

# (Hand) Made in America

## Artisans add individual touch to beautiful objects

BY DEBBIE CARLSON | Chicago Tribune



DANIELLE CHUTINTHRANOND

Each piece at Monsoon Pottery is designed and handmade by Danielle Chutintranond, who calls her pieces "Asian farmhouse." Her porcelain serving bowl in beetle green with geometric foot detail is microwave and dishwasher-safe, \$200, [monsoonpottery.com](http://monsoonpottery.com).



OAK STREET BOOTMAKERS

Oak Street Bootmakers founder and designer George Vlagos apprenticed at his father's shop, where he learned the craft of shoemaking from an early age. Oak Street Bootmakers footwear is hand-cut and -sewn using Horween leather. Each pair makes use of replaceable outsoles, a feature normally reserved for formal footwear, to ensure a lifetime of wear. Natural Dainite Trench Boot, \$462, [oakstreetbootmakers.com](http://oakstreetbootmakers.com).

Fleur'd Pins is a line of luxury lapel flowers to provide guys with that something extra to complete their look. Handcrafted in New York City, the line uses materials such as burlap and cork. From left, Cork & Gold Rose, \$125, and the Champion Carnation, \$75, made from neon yellow wool, the same material used for making official tennis balls, [FleurdPins.com](http://FleurdPins.com).



ANDREW WERNER/FLEUR'D

Los Angeles-based designer Hyun Yu designs and produces all of her work, making both wearable pieces and art for the home. Her Dots Ring Stand can be used as a stand-alone design or a functional piece for your rings. Each piece is made by hand and made to order out of brass, clay and felt. \$79, [hyworks.com](http://hyworks.com).



HYUN YU

Metalsmith Maranda Powers makes each piece by hand. Her Voyager jewelry collection is a minicollection embodying some of her favorite things: spacey vibes, bold designs and precise construction. Pictured, B'Elanna earrings, \$175, [powershandcrafted.com](http://powershandcrafted.com).



MARANDA POWERS



EDIE PARKER

Edie Parker's midcentury look harks back not only to the style of the time, but also to the postwar period of design innovation in the United States. A bespoke program allows customers to personalize their clutch by selecting the shape, color, clasp and font. Pictured, Jean Stars acrylic clutch in hot pink, \$1,395, [edie-parker.com](http://edie-parker.com).

Debbie Carlson is a freelance writer.

# 'Grown and sewn' goods get easier to find

BY DEBBIE CARLSON  
Chicago Tribune

During this July Fourth celebration, let your closet declare independence from foreign clothing by buying goods made in the U.S.

While some high-end companies like Brooks Brothers have always made clothing in the U.S., it's been difficult to buy American-made casual clothing because of the textile industry consolidation in recent decades, as several mills closed. But the industry didn't die completely, and now there's a renaissance of startup labels selling U.S.-made products — both clothing and home goods — where the focus is on high-quality U.S. craftsmanship priced competitively with imports.

For these sellers, having everything in the entire supply chain — or nearly all — be U.S.-based is an important part to supporting local communities. Several factors and macroeconomic trends make "grown and sewn in the U.S." possible: e-commerce lets small firms tell a story and sell directly to consumers who have an interest in natural fibers like cotton and wool, a willingness to invest in longer-lasting higher-quality goods and a desire to shop local.

Not surprisingly, many of these labels started because they couldn't find what they were looking for. At McIntosh, founder of Homegrown Cotton, was disappointed the better-quality polo shirts costing around \$80 or \$90 were imports.

He wanted to keep production as local as possible and guarantee it's only his cotton in every polo, so every step of the process is done in North and South Carolina. The shirt's final cutting and sewing happens 40 miles from his farm. (\$69, [www.homegrown cotton.com](http://www.homegrown cotton.com))



GIGFIRM

Jeans from Chicago's Dearborn Denim, whose factory is in the Garfield Park neighborhood. Women's and men's jeans prices start at about \$60, [www.dearborndenim.com](http://www.dearborndenim.com).



RAMBLERS WAY

Ramblers Way wool is crafted of worsted yarn, a carefully spun yarn that's free of the usual fiber ends that cause you to itch. Pictured on woman, wool jumpsuit, \$175; on man, Rambouillet Merino Wool ribbed turtleneck sweater, \$235, [ramblersway.com](http://ramblersway.com).

Taking a page out of the farm-to-table movement, Anna Brakefield and Mark Yeager, father-daughter owners of Alabama-based Red Land Cotton, call their bedding and towel brand a "farm-to-home" product. By growing and ginning their own cotton, they

create a higher-quality fiber, which is spun, woven and finished in South Carolina and Georgia before being sewn in their hometown. To differentiate their sheets from other luxury brands, they sent U.S. textile engineers samples of sheets from the 1920s to

recreate the quality and feel of heirloom sheets.

Their Madeline Gray Lace sheets (sheet set starts at \$230, [www.redlandcotton.com](http://www.redlandcotton.com)) are named after the family friend who donated those original 1920s sheets for testing.

Rob McMillian, founder



EMILY DORIO

Red Land Cotton grows its own cotton to produce luxury home decor items. Baby Nadine Quilts in white and natural colors or a classic ticking print, \$100, [redlandcotton.com](http://redlandcotton.com)

of Chicago-based Dearborn Denim, said when he started the company in 2016, he wanted to create an all-American apparel company that produced high-quality products at an affordable price to show that locally made goods don't have to be more expensive. Even though the manufacturing costs are higher in Chicago than using foreign products and labor, the e-commerce route helped keep costs down. His women's and men's jeans cost around \$60 ([www.dearborn denim.com](http://www.dearborn denim.com)), competitive with prices of jeans from The Gap and Levi's.

These labels' journey to retail hasn't been easy, whether it was finding who would segregate their cotton or offer smaller amounts of material, they said. Tom Chappell, founder of Ramblers Way, which offers organic wool and cotton clothing online ([www.ramblersway.com](http://www.ramblersway.com)) and does custom-made clothes in their shops in Maine and New Hampshire, said it took a lot of trial and error to get the fabric quality he wanted and to do it sustainably.

Eventually they built their own factory in Canton, Mass., so they could

create a superfine worsted Rambouillet merino and organic merino wool that wasn't itchy and could be worn year-round.

Brakefield said they had a hard time finding sewers who could do some of the finer detail hemming for their sheets, but found small-scale sewing firm in their hometown to finish the sheets, an operation which she said otherwise would have closed.

There is interest in buying U.S. products. A survey by Cotton Incorporated, the cotton industry's research and promotion arm, showed 66 percent of consumers say they are interested in buying U.S.-made clothing made with U.S.-grown cotton. McMillian said American-made gets people's attention, but getting people to buy still comes down to quality.

"Generally, the sentiment (from customers) is, I love the pants, and I love the fact that they're made-in-Chicago pants. That's the cherry on top. But we shouldn't rely on the made-in-America angle as the sole reason to buy our pants," he said.

Debbie Carlson is a freelance writer.