

Roaring Fork

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TINY HOME LIFE
IN GLENWOOD

STAGING YOUR
PROPERTY TO SELL

BASALT'S HANGAI
MOUNTAIN TEXTILES

have blankets, will travel

HOW A GLOBETROTTING COUPLE BROUGHT SUSTAINABLE LUXURY MONGOLIAN TEXTILES TO THE U.S.—AND DISCOVERED HOME IN THE ROARING FORK VALLEY

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NEGATIVE 40. Such was the sub-zero temperature when Betina Infante and her family arrived in Ulaanbaatar, the notoriously frigid capital city of Mongolia, during the dead of winter in 2007—straight from living in balmy Indonesia, no less.

"I will never forget that," she says, recalling her first days in the remote Asian nation with both humor and fondness. "It wasn't easy at first. Things that are normally easy in other parts of the world are tough in Mongolia. There was no hot water, we had our two little kids, it was very cold outside, and we were constantly boiling pots of water to use at home. Plus the pollution in the city is devastating in winter, really quite toxic."

Still, Betina and her husband Bill, along with their children, persevered through that first season in "UB," a common expat term for Ulaanbaatar. As the family settled into a new way of life, they opened themselves to any new experience that Mongolia had to offer; soon, Betina recalls they found themselves enchanted.

"There's the city, and then there's the rest of Mongolia," she explains. "It's a place where the sky literally meets the earth; it's surreal, so special, and so beautiful, that we just dealt with all the little inconveniences in UB so that we could get out there as often as we could. We had our own ger [yurt] an hour and a half from UB, had horses there, and spent every minute possible learning about the country and the culture. It was total freedom."

Betina adds, "Here's the thing about Mongolia: It can be hard. But if you can ride your horses and not focus on the flies, you'll have the adventure of a lifetime."

For the next several years, the family did just that. They canoed the rivers of the northern part of the country, spent time with eagle hunters and nomadic herder families, explored sparsely populated lands that many foreigners never see, and rode their horses despite the flies. Although they had a stint living in Serbia while Bill worked as a U.N. ambassador there, the Infantes ultimately felt the call to return to the wilds of Mongolia afterward. So how did they end up here in the Roaring Fork Valley as the owners of Hangai Mountain Textiles, their Basalt-based luxury fiber goods business?

"As our kids got older we made the decision to send them to school in the U.S. We just Googled 'mountain schools' and landed at CRMS," Betina says of discovering Carbondale's Colorado Rocky Mountain School. "We visited and fell in love with the valley—really fell in love. As the Mongolian economy took a downturn in 2014, we felt like it was time to base ourselves in Colorado. The stars aligned, we found a house in Basalt, and moved in the summer of 2015. That's when we established Hangai here."

On chilly evenings, the Infantes offered house guests blankets they'd brought from Mongolia. When the guests raved about them, Betina got an idea. **CONTINUED >**



Betina and Bill Infante with a small herd of yaks in Mongolia.







“HERE’S THE THING ABOUT MONGOLIA: IT CAN BE HARD. BUT IF YOU CAN RIDE YOUR HORSES AND NOT FOCUS ON THE FLIES, YOU’LL HAVE THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME.”



Photography p. 26 & 28: Summers Moore



“I thought, Coloradans are loving these blankets—why aren’t Mongolians importing these to the U.S.?” she says. “We were going back and forth to Mongolia for other work at the time, and started looking at the supply chain for textiles to explore the possibility of working with Mongolian entrepreneurs to build an international brand that would showcase their exquisite natural fiber. Despite some kinks in the supply chain, we established partnerships with several families with knitting and weaving factories and began working with them to build a sustainable model to export to the U.S..”

The local families Betina and Bill had spent time with in recent years left a deep and meaningful impression on them, so the couple developed values for Hangai Mountain Textiles centered around a business model that helps the herder families preserve their ancient way of life in an economically viable way, and encourages Mongolian knitters and weavers to create high-quality items for the discerning international luxury goods market. All production remains exclusively in Mongolia, ensuring that the local producers benefit fairly in the process. The Infantes make several trips back every year, and as they work with teams on the ground to ensure quality, they’re also focusing on the sustainability and traceability of the hand-combed yak down, cashmere, and camel down used in their textiles.

“We’re working with the local cooperatives that source the fiber and ensure the herder families are learning more sustainable practices, such as adequate rotation of herds and keeping smaller herd sizes,” Betina notes. “Buyers in the U.S. increasingly want to know where their fine fiber comes from, much like knowing which region a wine comes from in Italy or France. For example, the yak down that we use is

a rare, gorgeous, sustainable fiber sourced primarily from the Hangai region in central Mongolia. It's our favorite fiber, which inspired our company name."

As Betina and Bill set their sights on expansion through boutique hotels, specialty retailers, interior designers, select luxury department stores, and online retail sales in 2019, they also welcome curious potential customers to their new wholesale Basalt showroom that debuted last year.

"We offer a rare and unique product," Betina says. "People want to be able to feel the blankets, discover yak versus camel, and experience the softness and the quality in person."

Hangai goods are featured around the region at the Hotel Jerome, Aspen Outfitting Company, and the Eleven Madison Park Winter House pop-up at the St. Regis in Aspen. The Timbers Club in Snowmass is also outfitted with Hangai, and Cathers Home of Basalt carries their product in their showroom. Betina recently collaborated with Michaela Carpenter of Maker + Place to design a Bauhaus-inspired collection that's currently available in the Aspen shop and online.

Nearly four years after adopting the valley as their new base, it seems the Infantes are here to stay—and the community is richer for it. Somewhat like the nomadic Mongolian herder families producing fiber for Hangai Mountain Textiles, the couple once maintained a lifestyle that kept them on the move for many years; have they found a true home in the Roaring Fork Valley?

"Oh yes," Betina says. "This is where we want to be for the foreseeable future. After having been all over the map, it's so nice to find a place where the people are so engaged. We feel extremely fortunate to have found this community and we look forward to growing here."

