NEWS LESSON

Old Craft Skills, New Designs in Ukraine



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	**artisans**	☐	A	something expensive and special that people do not really need
2	**heritage**	☐	B	all the people born at about the same time
3	**displacement**	☐	C	the things that make a person or group who they are
4	**preservation**	☐	D	a new way of showing or explaining something old
5	**reinterpretation**	☐	E	skilled people who make things by hand
6	**luxury**	☐	F	being forced to leave your home
7	**generation**	☐	G	the history and traditions a country or group has had for a long time
8	**identity**	☐	H	keeping something safe so it is not lost or damaged

3 Read

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

Break the chain between an older craftsperson and a younger one and the technique goes too. Paying customers, awkwardly, may be what keeps it going.

1 How can a ceramic plate or a hand-embroidered shirt become part of a country's cultural survival? In Ukraine, designers are answering that question by turning traditional crafts into modern products. One of the best-known examples is GUNIA Project, a Kyiv-based company that works with artisans from across the country.

2 The brand creates clothing, jewellery, tableware and decorative objects inspired by historical designs. Rather than turning out exact copies of museum pieces, its designers look into folk traditions and adapt their patterns, materials and techniques for contemporary customers. A familiar symbol might crop up on an unusual candle, while traditional embroidery may become part of a modern garment. The aim seems to be recognition rather than reproduction: a buyer should sense where a design came from without mistaking the object for an antique.

3 The work depends on craftspeople whose knowledge cannot easily be replaced by machines. GUNIA says it collaborates with more than 150 artisans using techniques including ceramics, weaving and blown glass. Each handmade object represents not only a finished product, but also years spent learning a craft and handing it down from one generation to the next. Break that chain and the technique tends to go with it, however many photographs of it survive.

4 After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the idea of cultural preservation took on greater urgency. Military attacks and displacement have placed historic sites and traditional livelihoods under pressure. A workshop may lose its materials, its customers or the people who ran it. For designers, continuing to produce objects rooted in Ukrainian culture can be both a business decision and a statement about national identity. Keeping the workshops going is, in itself, a way of insisting that the culture has a future as well as a past.

5 There are tensions in this approach. Handmade products may be too expensive for many people, and selling cultural traditions as luxury goods can raise awkward questions about who really benefits. Designers also have to weigh up the difference between respectful reinterpretation and treating a community's heritage as decoration. A pattern taken out of its original setting can end up as little more than a pretty shape.

6 Even so, the project challenges a familiar assumption about tradition. Preserving culture does not always mean keeping old objects untouched behind glass. It can also mean giving a skill new customers, new uses and a reason to survive. Tradition, on this view, is less a museum case than a working habit that has to be passed on.

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 article says handmade products are affordable for everyone. T F NG
2. The company has opened a shop outside Ukraine. T F NG
3. The writer says preserving culture can mean giving a skill new customers. T F NG
4. The writer suggests that photographs of a craft can keep the technique alive. T F NG
5. A buyer is expected to recognise where a design came from. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

adapt **assumption** **contemporary** **decoration** **livelihoods** **reproduction** **tensions** **urgency**

1. The flood warning gave the work a new _____ , and volunteers arrived within the hour.
2. It is a common _____ that handmade goods are always better than factory ones.
3. Small firms must _____ quickly if their customers change what they want.
4. The gallery shows _____ art made by living artists in the last few years.
5. There were _____ between the owners and the staff over pay and working hours.
6. When the factory closed, hundreds of families lost their _____ .

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the war began, the workshop _____ three apprentices. (TRAIN)
2. Patterns like this _____ on clothes for centuries. (USE)
3. Some artists _____ to leave their studios after 2022. (FORCE)
4. At the moment, the designers _____ a new range of cups. (PLAN)
5. If prices fell, more people _____ handmade plates. (BUY)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A collocation is a pair that sounds natural. Ask which verb or noun usually goes with the other.

attitude	decision	habit	make	pressure	raise	statement

1. The new price list could _____ doubts about who really benefits.
2. Many workshops are under _____ to cut their prices.
3. Opening a second studio was a risky business _____ .
4. After the attack, the museum released a short _____ to the press.
5. Small firms can _____ a living from selling handmade goods.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 NG · 3 T · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 urgency · 2 assumption · 3 adapt · 4 contemporary · 5 tensions · 6 livelihoods

6 Verb forms

1 had trained · 2 have been used · 3 were forced · 4 are planning · 5 would buy

7 Language focus

1 raise · 2 pressure · 3 decision · 4 statement · 5 make

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