

COOL DOWN

Baba Tree's Fantastic Fans

Baba Tree has been preserving the culture of baskets in the Gurunsi community for 15 years. In Ghana, 300 artisans practice a time-honoured weaving technique using elephant grass and their own 'rhythm and flow'. Each basket comes from the hands of the artisan weavers – energetic, colourful and with purpose. Founder Gregory MacCarthy started weaving stories with baskets in 2004. His vision to celebrate the creativity and skill of this community has never felt more significant. Baba Tree continues this ongoing commitment to the artisan weavers and the incredibly talented crew members through fair and meaningful work, capacity building and true social impact in the local community. They honour local basket traditions and create exciting forms with the oldest craft in the world. New patterns, techniques and dye materials emerge over time as artisans innovate, evolve and understand better the elephant grass they exquisitely weave by hand. The evolution of the baskets is never rushed to market but slowly developed to be useful, beautiful, and ethical.

Each fan holds a design sensibility, energy and vibrancy that is unique. These fans are traditionally used by women in funeral ceremonies in the North East region of Ghana. The women dance with the fans while singing 'Kingkelenga' in shrill tones supporting the men's war dance, sung and performed during the burial rites.

Each fan takes our weavers between four or five hours to weave, including splitting and rolling the straw in preparation for dyeing, and applying the leather handles. The fans are created from 'Pennisetum purpureum' known as Veta Vera grass or straw by the weavers, farmed in the south of Ghana where it grows. You can use the fans for keeping cool of course, small enough to take almost everywhere with you, especially brilliant in a heatwave and the perfect size for your carry-on luggage. But they also look fantastic hung on the wall, singularly or in a group.

Ayine lives in Gambibgo, a small traditional village about a 20-minute walk across the river from the Baba Tree Baskets compound. She lives with her husband and three children in her husband's family compound. It is a tradition here for a woman to move in with her husband's family when she marries.

Ayine doesn't find anything challenging about creating the fans: 'weaving fans makes me so happy there is nothing that I don't like about it'.

Polly Leonard - How long have you been weaving?

Awuni Ayine - I have been weaving for two years. My mother and my brothers all weave... mostly fans but also some baskets. I started to weave in the house for the Baba Tree and was coming to dye my straw every Saturday. One day I asked the Quality Control Manager who buys the baskets if I could come full time to weave. From that day I was welcomed into the community.

PL- What do you enjoy most about weaving with The Baba Tree community?

AA - I enjoy the people – I have made some great friends and we laugh and joke together every day. I receive the money from my fans to take care of my family: three children, two boys and one girl.

PL- What do you enjoy weaving the most?

AA - I enjoy weaving fans the most. The more fans I weave, the happier I am because weaving enables me to provide for my family and build a future.

PL- Tell us more about yourself.

AA - Alongside my weaving work, I am a businesswoman. I have a mobile shop selling local herbal drinks including Zonko, Sobolah, ground nuts and bread. I have been selling and roaming for four years. Every morning I wake at 4.30 am or early dawn to prepare the drinks and then take them to the compound. People always buy Zonko as it is good for digestion and energy. ...



