

GIRL

Not-for-profit ABURY Foundation empowers women in developing countries through education and intercultural understanding. Companion talks to Andrea Bury and Petra Hoffmann about how it began and where it's going

"TOGETHER WE MAKE IT FASHIONABLE TO CARE"



Andrea Bury and Petra Hoffmann

If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together. This is a key mantra for ABURY Foundation founder Andrea Bury and her charity business partner, Petra Hoffmann, formerly of 25hours Hotels, who have come together to make the lives of women in Africa better.

"For a couple of years I lived in Marrakesh," recalls Andrea, "and while I was fascinated by the extraordinary skills of the artisans, I was shocked about the situation of the women there, especially in rural areas where it's very difficult to get good education."

Forty-five per cent of women over 25-years-old in Morocco are illiterate or only have basic knowledge of reading, writing and counting. In the Gender Gap Report of the world Economic Forum, this North African country is placed far at the end. "Women in Morocco still lack a lot of rights which are 'normal' for us," says Andrea. "Many women are still quite bound in traditional rituals and laws, which cuts down their personal choice and freedom regarding what to wear, what to learn and whom to love. At the same time there is a huge youth unemployment rate in Africa and also Morocco – so a major goal of ABURY is to support the women to create local work opportunities."

It's clear that Andrea has a big heart, combined with a sharp business sense. Her background is in sports and entertainment sponsorship and marketing. She started her own agency back in 2000 with impressive clients such as Deutsche Bank, Volkswagen, Dell, Mercedes-Benz and O2 (now Telefonica).

ABURY's CPO (chief product officer), Petra Hoffmann is also a very empathetic, positive, curious and opened-minded professional with a vast experience in interior design and a great passion for design and products. She joined the organisation from a background in the hotel industry. She is deeply connected to 25hours Hotels having been involved from the very beginning, helping to open up a number of hotels and contributing to the development of the 25hours head office. As Petra says, "I'm married to 25hours Hotels founder, Christoph Hoffmann, meaning I'm married to 25hours Hotels!"

"I think it was love at first sight," says Petra of her meeting with Andrea. "We exchanged ideas, and we talked endlessly for hours. She loves hotels and I was amazed by the vision of her project, and the strength and courage she brought to it. It was clear to me that we had to help, so we bought ABURY products and began by selling them in our 25hours Hotel shops."

When in Marrakesh, Andrea worked with Rotaract, the youth organization of the Rotary Club, and presented her ideas of activating the potential of women in rural areas, helping them establish financial independence from their husbands, and from their environments, so they have opportunities to decide about their lives. "I wanted to bring artisans together to help women use their skills to make something better, empowering the women," she explains. Rotaract took Andrea to the Berber village of Douar Anzal, southwest of Marrakesh in the Atlas Mountains. Home to around 2,000 people, Andrea got to know the village heads, and finally one of their sons, Ali, took her aside and said he wanted to support her ideas. →

POWER

Above: Andrea offers hugs at the Berber village of Douar Anzal; Right: Andrea and Petra with the women of the village; Far right: ABURY Foundation empowers women by increasing their skill sets



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“We started literacy programmes for the women, collecting IT donations, thereby enabling women without access to computers to receive education. We also set up a pre-school for children aged three to six, and a creche so that the women have time to work and learn. The latest addition is the ABURY teenage girls club. We supported the building of a well for the village so that women wouldn’t have to spend hours walking to fetch water, along with a solar pump.”

ABURY also created a sewing school and trained women in crafts they didn’t know. However Andrea soon learned it’s better to support women in traditional crafts they are familiar with. “For me, each handmade Berber bag is a symbol of Morocco’s cultural heritage that seemed to be lost to consumerism – each a small piece of cultural identity,” says Andrea. “I wanted to support those skills and give the women an outlet for selling their beautiful crafts.”

Andrea founded the ABURY Collection GmbH producing high quality designer accessories produced by female artisans in Morocco to sell internationally. Each product sold supports a special project of the ABURY Foundation. All profits are put back into the foundation to create new projects to support women. As Petra explains, “Our aim with ABURY is to create a special product range that is fairly designed and handmade. We want customers to see that when you buy a product, it goes directly to the cause. We also want to expand from smaller items such as bags and jewellery, to interior design – and sell that to hotels, restaurants and private homes, conveying a special atmosphere with our ideas and products. Our first client is the Bikini Island & Mountain Hotel Port de Soller – a member of Design Hotels – where we created and replaced various lampshades and decorative items that were weathered and needed to be renewed after five years.

“We are also thinking of a ‘Wandering ABURY table’, with dinners for like-minded people who share our vision, in European cities like Berlin, Zürich, Hamburg and Munich. The tables will be covered with decoration and crafts the women in the ABURY Foundation have created.”

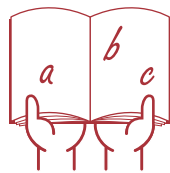


Petra (front left) and Andrea (front right) with the girls of the ABURY Foundation

And the aim of all this good work comes back to give women in Africa self-determined lives. “We encourage them by building schools, learning livelihoods, literacy, and languages,” explains Petra. “The exchange between cultures is very important to us, which is why we integrate people into our global network - learning from and helping each other. I am convinced of the following mantra: no education, no choice, no chance.”

ABURY’s heart still lies with the women of Morocco, but they have also reached out to a women’s cooperative in Ecuador for exquisite Tagua jewellery, and another in Ethiopia where the women weave blankets, hammam towels and other textile-based products.

It seems there’s no stopping ABURY’s inspiring women. Andrea and Petra are living proof that women supporting women is a powerful force for good.



GIVING BACK
ABURY re-invests in education and skills training



CO-DESIGN
We create unique designs with the artisans

ABURY'S CYCLE OF GOOD DESIGN



TRADE
ABURY introduces international sales creating awareness and income



PRODUCTION
Creation of handmade collections comprised from local materials, creating jobs

JOIN THE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

As well as buying beautiful artisanal products from the ABURY Foundation website, you can help by becoming a friend from just €10 per month. A quarterly online meeting keeps you up to date, and experts are invited to highlight topics such as the plight of women in Afghanistan and Iran. Once a year, the Circle of Friends organises a face-to-face meeting in either Berlin or Marrakesh.

abury.org/freundeskreis

FAIR TRADE ACCESSORIES AT ABURY.NET



Tagua bracelet €49



Berber clutch bag €179



Raffia slippers €79



Berber shoulder bag €249