

Of prints and paisley

Appreciation for Indian textile work can be dated back to the 12th century, when its printed and dyed fabric received patronage from royal emperors around the world. As time passed and tastes evolved, traditional handmade work took a backseat to mechanised manufacturing. One of Rajasthan's most famous, labour-intensive technique—block printing—is a prime example of a traditional textile that once commanded global admiration and now lies on the brink of extinction. MARWAR unfolds a visual story of Jaipur's block printing and the champions who fight to revive and innovate this ancient art.

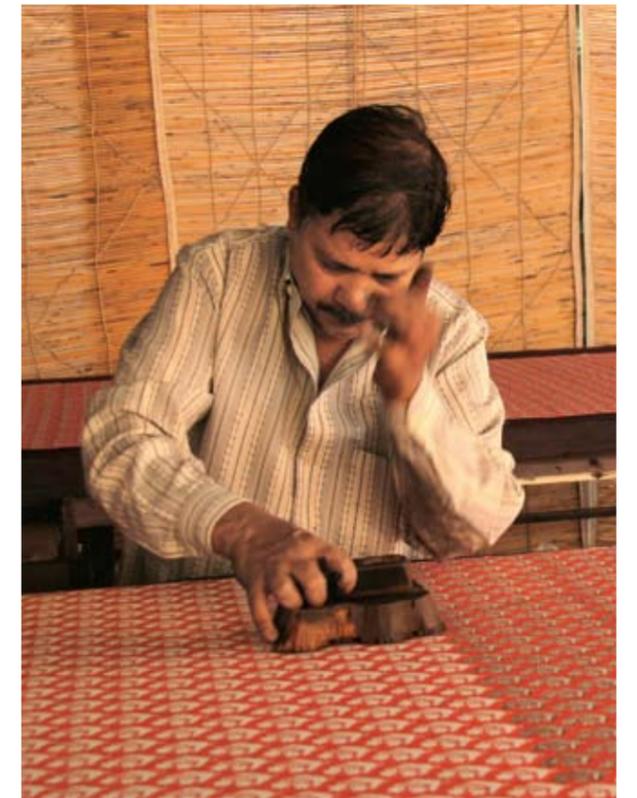
Photographs: CHARUKESI RAMADURAI

Inside a workshop where a machine is used for the 2000-year-old art of block printing



Though the art of block printing is said to have originated in China, once it reached Indian shores, it flourished in the South and the North-west. Rajasthan became a popular centre for block printing in the 18th century, with Sanganer and Bagru being the two villages where this art particularly flourished. Though decades have gone by, there is still a noticeable stability that can be observed in the designs from these regions. The reason is that the main group of people involved in block printing, the *Chhipa* community, believe in the tradition of passing down the secrets of this manual trade from parent to child so that the expertise remains within the family.

Freshly dyed cloth left to dry under the sun in Sanganer.

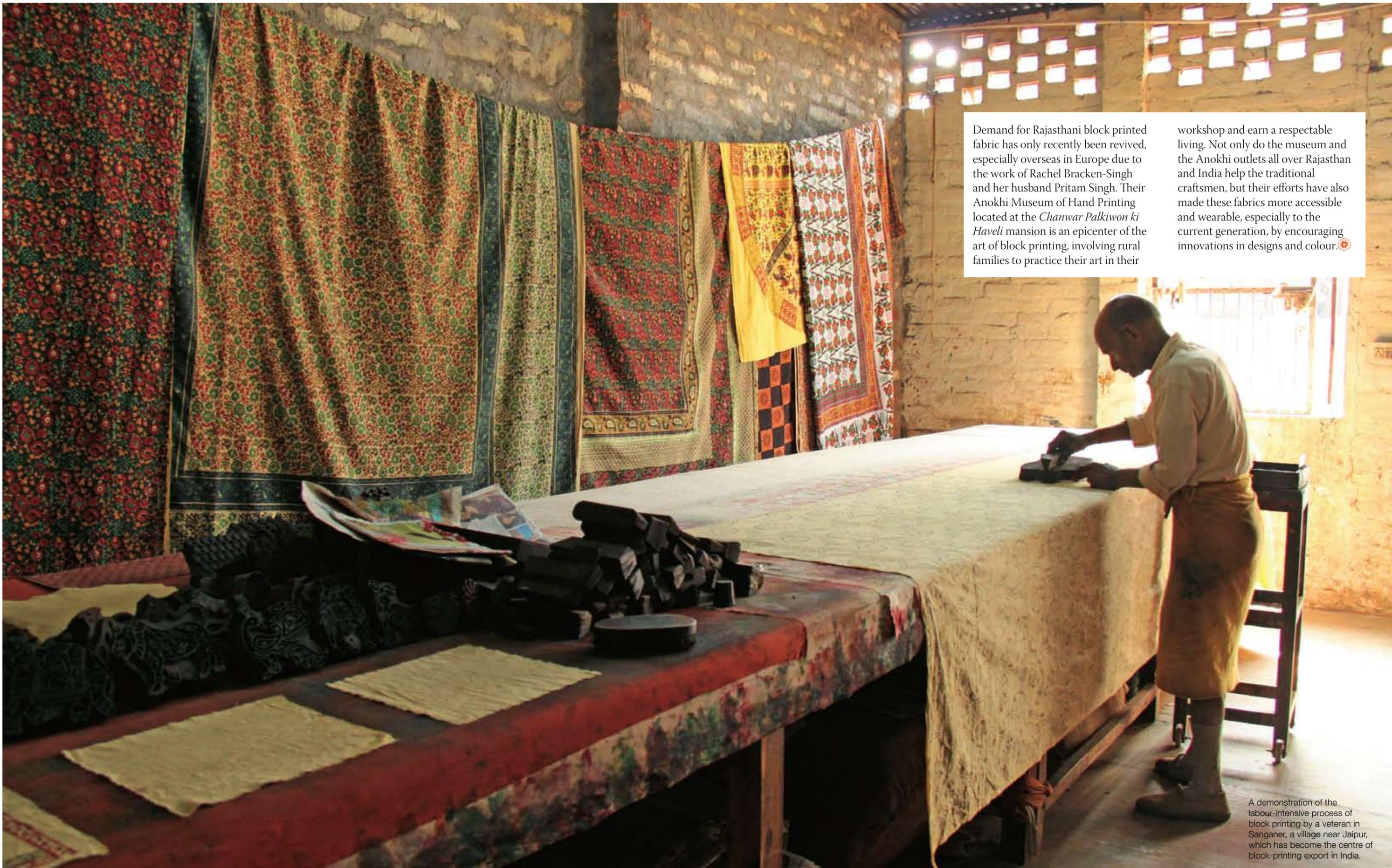


(From top left, clockwise): Local women working at the Anokhi factory in Jaipur who earn a sustainable livelihood because of the efforts of Rachel and Pritam Singh.

A printer at work at the Anokhi factory in Jaipur.

An artist at work at the *Chanwar Palkiwon ki Haveli*, using chemical-free vegetable dyes.

Even within these two regions, however, there are two distinct styles of print. Sanganer is known for its sombre, low tones and delicate lines. Finer designs of flowers like the poppy, rose and lotus, usually on a white background, are common. In contrast, Bagru printers use big and bold prints of flowers, buds and foliage, and the dyeing process produces a reddish black shade.



Demand for Rajasthani block printed fabric has only recently been revived, especially overseas in Europe due to the work of Rachel Bracken-Singh and her husband Pritam Singh. Their Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing located at the *Chanwar Palkiwon ki Haveli* mansion is an epicenter of the art of block printing, involving rural families to practice their art in their

workshop and earn a respectable living. Not only do the museum and the Anokhi outlets all over Rajasthan and India help the traditional craftsmen, but their efforts have also made these fabrics more accessible and wearable, especially to the current generation, by encouraging innovations in designs and colour. 🌞

A demonstration of the labour-intensive process of block printing by a veteran in Sanganer, a village near Jaipur, which has become the centre of block-printing export in India.