

SARTORIAL SHIFT

THE UPCYCLED, HANDCRAFTED VISION OF ORENDA TRIBE
RESONATES WITH ETHICALLY MINDED SHOPPERS

WORDS BY **KRISTIN SCHARKEY** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ASHLEY LAPRADE**
LOCATION: **LAZY SKY RETREAT, JOSHUA TREE**

The first time I saw an Orenda Tribe poncho, it was draped over a door in Kime Buzzelli's vintage clothing shop, The End, in Yucca Valley. I was impressed by the tightness of the weave, the way the intricate handwork in its bright salmon-pink neckline settled right into the rest of the striped indigo. Completely repurposed, it and every Orenda Tribe piece is made with upcycled fabrics and trims from across the globe – think Bali, Morocco, Mexico and Argentina. “There’s just some energy, a catch to the older fabrics where it almost feels like you’ve got some sort of beautiful protection on,” founder Amy Yeung says. “They just feel different. There’s something about them when they get this beautiful age.” • You know those clothes that you love on their own, but then you get to know their maker and become even more obsessed? That’s how I feel about Orenda Tribe and Amy Yeung. • The brand started because of a shift – a pivot in the apparel designer’s career. For the past 10 years, Yeung has worked with active wear brands like Asics and Capezio through her Santa Ana design consulting firm, Lilacreative. But in 2014, she felt the need to decrease the amount of clothing creation she facilitated – and to focus on buying (and making) an upcycled wardrobe. She and her 16-year-old daughter, Lily (whose own pieces are also available at The End), had already exclusively worn vintage for two years.



She sews every piece herself – a full-circle harkening back to her Midwest upbringing with two grannies who taught her how to quilt and crochet. Already established in global textile circles, she purchases and restores the old fabrics before completing patchwork and ornamentation. Styles range from ponchos and pullovers to recently released nomad-hooded tunics made from Guatemalan handwoven plaids. In total, only 250 pieces have been made.

“It’s rescued, old souls,” Yeung says of the textiles. “It’s things that lived another life, really. It’s trying to renew them and put them together in a different way.”

Damaged velvet found in an old Los Angeles millinery shop, for example, might top an indigo poncho. “Things like that, some people would look at it as seconds or something they wouldn’t buy,” Yeung says of the velvet. “But to me, the beauty of the color and the way that it aged gracefully, I would have paid twice as much for it. Finding those things that fit untraditional fabric choices, that’s what I love is the eclectic blend.”

The brand also includes tipis as well as jewelry: bold, chunky pieces made with materials ranging from Turkish evil eyes and African glass to water buffalo horns hand-carved at Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. Yeung has also been repurposing 100-year-old wooden cattle amulets from Taos into necklaces. “Inside, there’s this tiny hole where they [put] a little piece of paper and scripture to protect the animal from evil spirits,” Yeung says.

“They’re really big, so somebody has to understand it to wear them,” she adds. “... I always wear really big amulets with the ponchos or with the different things that I make. I’m not really into small jewelry.”

Once Lily graduates from high school in two years, Yeung plans on moving to New Mexico so she can be “bouncing back and forth between LA and Taos, but shifting everything out there so I can eventually become Georgia O’Keeffe living in the desert doing my thing.” The 53-year-old designer, who is half Navajo, is working to establish production at Navajo Nation to “shift some of the small handwoven or the smaller batch, artisanal things you see happening in downtown LA to a reservation-made product versus sending it to Mexico to get made or sending it to other countries to get the handwork done.

“We can actually do things that shift the cycle of where things are at in the world and that’s the meaning of Orenda,” Yeung explains. “Everybody has that within them, that ability to do good and to make the shift and to make change. You just have to set down your intention and actually start doing it. That’s really my mantra. Every day, I’m trying to put time and effort into this because I know with that, it does shift the dynamic of what’s going out into the world of apparel.” 🌱



THE DETAILS ORENDA TRIBE

To learn more about the brand,
follow on Instagram @orendatribe.

Pieces are available locally
at The End, Yucca Valley
(55872 29 Palms Hwy.)

