



colours of life

WORDS AND STYLING PIA JANE BIJKERK PHOTOGRAPHY CRAIG WALL

A JOURNEY INTO NATURAL DYE TECHNIQUES AND THE ANCIENT JAPANESE ART OF SHIBORI.

FORAGING SEEMS TO BE a perpetual instinct. Even without an immediate application in mind, I'm always collecting potential treasures for styling shoots and natural objects that may one day adorn my walls, embellish little gifts or simply provide inspiration for projects.

But sometimes the haphazard foraging assemblages lead to a whole fresh purpose. On my studio table I have a large pile of unbleached cloth and various other textiles that await the pursuit of my new-found interest in natural dyeing.

I have been inspired by India Flint's two books, *Eco Colour* and *Second Skin* (both published by Murdoch Books), which I bought last year to while away the final weeks of my pregnancy. I have pored over the pages, soaking up the details and instructions. India's methods of gathering seeds, pods, native plants and eucalypt leaves to create distinctive organic dyes suit me perfectly. And the idea of binding the fabric using string or rope, and folding bundles of cloth around wooden blocks to create interesting patterns is inspiring.

Most of all, I love how India talks about the journey of the dyeing process being one of the most satisfying aspects. I'm currently on the lookout at markets for some old, large vessels to use as dye pots, as well as gathering all the information I can from blogs and other internet resources such as Etsy and Pinterest.

To further understand the journey of dyeing, I recently visited the home studio of textile designers Pepa Martin and Karen Davis, whose work with the ancient Japanese art of *shibori* has become well known through their collaboration with interior designers and stylists in Australia and overseas. While I've always associated *shibori* with the splendidly deep, rich indigo shade, I've learnt from Pepa and Karen that the term does

not mean a specific colour, but instead defines the techniques of creating patterns within the dyeing process. You can see their creations, and learn about their workshops, at www.shibori.com.au

Shibori is the Japanese term for several ways of dyeing with a pattern by folding, binding, winding, stitching or compressing the cloth. In the West, we've come to know part of this as tie-dyeing. Like me, perhaps you've strategically forgotten your attempts some three decades ago at tying rubber bands around your white T-shirts, then plunking them into tubs filled with mixtures of boldly chemical-coloured water.

But since observing Pepa and Karen demonstrate their techniques, I've seen another side of it. They describe *shibori* as an abstract painting: "On the surface it may appear simple and unplanned, but as you stare into the layers, you are able to see a story unfold."

I now feel ready to create some *shibori* stories of my own. I look forward to stitching my soon-to-be dyed cloth into cushion covers and a simple summer bed throw, tea towels and knotted fabric wraps for gifts. I'm even thinking of some teeny *shibori* bloomers for my baby girl. *

PIA'S LINK LOVE

For more inspiration, visit these sites:

- 1 www.prophet-of-bloom.blogspot.com.au
- 2 www.emmallamb.blogspot.com.au
- 3 www.sallycampbell.com.au/blogs/news
- 4 www.victoriaalexander.com.au

Pia is Country Style's resident blogger at blogs.homelife.com.au/countrystyle