

Don't follow the herd

One of our area's most fascinating boutiques is Holy Cow Home. Crammed with unique and unusual items for the home, for gifts, or to wear, it is run by the lovely Poonam who has to be the friendliest, happiest, bubbliest shopkeeper ever. Pop in for a browse - she may even pour you a cup of Chai tea...

Winner of last year's Aylesbury Vale Business Awards 'Best New Business' category, Holy Cow Home, is only two years old but already a popular stop for those seeking something different.

Handmade, Fairtrade, recycled and reclaimed is the mantra here and with an eye for style and quality, owner Poonam Gupta has curated a quirky and colourful lifestyle collection that will inspire and delight, if you love the different and the unique.

Poonam was born and brought up in London of Indian heritage - her father was from Lucknow in the north and she spent a couple of years there, aged 11 to 13, which she describes as a real adventure!

Her husband is a GP in Tring and when her two children reached school age Poonam decided she would get a part-time job, or maybe start a shop...

"I'd been an accountant before I had children but wanted to do something different," she says. "So I started selling handmade 'lost wax process' brass sculptures from India and it grew from there."

Buying from Fairtrade importers to ensure goods were ethically sourced, Poonam first sold on the internet and then sublet a section at the back of her current shop, finally taking



Poonam shows off a sari shawl



over the whole store two years ago.

"I have some really old pieces and some pieces that are new but made from old, recycled materials; some designed to look new and some to replicate the old! It's a lifestyle shop for those who like things that are unusual and unique, not mass produced."

Holy Cow Home is an eclectic mix of furniture, furnishings, mirrors, traditionally carved screens, ornate benches, amazing chairs, gifts such as; handmade Fairtrade silver-plated and gold-plated jewellery; vases, pots; scarves and shawls (pure silk and cotton, hand Kantha-stitched); clothing, greetings cards, drawer and door knobs; colourful, sari-covered handmade khadda paper notebooks and journals; block printed hand-stitched cotton tablecloths; handmade candles and diffusers; Moroccan lamps, lightshades and glasses; Incense sticks, cones and burners; Hessian bags, and items made from recycled plastic bottles which are turned into thread and then woven into bags, rugs and throws and feel and look exactly like organic textiles!

There are vintage sari quilts and throws;

Nepalese goat leather bags; and scented beeswax tea lights in little clay pots, which support a children's charity helping the Dalit people or 'untouchables' and lovely, quirky, decorative and original little 19th Century sandstone niche shrines.

Larger items include a reproduction cart wheel, an old grinding table and beautiful, traditionally-carved, reclaimed wood screens, tables, benches and cabinets. And shopping in Holy Cow Home you can't fail to notice the store's stunning Lakree floor made from blocks of reclaimed Indian hardwoods such as Mango, Teak and Jackfruit. It's extremely hardwearing with stunning variations in colour, well-seasoned and held together in one metre squares with a tough canvas backing. It won't warp/shrink or swell and the sections are easy to lay and remove, adding an instant wow factor to your home (£125 per m² from Holy Cow Home).

There's items from a few pounds to a few hundred pounds and the stock is constantly changing: "The items are not mass produced," says Poonam, "so not available in large quantities. I think my favourite is a colourful, patchwork armchair, which is currently on display at a small concession I have taken in a pop-up department shop in Bristol. I am happy to source items for customers too, so if you don't see what you want here, please ask."

Poonam actively promotes her business. She advertises, posts on social media, sells via the internet, exhibits at fairs and show (she will be at the Bucks Country Show in August) and as a little sociable extra is thinking of brewing free Chai Tea on a Saturday, to welcome customers and add to the fun of a browse around the store. "I make my own recipe,"

she says. "with herbs and spices chosen to enhance your shopping experience!"

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