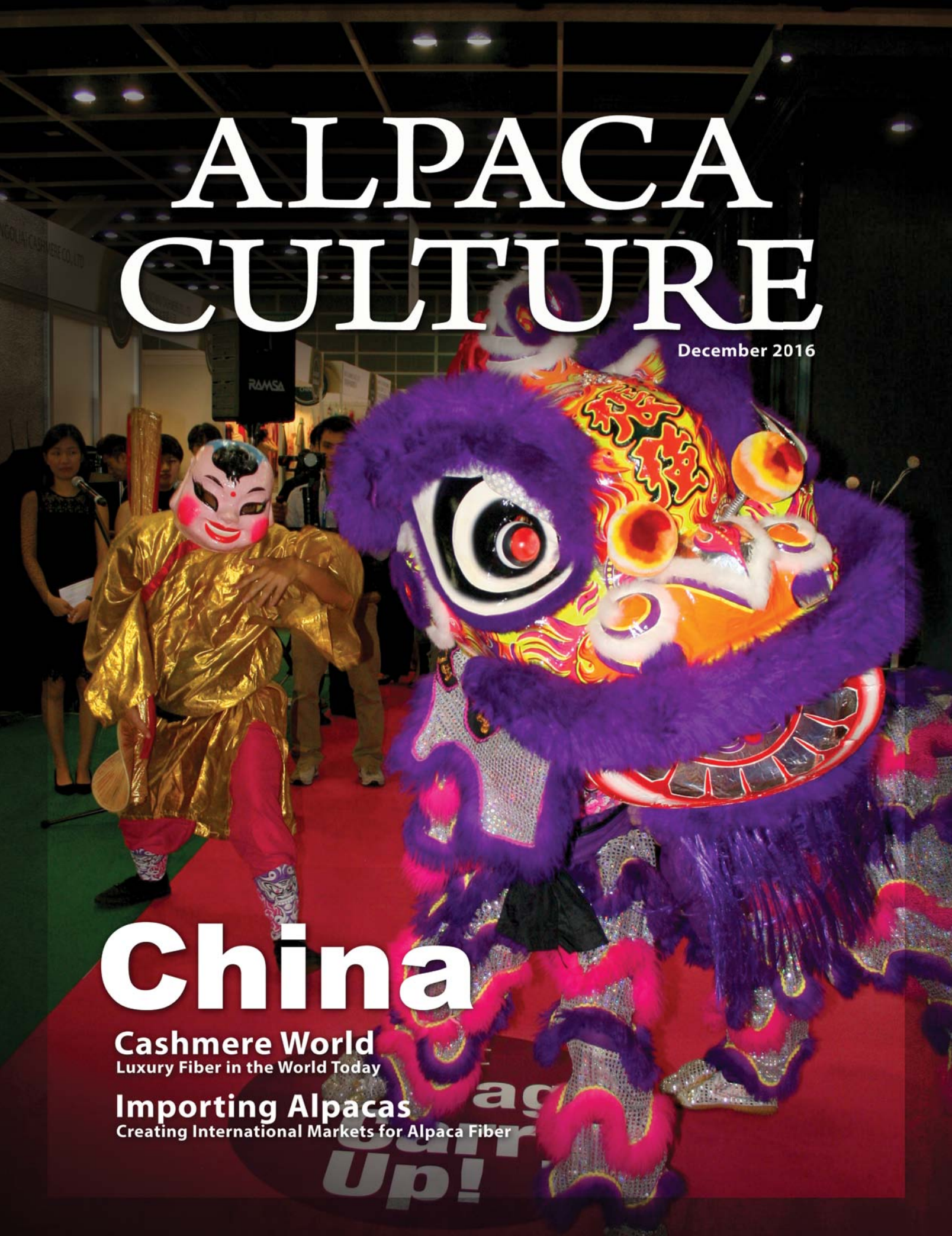


ALPACA CULTURE

December 2016



China

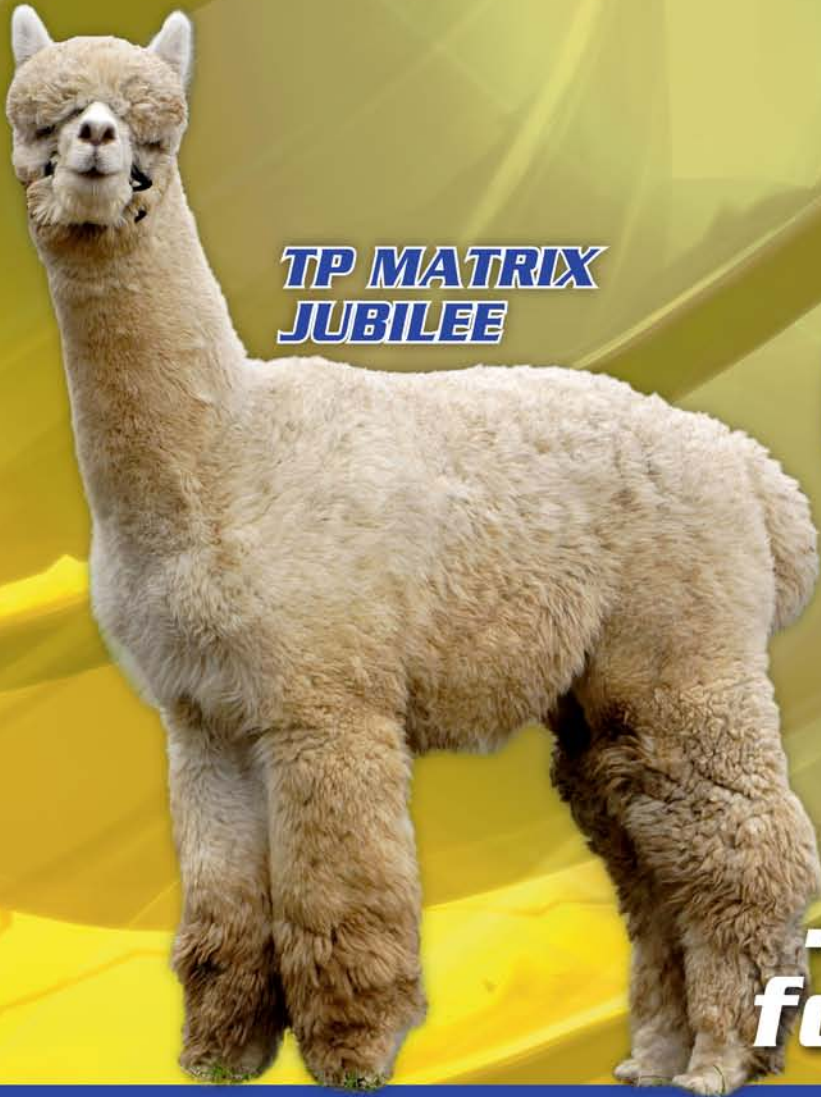
Cashmere World
Luxury Fiber in the World Today

Importing Alpacas
Creating International Markets for Alpaca Fiber

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ON THE COVER:

The pageantry of Cashmere World's Opening Ceremony. Photo by Jared Johnston.

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Presenting *An Introduction to Alpacas and Alpaca Fibre* at Cashmere World in Hong Kong. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong.

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Hong Kong

Cashmere World 2016

By Meyla Bianco Johnston

Despite the frenetic pace in Hong Kong, the city is surprisingly safe, orderly and polite, with well-oiled systems in place everywhere, from the subway system to commuter lunch counters. With throngs of people moving all day long, mass transit goes off without a hitch with the efficient MTR (subway), bus, tram and regulated taxi services. In addition, the famous Star Ferry moves people across Victoria Harbour seamlessly, as it has done since 1933. With a gigantic airport scheduled to double in size in the coming years and the economy booming, it seems Hong Kong will continue its trajectory of commerce and growth. As the host of the largest fine fiber show in Asia, Hong Kong is an extremely influential city poised to become an even bigger and growing fashion hub. In fact, the distance between Hong Kong and Kowloon islands, the two main areas of the city, gets shorter every year with more landmass being built by humans as new real estate is needed.





Cashmere World



started off with a

BOB

at the Hong Kong Convention Centre in the central part of this vibrant, teeming city.

A very colorful and active dancing dragon consisting of two acrobats in a traditional costume officially started the event with twists and turns and the backing of musicians. Cymbals crashed to punctuate the undulations of the dragon as its masked “trainer” directed its movements. Dramatic pauses in the action only added to the theatrical effect.

Dignitaries including Mr. Bian Zhendu, President China Chamber of Commerce Foodstuffs and Native Produce, did the honors cutting the ribbon for the ceremony, officially beginning Cashmere World.

Also present to welcome vendors and attendees were

Mr. Michael Duck, Director APLF Ltd; Mr. Sergio Avila, Consulate General of Peru and others. This is the third time Cashmere World has taken place in Hong Kong; the first two years were in Beijing. Held in conjunction with Fashion Access, the largest fashion accessories trade show in Asia, the two combined events boasted participants from Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Cayman Islands, China, Colombia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Multiple seminars and hands-on workshops were held at the venue, which catered to the Cashmere World and



Far left: Visitors to the 2016 Cashmere World convention are greeted by a traditional Chinese dragon, actually made up of two energetically dancing and spinning acrobats. The masked character is the dragon's handler. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong. **Left:** Dignitaries prepare to cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony for Cashmere World and Fashion Access. Photo by Jared Johnston. **Above:** A colorful array of seasonal weight cashmere scarves tempts convention visitors. This is each retailer's chance to choose what they will offer consumers and purchase those styles at wholesale rates. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong.

the Fashion Access crowd. Both shows were a success and were well attended.

Peruvian Connection

Mr. Sergio Avila, Consulate General of Peru, acted as an officiating guest during the opening ceremony. We were able to have a few words with him at the beginning of the event.

Avila explained that last year Peru had alpaca representatives at Cashmere World, including government promotional agency PromPeru, where the Alpaca Del Peru brand was showcased. You may recall reading about the debut of this brand after *Alpaca Culture's* trip to Alpaca Fiesta in 2014.

While Peruvian groups were not able to attend this year, Avila went on to explain how the Peruvian alpaca fiber industry's wish is to work hand-in-hand with cashmere and other fine fibers.

Because 70-80 percent of all alpaca fiber comes from Peru, he said it would be better to join with the other fine fiber producers such as those from Mongolia, Tibet and China than to try and go it alone with a fair devoted only to alpaca. Because of this "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" attitude, Avila feels partnering is the best bet for Peruvian alpaca fiber in the burgeoning Chinese market.

He pointed out that many of the Italian luxury brands so evident in Hong Kong are currently using alpaca and vicuña fiber sourced from Peru. Loro Piana has multiple opulent retail salons with prominent placement in several shopping malls in Hong Kong. Historically a major user of camelid fibers, Loro Piana is one of the most important of these brands in terms of Peruvian alpaca fiber.

Avila himself is from the Puno region of Peru, world renown for its production of alpacas and alpaca fiber. His own grandfather was involved in





scouring alpaca fiber and selling the fiber to England in the past. Remarkably, while European people of that generation were quite familiar with alpaca fiber and regularly wore it to finer functions, younger generations have become less aware of it and are only now being reintroduced.

Avila pointed out that if hard pressed, very few people could tell the difference between cashmere and alpaca. This makes them perfect partners going forward, especially in the Asian market where cashmere is well established and alpaca is still up-and-coming.

Global Representation of Cashmere Producers

According to everyone we asked at the show, probably most of the major cashmere producers of the world were in attendance at Cashmere World, from China, Mongolia, Nepal and India. Nearly all of the world's cashmere is produced in Northern China in the high altitudes of the Himalayas. This climate is home to hardy, small cashmere goats – the origin of this spectacular natural fiber. The famously kind and hardworking people of those regions were in full attendance, with the best cashmere available on earth.

Each booth was filled to bursting with the kind of wares many of us dream of. A dizzying array of woven

Left: Fashion Access and Cashmere World were host to international buyers and an enthusiastic public. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong. **Above center:** Knitted seasonal ponchos show color and texture in popular bulky yarn designs at Cashmere World. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong. **Above right:** Consulate General of Peru Mr. Sergio Avila displays the June 2016 issue of *Alpaca Culture* during the Cashmere World Opening Ceremony in Hong Kong. He believes fine luxury fiber producers should band together across continents. Photo by Jared Johnston.



and knitted cashmere garments and accessories were on display in the clean, well-organized booths at the trade show. Hand woven scarves in natural colors and a range of weights were present as well as knitted cashmere garments in vibrant, modern colors and styles. Frothy, ethereal hand-woven scarves with fluffy edges were coiled into twists on tables.

New, digitally printed cashmere scarves of very lightweight woven material hung from hooks in a wide variety of prints, from camouflage to red roses. Displayed alongside were cashmere capes that made use of lightweight leather fringe. One poncho sported barber pole red and white stripes. Color-blocked knit scarves created a rainbow of cashmere displayed on a rotating rack – all the better to feel the quality.

Isle of Skye from Scotland are unique in that they travel all the way to Asia to source cashmere and back to Scotland to create their garment lines. Designer and owner Dug Scott joked that it “really racks up the air miles.” His commitment to creating a better future for

herders in conjunction with some of the most modern designs was inspiring.

Charming Ya Li, General Director at Mewin from Inner Mongolia, was highly interested in alpaca and its characteristics and offered us some cashmere roving for comparison. He invited *Alpaca Culture* to Mongolia to visit the manufacturing facilities where they have been processing cashmere for 17 years.

He also explained how the goats are combed during their twice yearly molting, which does not hurt them. The fiber would fall off naturally anyway but is collected by the herders who watch the timing of the molt carefully.

He explained that goats live “mostly in China, Mongolia and Afghanistan and some close to Russia.” However, he points out that “good quality comes mostly from this region because they have good locations for grasslands and good weather for goats – this is why many luxury brands source cashmere from Inner Mongolia. This region mainly produces white cashmere,

without black hair inside. This can be dyed very light colors, or left as natural white colors.” Li explained that the desired staple length for cashmere is a bit shorter than alpaca.

He continued, “For staple length, now in the market we have these levels:

1) 20-22 mm (about .79 - .87 inches), this is mainly from some small factories whose machines are not very efficient. From some of the waste, they re-card it again to get this short fiber. This fiber has a much lower price, with some spinners blending it to get lower costs. Some of this cashmere is also used for fabric.

2) 24-26 mm (about .79 - .94 inches) and 28 mm (about 1.10 inches), this is medium length fiber and is in huge demand for both yarn and fabric.



3) 30-32 mm (about 1.18 - 1.26 inches), this is the main fiber source for knitting spinning yarns. 2/28 is also good fiber for good quality fabrics.

4) 36-40 mm (1.42 - 1.57 inches) this is the super longer fiber, used for combinations and it is spun to make worsted products. Our company mainly produces this fiber to export directly to Italy.

Hardy cashmere goats in their native habitat. Small in stature, they nonetheless thrive in some of the most lofty and challenging environments on earth: the Himalayan mountains. Each goat molts its fiber seasonally, which herders harvest by combing.

Inset: Ya Li of Mewin Cashmere and Meyla Bianco Johnston discuss the characteristics of fine cashmere. Photo by Jared Johnston.



Each booth was filled to bursting with the kind of wares many of us dream of.



Above: Cashmere comes to market primarily as natural white and can be dyed to any color, as in this sunny spectrum of lightweight woven scarves.

Right: Cashmere World was host to most of the world's leading cashmere producers. Here, wholesale producers explain garment specifics to potential retailer store owners in hopes of making a large sale. Cashmere's irresistibly soft hand and wearability makes it extremely appealing to everyone – buyers and the public alike. Photos courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong.





As far as micron, now in China, our 14.8 - 15.1 micron cashmere is mainly located in Inner Mongolia's Alashan area while 15.3-15.5 comes mainly from Tibet and XinJiang.

15.7-16.2 micron cashmere is mainly located in the northeast area of China, the Liaoning Province."

Li mentioned some herders have tried shearing the cashmere in recent years, but this has proven ineffective in terms of quality. He was interested to learn more about alpaca. We shared samples with Ya, which we brought with us from our sponsors and clients. He was notably impressed as he felt the fiber and we discussed the different staple lengths between cashmere and alpaca.

Similarly, M. Sosordulam, CEO at Ulemj Cashmere was highly interested in the newly moved American dehairer being operated by Natural Fiber Producers and Maine Textiles. Read more about this story on page 72. She was also keen to know more about the Cormatex machine and the dyeing facility and requested further information about the specifics.

Networking with some of the most important names in the fashion world was an excellent learning experience. The information provided during seminars by leading fashion experts was invaluable. Read more about these presentations on pages 12, 16, 22 and 26.

Samples

Most displayed cashmere goods were samples meant for buyers to look over and then order at the fair, but we got inside word that samples might be sold toward the end of the last day so after the seminars, we took a shopping break.

One of two exhibitors from India had a uniquely Indian look with a sari-style print on extremely high



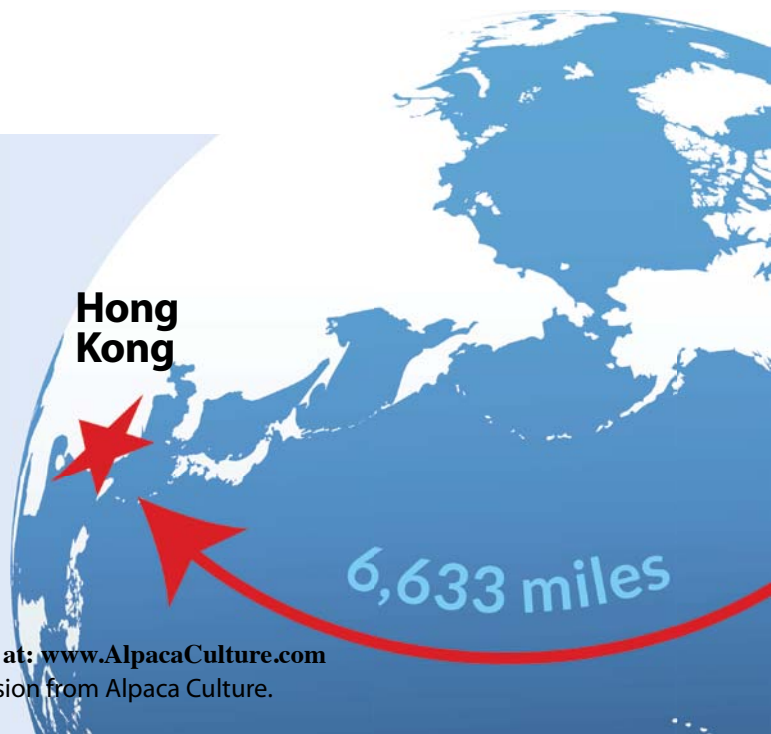
quality lightweight woven scarves. Beautifully intricate, they were woven to look like embroidery.

The wide range of light and airy cashmere scarves all lined up in this booth was a rainbow of saturated, luscious jewel tones associated with India. Ritu Kumar from Ezma obliged my request to buy a sample and I have a royal purple ombré blending to magenta scarf to remember Cashmere World. It is super-comfortable to wear and also very warm.

Friendly Nepalese Sadeep Sahi's hand-woven scarves and blankets were so inspiring to us we bought some to take home for friends and family. Each is hand-woven from cashmere fiber. He explained a bit to us about his country and the unique combination of Hindu and Buddhist cultures. When we asked how hard it was to comb the goats for their fiber, he pointed out that this depended entirely on each goat and its personality. Remind you of anything?

How far is Hong Kong from Sandpoint, Idaho, USA?

- 6,633 miles
- 6 hours on two separate planes; 12 hours total
- 11 time zones between Sandpoint, Idaho and Hong Kong.
- Hong Kong's time is 15 hours ahead of our time. We are in Pacific Daylight Time (PDT) and Hong Kong is in Hong Kong (HKT) time.
- When we left, September 16 at 9:00 a.m., we did not arrive in Hong Kong until September 17 at 8:00 p.m.
- When we returned from Hong Kong, we left September 25 at 11:00 a.m. and arrived home in Idaho that *same day* at 12:00 a.m.





Above left: The wide range of alpaca garment samples our sponsors and clients provided for us to share at Cashmere World. Photo by Jared Johnston. **Above:** Meyla presents *An Introduction to Alpaca Fibre* to an international fashion audience. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong.



**Sandpoint,
Idaho**

The Alpaca Culture Seminar, *An Introduction to Alpacas and Alpaca Fibre*

Seminar attendees were required to pre-register for our seminar and others but if extra seats were available, you could grab a place at the last minute. At the entrance to the seminar, when the time

came to give the presentation, Rachel Yan, Marketing Communications Executive for APLF, Ltd., helped us distribute literature and free stickers, bottle openers and notepads to registered seminar attendees.

Despite a couple of minutes of technical difficulties at the start, we soon got our gear sorted out. Kennise Pang, Senior Marketing Communications Executive at APLF, Ltd., was also kind enough to be our handler. She took care of everything from making sure we had the correct file for our presentation to giving us tips on local culture. She was the one who stopped to help in my hour of need when the projector was giving me fits. As a result, the seminar went off without a hitch. The 45-minute presentation, *An Introduction to Alpacas and Alpaca Fibre* (British spelling adopted for event), was a success. It was well attended and the crowd showed genuine interest during the presentation.

For the fifteen minutes scheduled at the end, a



slide indicating a question and answer period signaled a change of pace at which point we invited the seminar attendees to come up front and get their hands on alpaca fiber garments and fiber provided for the purpose by sponsors and colleagues. They were then encouraged to take a free magazine home – we were pleased to distribute *Alpaca Culture* directly into the hands of interested parties.

Jared and I managed the table together, took many questions and had a lot of great conversations. People really got their hands on the samples and seemed to come away impressed – many were knowledgeable fiber experts while others were leading fashion trendsetters. In fact, it was evident that the wheels were turning in terms of ideas for attendees. From this hands-on period we received several questions that resulted in direct referrals of our sponsors and colleagues. The seminar served as an official introduction of the alpaca community to the cashmere and global

fashion communities.

The questions ranged from technical fiber questions regarding the comparison between cashmere and alpaca to direct questions about where to buy alpaca fiber. Many attendees were intrigued by the ecological benefits alpacas offer as livestock animals. It was quite clear that alpacas were an almost wholly new topic for our audience and that made introducing them even more exciting.

Others wanted to know where to get the best of the best alpaca fiber – an easy one – our community! We distributed many Directories and a sponsor sheet with our sponsors' logos and contact information. We brought many sponsor business cards to the table where attendees could take them. In Asia, we learned, business cards are called name cards and are exchanged freely—often at the beginning of a conversation. They are given and received with both hands and are considered very important. We were able to exchange hundreds of our own cards and our clients' cards with a wide range of people.



The Venue Itself

It's hard to beat a venue like the Hong Kong Convention Centre. The facility was enormous and well equipped, clean and comfortable. With marble floors and lofty ceilings, it is an impressive and almost incomprehensibly large building, with areas designated by concourses and halls. Built in 1988, this ultramodern building was designed to look like a bird in flight. Even today, it feels contemporary and is arguably one of the most recognized buildings on Victoria Harbor, in Hong Kong and even the world. With restaurants inside the facility and an entire mall within short walking distance, it was an ideal place to have Fashion Access and Cashmere World.

We were able to access a press lounge with comfortable seats and refreshments and nooks for interviews. A station to take a break, make notes and refuel with Nespresso® pods added greatly to the coverage of this event.

In fact, Cashmere World was remarkably well planned in general. There was even a first-aid station manned by two kind helpers. I visited there when the blisters I got from my new shoes made walking a chore. As I took a couple of Band-Aids for the road, I noticed recycle bins for what's called rubbish here. Impressive – not only was the event planned down to the last detail; the waste it generated was tidily processed.

After the final part of the last day, we were approached by a group of five young women studying journalism at a nearby event planning school and asked our opinion of the event, which we were glad to give.

Taking notes in Chinese, they seemed surprised by some of our answers and by our open assessments. We also gave extra compliments during our conversation because we felt moved to do so.

The technology at Cashmere World was top-notch and the APLF app was especially notable. A booth at the

Left: Interested seminar attendees handle the alpaca fiber samples and ask questions after the presentation. We considered this Q & A session invaluable in making viable business contacts. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong. **Below:** The remarkable Hong Kong Convention Centre, built in 1988 but still contemporary today with its bird-in-flight design. The surrounding urban skyline speaks to the naturally large and deep Victoria Harbour, which allowed Hong Kong to develop into the lucrative financial center it is today.





Contemporary leather goods on display at Fashion Access, held in conjunction with Cashmere World. This high-end brand based in the United Kingdom specializes in fine leather accessories for gentlemen. It was just one example of the stylish and contemporary fashion accessories on display. Many leather-based manufacturers of shoes and handbags were present, which made the hands-on workshops creating small leather craft projects relevant. Photo courtesy Nonframe Hong Kong.

center of the fair by the seminar venue encouraged attendees to download the app and rewarded them with a travel plug adapter – handy.

The impressive APLF app allowed attendees to see a list of each company attending as well as to see the list of seminars in real time and view highlighted vendors all day long. The maps and link with WhatsApp made finding a booth or person much easier. As a result, getting to seminars on time was easy and follow-up after the show with new contacts even more convenient. In addition, regular announcements in both Cantonese and English made everyone aware of seminars and workshops taking place. Evening mixers made meeting and greeting convenient and comfortable.


Fashion Access

While *Alpaca Culture's* main reason for attending was Cashmere World, Fashion Access was the larger event and was held in the same hall. A dizzying array of the latest shoes, handbags, belts, leather goods and jewelry were showcased in large numbers. Two notable shoe trends are metallic materials and accents and space dyed sneakers – look for this on the streets any minute.

This first look at the upcoming seasonal trends was

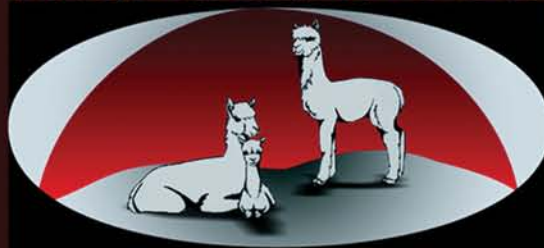
intriguing, especially in conjunction with the fashion show we were watching every single day on the streets of Hong Kong during our sightseeing forays into many neighborhoods of the city and the surrounding area.

One thing I enjoyed immensely was the Fashion Access workshop I attended making small leather goods. It happened to be just before our seminar and I'll admit it – I was nervous. So working closely with the Chinese leather and hide group was gratifying – it gave me a chance to meet more Asian people on a one-to-one basis. Also, the two leather key chains I was able to make and then decorate will help me remember how much fun I had. These workshops brought people in a business environment together in a unique way that both Jared and I agreed would be highly beneficial if replicated for alpaca events. We think the chance to have a hands-on experience like this would be a great thing to do in the alpaca community to forge new relationships.

As alpaca fiber producers and artisans, global fashion trends are our business and should be monitored closely to compete in one of the most cutthroat businesses in the world. If we want more alpaca to be worn, more alpaca should appear in the minds of designers, on the runways and ultimately in ready-to-wear garments. 

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