



Photo by Noam Perisman

A Contemporary Craft

A luxury brand is keeping crochet relevant while empowering women.

Words by Andrew Wasserstein
Photos by Noam Perisman, Ronen Mangan, Shahar Tamir and Via Tolila

iota is a luxury brand centered on fair trade and a socially responsible business model. The studio creates unique, luxury hand-stitched furniture, rugs and accessories that bring the 200 year old technique of crocheting into the realm of contemporary, cutting-edge design. Partnering with women from underprivileged communities, iota aims to support the many women who are unable to work outside of the home due to cultural, religious and geographical barriers. The company trains its designers from scratch, offering them a set of technical skills and providing a steady supply of work that can be completed according to each woman's schedule and framework.

The iota project is the brainchild of social activist Shula Mozes, combining her lifelong passion for crochet with a mission of providing work for women. A connecting and brainstorming coffee between Mozes and industrial designer Tal Zur, transpired into an hours long meeting of the minds that defined the initial concept and structure of what would become the iota project. Assembling a team from the ground up, the two selected



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skilled women from various disciplines to make their social business a reality.

Zur took on the role of creative director. Architect Dorit Chesler was hired as the project manager, ensuring the dream became sustainable and profitable. Noa Curiel joined the team as Iota's head designer, leading the direction of the brand's product line, while expert in knitting and crocheting, Iris Dayan came on board to develop the brand's endless iterations of shapes and textures and to guide and tutor the crochet community. The group established their first partnership in the Bedouin city of Hura, Israel, offering women a new opportunity and work model that fit within the confines of the community's cultural and social standards.

“Crocheting is an international language, with global terms and symbols, permitting us to overcome difficulties of distance, culture and language, and create an equal, identical starting point for our team,” explains Tal Zur. In Hura, 85% of the women are unemployed due to a variety of factors. The women designing Iota's products receive a salary, pension and training, and work within a relationship built on trust, working when and how they choose to. Each week Iris Dayan travels to the community to meet with the women, hold business meetings and offer guidance and training on various crochet techniques.



Each of Iota's products is handmade with the brand's bespoke polyester and cotton yarns and textiles, offered in several configurations with more than 120 color and tone variations.



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"As opposed to a machine that creates anonymous products, our handmade objects have a past, a background and a memory," explains Zur. Photos by Noam Perisman (above) and Via Tolila (right)

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"A utilized skill, can have rewarding qualities; both the product that is created as a one of a kind element; and to the craftsperson, whose skill makes them an expert," says Zur. Each of iota's products is handmade with the brand's bespoke polyester and cotton yarns and textiles, offered in several configurations with more than 120 color and tone variations. Their iconic decorative swings, pouf seats, benches and home decor can be found in offices, residences and studios around the world. "As opposed to a machine that creates anonymous products, our handmade objects have a past, a background and a memory. They embody the craftswoman's unique fingerprint and thus make her an inseparable part of the final product," explains Zur. Each item is hand signed upon completion by the craftswoman who made it.



The story of iota isn't just a "feel good" message, it's a business model that proves profitable. iota's products can be found in more than 20 boutique stockists around the globe and the brand has presented at the world's most prestigious international design fairs: *New York's Design Week*, *Maison & Objet* in Paris and as part of Tom Dixon's "Multiplex" presentation at *Salone del Mobile* in Milan. iota is also a member of London's Maiyet Collective, a collaborative group of positive impact luxury brands. A meeting with Peugeot Automotive at *Maison & Objet* led to



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a collaboration in which iota designed the carpets for the Peugeot concept car at the 2017 Geneva motor show. The combinations of material, new color mixes and hand knit patterns presented an exciting challenge for the brand and proved that the future still holds a place for manual crochet techniques.

This summer, the studio will relocate from the Eastern edge of Tel Aviv to a larger space and showroom in South Tel Aviv. iota will also expand their network and workforce with partners in the region training and providing work to women in Istanbul, many of whom are from refugee communities. Mozes and Zur hope that iota will become a platform and method that can be translated globally and inspire business owners to introduce positive social impact into their supply chain and work. “Imagine if every designer, architect and artist chose a product based on social impact within a house, an office, a studio or any other project they are working on... the world would inherently become a much better place and the industry would adapt,” concludes Zur.

