reaching completion. I really hope that level of care and dedication comes through in our products, photos, and overall brand aesthetic.



PRODUCT DESIGN: THE CREATIVE PROCESS

With Deirdre King, Creative Director



We've seen our product line and brand grow and change immensely over the past ten years. When Indego first started, we focused almost exclusively on simple, traditional home goods and accessories (baskets, coasters, tote bags). The artisans we partnered with were not used to sampling new products and working with different designs. When we decided to focus on building our brand and product line, it took almost a year for us to really figure out how production would work and how our partners' own creativity, vision, and designs would fit into that process.

Looking back at the first five years,

Indego's product line was driven exclusively by artisan capacity. Since we started focusing on growing our line and our team creatively (and working through the challenges involved in doing that!), Indego has begun to rely much more heavily on market opportunity and customer demand, as well as on our own brand vision and aesthetic, to shape our product offering. Our line is always evolving. Instead of fighting against shifting priorities and trying to fit ourselves into someone else's model, we take pride in our design, production, and marketing flexibility. It's what makes Indego work!

The design process looks different

for every product but always has the same creative spin behind it. The first thing we always start with is the artisan element itself. What can our partners make with the skills and materials they have? What will be a good fit for our brand aesthetically and will it showcase their artistry?

Whenever I'm seeking – or seeing – inspiration, these are the parameters at the front and center of my mind. From there, I focus on using color and pattern to tell a story while also showcasing the power of texture through neutrals. I want our products to feel happy, interesting, and well-made. We sell home goods, baby & kids décor and apparel, women's accessories, and art, so we always make sure our product line feels cohesive and collectable. What are the designs that would be able to tick all of these boxes while also following trends in the markets we serve?

The design process can feel sort of like a puzzle sometimes – and that's before we even start sampling! Once we have an idea that will work, I communicate with our production teams in Rwanda and Ghana, who then sit down and work with the artisans to see if the piece can come

to life the way we want through a traditional sampling process. From there, we review, redesign, and resample. Then, within a few weeks, months, or seasons, we have a new product. Being a part of this truly global design process is my favorite part of the job!

We make a conscious effort to ensure that all of our products tell the Indego story. We make so many different products and work with so many different artisans and handmade techniques that we don't want our brand vision to get lost. That's why it's important for us to offer cohesive yet unique products that you wouldn't be able to find just by visiting Ghana or Rwanda. The “design” element, which takes place in New York City, is just as essential to us as the handmade-in-Africa element. We think it's the combination of the two that makes us special. Perhaps it's clichéd to say, but we really are a lifestyle brand, and I want customers to feel like our product line evokes the feeling of walking into someone's home—someone with distinct (and good!) taste and vision. That's always my goal when designing for Indego!



I N D E G O A F R I C A ' S

IS ONE OF COLOR, TEXTURE

WE VALUE NATURAL FIBERS

WE WANT OUR PRODUCTS TO

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE.

A B O V E A L L ,

REPRESENT THE BEAUTY

THE VALUE OF SUPPORTING

THE GLOBE.

S I G N A T U R E S T Y L E

& ATTENTION TO DETAIL.

AND CREATIVE SHAPE, AND

SPEAK TO THE EASE OF USE IN

O U R P R O D U C T S

OF ARTISINAL CRAFT AND

HANDMADE WORK AROUND

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*Thank you for reading Issue Four of the
Indego Africa Zine!*

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