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# South of the border

Peru is the place for designers and brands to source stylish jewellery with a twist. By Laura McCreddie

**F**or most people, the description 'Peruvian jewellery' probably conjures up an image of the kind of pieces sold in the types of stores that seemed to be everywhere in the 1990s - shops pervaded by a smell of incense, where books on witchcraft filled the shelves and tie-dye never went out of fashion.

However, a clutch of brands is looking to change that perception, spearheaded by luxury ethical jewellery label Chavin.

"The idea of a Peruvian jewellery company came about when my brother brought back some of the most amazing handcrafted artisanal jewellery from Peru," says Chavin managing director Simon Ogilvie-Harris.

At the time, Ogilvie-Harris was working as a research analyst at an investment bank in the City with dreams of running his own business. The jewellery gave him the impetus he needed.

"I contacted the Embassy of Peru in London for a list of Peruvian jewellery designers and manufacturers and was on the next flight to Peru," he says.

Ogilvie-Harris's original plan was to work with jewellery companies in Peru and then promote them in the UK. However, what he soon realised was that in order to make a real difference he needed to think bigger.

"I realised that in order to make a real difference to the people of Peru and ethical jewellery, we needed to work with large-scale commercial supply chains and through this the idea of Chavin was born," he says.

## Nature and nurture

The brand takes its name from a civilisation that developed between 900 and 200 BC in the northern Andean highlands of Peru. One of its characteristics is nature-based iconography in which the deity of the supernatural world is represented through jaguars, which is referenced in the designs of the brand's first collection. The range was created by UK Jewellery Designer of the Year 2011 finalist Ana De Costa.

Chavin is not the only brand to take



*"Peru has stones that are very new to the UK, such as Andean opal"*

**Maria Helena Spector** Jewellery designer



**Chavin (above and top) is an ethically responsible brand that sources its materials from Peru**

its inspiration from Peru's rich cultural heritage. Sissai, the brand created by sisters Ximena and Pamela Ceballos, takes the Inca civilisation as its touchstone.

"It all started years ago, when we were at the beach," explains Ximena. "We collected some stones that were special in form and colour, perfect pieces for a necklace."

"Months later we visited the Sipan Museum in northern Peru. Several pieces of ancient Inca jewellery were being exhibited, all of them perfectly crafted in gold. We were amazed by the advanced technique developed by our ancestors thousands of years ago. That is when our love for jewellery was born."

The brand's pieces are geometric yet have a fluidity that makes them sculptural without being severe.

Pre-Columbian jewellery also inspired Maria Helena Spector, who designs jewellery under her own name and is native to Peru and lives in the UK.

"I am very influenced by Pre-Columbian jewellery and the architecture and landscapes of Peru," she says. "Blending this with my European influences makes an unusual combination."

Despite now being based in the UK, Spector supports her place of birth by still sourcing materials from Peru.

"It's a way of supporting my country's economy," she says. "Peru has stones that are very new to the UK, such as Andean opal, and stone cutting in Peru is passed from one generation to another. I can develop my own cuts and work with the best stone cutters who will cut each bead individually by hand for me to finish in my workshop."

## Feel-good factor

Giving back was something that was important to Ogilvie-Harris when he set up Chavin. He wanted ethics to be entwined in the fabric of the brand, in the same way Aveda operates in the beauty and haircare industries.

"Modern female consumers don't want to choose between ethics and





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***“Modern female consumers don't want to choose between ethics and aesthetics”***

**Simon Ogilvie-Harris**  
 Chavin

corporate social responsibility policy, which its manufacturer and exporter Arinsa also adheres to.

“We recognise that it is very difficult to be 100% ethical and commercial at the same time, but we have worked very hard with our supply chain to be as ethical as possible but with commercial capacity,” says Ogilvie-Harris.

A renewed interest in jewellery with a conscience, as well as a desire for something different, could well see these Peruvian brands becoming hot property on the UK scene. After all, its about time ethical jewellery ditched the tie-dye image and got a bit more Isabel Marant instead. ●

aesthetics,” he says. “They want both and that is what we are offering to consumers.”

Part of this is its partnership with SOS Children – the world's largest charity for orphans and abandoned children – and its Luz Y Vida project in northern Lima, which helps improve the economic situation of families in the area.

Chavin will work alongside SOS Children to teach single mothers to make commercial jewellery to help them secure an income so that they can support themselves and their children.

Ogilvie-Harris has also ensured that the metals used by the brand are bought from mines that have a strict

**Peruvian designer Maria Helena Spector's work (above) is inspired by pre-Columbian jewellery**



Sissai's pieces have been influenced by ancient Inca jewellery, and are generally geometric in style while still incorporating a sense of fluidity