

SHIVPRIYA TEXCHEM · KNOWLEDGE SERIES

Jaipur. Hand block printing and the craft export trade.

Sanganer and Bagru gave Jaipur a craft that survived industrialisation by becoming a premium. Hand block printing is slow, irregular and expensive — and those are precisely the qualities the export market now pays for.

Sanganer

and Bagru — the two printing traditions the city is built on

By hand

each block placed individually; the irregularity is the product

Export

the market that made craft printing commercially viable again



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CHAPTER 01

What Jaipur makes

Jaipur's textile economy sits at the intersection of craft and export. It is not a volume cluster; it is a design and technique cluster serving buyers who want something a rotary machine cannot produce.

SEGMENT	NOTES
Hand block printing	Sanganeri and Bagru traditions — the city's signature craft
Natural dyeing	Indigo, madder, iron and mud resist techniques, particularly at Bagru
Screen printing	Volume printing serving the same design market at lower cost
Craft export	Apparel, home textiles and made-ups for international buyers
Bandhani & tie-dye	Rajasthani resist-dye traditions alongside block print
Home textiles	Quilts, cushions, table linen and made-ups built on printed fabric

Sanganeri and Bagru are different. **Sanganeri** printing uses fine floral motifs printed on a white or light ground. **Bagru** uses earthy natural dyes with mud-resist and a characteristic darker, more rustic palette. Buyers frequently conflate them — and they are genuinely different products.

CHAPTER 02

How a block print is actually made

Understanding the process explains both the price and the variability. Every metre passes through a person's hands many times.



One block per colour, placed individually, repeated across the whole length

01 Blocks are carved by hand

Teak blocks carved with the motif. A multi-colour design needs one block per colour.

02 Fabric is prepared

Scoured and often treated with a mordant so the dye will fix and the ground is receptive.

03 Each impression is manual

The printer dips the block and strikes it. Registration depends entirely on skill.

04 Colours are built up

Each colour is a separate pass with a separate block, aligned to the previous one.

05 Resist and discharge

Bagru work uses mud and gum resists to protect areas from subsequent dyeing.

06 Washing and fixing

Extensive washing sets the colour and removes resist. This stage consumes a lot of water.

A rotary machine prints a perfect repeat. A block printer prints **a slightly different repeat every time** — and that is what the buyer is paying for.

CHAPTER 03

How the cluster is organised

Jaipur's textile trade is a layered structure of export houses, printing units and artisan families, and the relationships between them define the commercial terms.

CRAFT EXPORT HOUSES

Holding international buyer relationships.

- 01 **Jaipur export houses**
Apparel and home textile exporters
- 02 **Home textile exporters**
Quilts, cushions and made-ups for overseas retail
- 03 **Design-led exporters**
Own-design collections for international buyers
- 04 **Fair trade organisations**
Certified craft supply chains
- 05 **Buying agencies**
Sourcing agents for overseas brands

PRINTING UNITS

Block, screen and natural dye.

- 01 **Sanganer printing units**
Fine floral block printing tradition
- 02 **Bagru natural dye units**
Mud resist and natural dye printing
- 03 **Screen printing houses**
Volume printing on the same design language
- 04 **Artisan co-operatives**
Collective structures for block printers
- 05 **Block carvers**
The specialist craft behind every design

FABRIC & FINISHING

Base cloth and conversion.

- 01 **Grey fabric traders**
Sourcing base cloth from Gujarat and Maharashtra
- 02 **Preparation units**
Scouring and mordanting before printing
- 03 **Washing and finishing**
The water-intensive stage after printing
- 04 **Made-up converters**
Cutting and stitching into finished products
- 05 **Quilting units**
Jaipuri razai and quilted made-ups

CHAPTER 04

How craft is priced and planned

Buying hand-printed fabric is a genuinely different commercial exercise from buying mill fabric. The variables that matter are not the ones on a normal specification sheet.

VARIABLE	WHY IT DRIVES PRICE
Number of colours	Each colour is a separate block and a separate pass. Cost scales with colour count
Design intricacy	Fine motifs need more precise carving and slower, more skilled printing
Natural vs pigment dye	Natural dyeing is slower, more variable and substantially more expensive
Repeat size	Small repeats mean more impressions per metre and more labour
Fabric width	Wider fabric means more impressions across; block printing does not scale like machinery
Lead time	Craft production cannot be compressed. Time is a fixed input, not a variable

Variation is not a defect. Hand printing produces registration variation, colour variation between lots and occasional misprints. **A buyer who applies mill fabric tolerances to block print will reject most of it.** Agreeing an acceptable variation standard up front is the single most important commercial step.

CHAPTER 05

The environmental question

Block printing looks environmentally benign and is not automatically so. The washing stages are water intensive and the dye chemistry varies enormously between units.



Jaipur, Rajasthan · Photograph: Chainwit. — CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

- **Washing is the water cost.** Repeated washing after printing consumes substantially more water than the printing itself.
- **Natural dyeing is genuinely lower impact** — but slower, more expensive and harder to reproduce.
- **Pigment printing** is common and much lower water, but is a synthetic chemistry despite the craft framing.
- **Effluent regulation** applies here as elsewhere in Rajasthan, and enforcement has tightened.

CHAPTER 06

What limits the cluster

Jaipur's craft economy faces the classic difficulties of hand production competing in a machine market.

- **Artisan succession.** Younger generations moving out of block printing into other work.
- **Machine imitation.** Screen and digital printing reproduce the look at a fraction of the cost.
- **Authenticity policing.** Machine-printed fabric sold as hand block is a persistent market problem.
- **Water and effluent.** Washing is water intensive in a water-scarce state.
- **Scale limits.** Craft production cannot be scaled quickly to meet a large order.
- **Price pressure.** Buyers accustomed to mill pricing frequently undervalue the labour content.

CHAPTER 07

What is shifting

The cluster's direction is toward verified authenticity, sustainability credentials and direct-to-consumer routes that capture more of the retail margin.

01 Certification

GI and craft marks used to distinguish genuine hand printing from machine imitation.

03 Direct to consumer

Online brands selling craft textiles directly and capturing retail margin.

05 Artisan documentation

Traceability to the printing unit as a marketing and compliance asset.

02 Natural dye premium

Genuine natural dyeing positioned as a distinct, higher-value product.

04 Design collaboration

Contemporary designers working with traditional printers on modern collections.

06 Water investment

Treatment and recycling in the washing stages, driven by regulation.

CHAPTER 08

Buying craft printing from Jaipur

Buying well here requires adjusting expectations that work perfectly for mill fabric and fail completely for craft.

01 Verify hand versus machine

Ask directly and inspect. Machine print sold as hand block is common. Look at repeat consistency.

02 Agree a variation standard

Define acceptable registration and shade variation in writing before production starts.

03 Confirm the dye chemistry

Natural, pigment or reactive. All three are sold under the craft banner and differ enormously.

04 Build in real lead time

Craft production has a fixed pace. Compressed schedules produce rejected fabric.

05 Test fastness

Natural dyes in particular need wash and light fastness testing on the actual fabric.

06 Match order size to the unit

Large orders spread across many artisan units produce more variation, not less.

How Shivpriya reads it. Jaipur is a **craft cluster, not a manufacturing one**, and the buyers who succeed here are the ones who specify variation tolerance instead of pretending it will not occur. Set that standard first and the rest of the programme becomes straightforward.

IN CLOSING

Irregular by hand. Premium by market.

Jaipur's block printing survived mechanisation by becoming the thing mechanisation cannot copy convincingly. If you are developing a craft print programme, talk to us — and settle the variation standard and the dye chemistry before anything else.

TALK TO US

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