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Sissai: Ethical and beautiful, hand in hand

August 23, 2016

Agnes Rivera

An ethical jewelry company is the first of its kind in Peru, as they team up with mines certified by Fairmined.



Silver bracelet with Andean Opal (Image courtesy of Sissai)

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If you put the words *fair* and *mining* side by side, would you see much relation?

For those of us familiar with Peru's history (past and present) of informal mining, the phrase 'fair mining' would seem like an oxymoron.

Not many of us are aware however that it has in fact existed in Peru for the last few years and, as an added bonus, something beautiful has blossomed because of it.



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- Morphology: A natural blend of design and shop

Taking its name from the Quechua term for flourish, **Sissai** is an ethical jewelry brand founded and designed by Peruvian sisters, Pamela and Ximena Ceballos. They are the **first jewelers in Peru** to be licensed to work with national mines certified by **Fairmined**,

an international assurance label given to artisanal and small-scale miners that practice sustainability. This means: legal and formalized operations, promoting social development, environmental awareness, and overall improved work conditions. *For a more detailed reading of how Fairmined works, visit their [website here](#).*



Pamela and Ximena Ceballos, owners and designers of Sissai (Image courtesy of Sissai)

“Our alliance with Fairmined is not only to separate ourselves but to also combat illegal mining and those who benefit from it,” explains Ximena. “Fairmined is the way to turn all of this negative impact into something positive.”

This factor of consciousness and unwillingness to sacrifice quality and sustainability for material reasons is something the sisters agreed on from the start. Both continued to work on their respective careers (Ximena psychology, and Pamela marketing), brainstorming and building the idea of Sissai until it came to fruition in 2011. Only for the past two years have they both focused on the brand full-time.

Intrigued by the idea behind the concept of the sustainable brand (and, we have to admit, the raw, not overly-feminine pieces we saw online), *Living in Peru* visited the Sissai store last week. What we found was a tiny treasure chest just off of San Isidro’s high-end shopping avenue, Conquistadores, showcasing exquisite and unique pieces.



Quartz necklace (Image courtesy of Sissai)

“We love being able to interact and directly help our customers and see their reaction,” says Pamela, noting that they also sell in a few boutique shops in the capital city, such as Dedalo in Barranco. She tells us that they receive many foreign clients who are passing through Peru for a limited time, as well as Peruvian clients who return every now and then for those special occasions. “Many Peruvians are surprised to find out the array and diversity of the minerals native to Peru when they enter the store. And that’s what we want to do: We want to bring attention to the natural beauty in these Peruvian minerals.”

The certified mine they work with is in **Ayacucho**, and the beautiful gold and silver that derives from the dark depths lend a unique look to the brand’s annual collections. For the past few years Sissai has released collections inspired by different themes, such as 2014’s **Kene** (inspired by the Amazon), and 2015’s **Acqua**, influenced by the highly adaptable and vital element, water. This year they released their first gold collection.

The rocks that have come to give the aesthetic signature of Sissai come from all over Peru from

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various providers, the sisters tell us.



Oversized pyrite ring (Image courtesy of Sissai)

As they take us on a tour of the different collections, pointing to and naming all the foreign-sounding names of stones as if introducing me to family members, all I manage to take in is the rainbow of natural stones: light green the color of smooth avocado, bright blue like the water of a pristine lake, – even a black that looks like the darkest shade of night sky only to reveal a slight glimmer of eggplant purple if held in the correct light.

Although pieces are replicated (“not on a large scale,” assures Pamela), each **handmade** piece is naturally unique, as each stone has a different stroke of color and cut. For those who truly want something unlike any other, personalized pieces can be arranged.

And just like their pieces, the devotion the owners have for the core concept of Sissai as a brand really is unlike any other in Peru.

“Informal mining normally causes a lot of negative impact on nature, on people’s lives because they just do it. Miners just do it because they’re not aware of the consequences it has on others,” says Pamela. “With Fairmined we can teach the artisans that there’s a different way...and that’s our main goal, to share with people the importance of movements like Fairmined...it’s something that we think our country needs.”

Sissai

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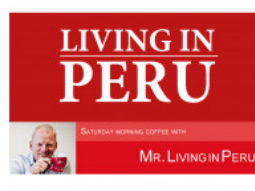
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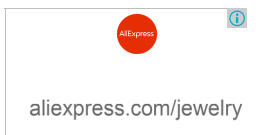
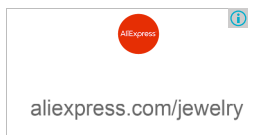
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