NEWS LESSON

How Ukrainian Designers Are Keeping Old Craft Skills Alive



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Can clothes tell a story without using words?
2. What makes you notice a new designer?
3. Would knowing who made an outfit change how you saw it?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**motifs**	☐	A	traditions and history passed down from earlier times
2	**artefacts**	☐	B	a warm, slightly sad longing for the past
3	**replica**	☐	C	the buying and selling of goods
4	**nostalgia**	☐	D	old objects made by people, often kept in museums
5	**commerce**	☐	E	careful protection of old things so they last
6	**monuments**	☐	F	an exact copy of something
7	**conservation**	☐	G	repeated shapes or images used in a design
8	**heritage**	☐	H	large structures built to remember a person or event

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A Kyiv company sells clothes, ceramics and household objects made with traditional Ukrainian crafts. Paying customers may keep a skill alive, but they also raise questions about who speaks for a tradition.

1 A plate, a shirt or a candle can carry a very old idea. Kyiv-based GUNIA Project makes clothing, ceramics and household objects that reinterpret traditional Ukrainian crafts for modern buyers. It is a business, not a museum, and that sits oddly with conventional ideas of heritage, though it seems to work in practice.

2 The company's method begins with research into historical motifs and techniques, followed by collaborations with working craftspeople. According to GUNIA, its production network takes in more than 150 artisans across Ukraine and draws on disciplines ranging from embroidery and weaving to blown glass and fine ceramics. A traditional image, lifted out of its original setting, is given a new function without necessarily shedding its cultural associations. What results is neither replica nor invention, but something closer to translation.

3 Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 has made such work particularly resonant. Heritage is lost not only when buildings or artefacts are destroyed, but when artisans are displaced, local markets collapse and specialist knowledge stops paying its way. A craft rarely dies out through a single dramatic event. It fades when the last person who can teach it has nobody left to teach and no reason to keep working. In those circumstances, commercial demand supplies something that reverence cannot: a livelihood attached to a disappearing skill.

4 The relationship between commerce and heritage remains uneasy, nonetheless. Luxury positioning may narrow the audience for objects presented as national culture, while reinterpretation risks turning complex traditions into attractive motifs stripped of context. Who speaks for a tradition, and who profits from it, are questions that cannot simply be brushed aside. Nor are they settled by good intentions: they have to be managed case by case, in decisions about pricing, credit and whose name appears on the label. Supporters counter that the alternative, allowing valuable techniques to drop out of ordinary use altogether, would represent a far greater loss.

5 What sets this kind of design apart from simple nostalgia is its refusal to treat tradition as something fixed. Techniques survive partly because they are adapted, and a practice incapable of change is a practice waiting to be catalogued. A new design can still keep an old skill in use. Someone buying a piece for their home may discover the history behind the way it was made.

6 Ukraine's experience points to a broader lesson. A culture is not only a collection of irreplaceable monuments; it is also a network of people who know how to make things, pass that knowledge on and invest familiar symbols with contemporary meaning. Protecting the monuments is comparatively straightforward. Keeping the network intact, particularly under wartime conditions, may call for as much creativity as conservation. It is an unglamorous form of preservation, and quite possibly a more durable one.

Sources: Financial Times. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The Ukrainian government funds the company's work. T F NG
2. The writer implies that buyers' spending can protect a craft more reliably than admiration for it. T F NG
3. The writer believes good intentions are enough to settle disputes over credit and pricing. T F NG
4. The writer treats an unchanging practice as more vulnerable than an adapted one. T F NG
5. The writer considers protecting monuments harder than keeping the network of makers intact. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

conventional	durable	ephemeral	intact	ornate	resonant	specialist	unglamorous

1. The speech was deeply _____ with an audience that had lived through similar losses.
2. Fast fashion falls apart within a season, whereas a well-made linen coat is built to be _____ .
3. Despite the bombing, the old market hall remained largely _____ , its roof and arches undamaged.
4. Her designs break with _____ thinking, which treats embroidery as a purely decorative art.
5. Archive work is slow, repetitive and largely _____ , yet it keeps the craft alive.
6. Only a _____ conservator could repair a fabric as old and fragile as this.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of local workshops would be a serious loss. (DISAPPEAR)
2. The advertising campaign was criticised as _____ , since it ignored the makers. (MISLEAD)
3. The _____ of the technique took the apprentice nearly a decade. (MASTER)
4. Buyers valued the _____ of a handmade piece more than the name on the label. (AUTHENTIC)
5. Such a project is _____ without public funding. (SUSTAIN)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. These are fixed combinations. Ask which word a native speaker expects, then check the whole phrase makes sense.

crushing	frail	love	mounting	paved	pays	trivial

1. Large brands that borrow village motifs without credit have drawn _____ criticism.
2. Critics say the label merely _____ lip service to the makers.
3. The restoration, unpaid and unseen, was a labour of _____ for the volunteers.
4. The workshop's collapse was a _____ blow to a village with no other employer.
5. The fabric's revival has _____ the way for a new generation of weavers.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What should a fashion story show beyond a dramatic photograph?
2. How can designers refer to difficult events without turning them into a selling point?
3. What would you want people abroad to notice about creativity where you live?

9 Role-play: is a handmade plate worth the price?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the shop owner

You sell handmade plates with traditional patterns. Each plate costs 80 pounds. Explain why it costs so much and who makes it. You can lower the price a little, but only if the customer asks a good question.

Student B · the customer

You like a handmade plate with a traditional pattern, but it's very expensive. Ask who makes it and where the money goes. Decide if you will buy it, buy a cheaper one, or leave.

Useful phrases

I'd love to buy it, but it's a bit expensive.

Who actually makes these plates?

That's what makes it special.

Where does the money go?

I can't lower the price much, but I'll add a free cup.

We're not rich, so could we meet in the middle?

Afterwards, tell the class: did the customer buy the plate, and was the price fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 D · 3 F · 4 B · 5 C · 6 H · 7 E · 8 A

4 True, false or not given

1 NG · 2 T · 3 F · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 resonant · 2 durable · 3 intact · 4 conventional · 5 unglamorous · 6 specialist

6 Word forms

1 disappearance · 2 misleading · 3 mastery · 4 authenticity · 5 unsustainable

7 Language focus

1 mounting · 2 pays · 3 love · 4 crushing · 5 paved

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