



## sweet serenity

Author, blogger and stylist Pia Jane Bijkerk's Dutch houseboat is both a home and source of inspiration for her handcrafted style

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**O**n wintry mornings in Amsterdam, when rain runs in rivulets down cobblestone streets and the wind whistles through the bare branches of chestnut trees, Pia Jane Bijkerk awakes to find her home gently swaying. Outside, quacking ducks waddle noisily over her roof and a steady stream of boot-clad feet and bicycle wheels race past the rain-streaked windows.

Living on a houseboat moored on an Amsterdam canal is hardly what the Australian-born author and stylist visualised when she moved to Europe in 2007, but then again, Pia has never followed a conventional path. "I lived on Sydney's northern beaches until I was 10, and after that my family moved around a lot – Montreal, Pennsylvania, Italy – I think that's where my wanderlust spirit stems from," muses Pia.

After returning to Australia, Pia studied film and photography at Sydney's College of Fine Arts before opening her own homewares store, Indigo Artefacts, at the age of 21. Running a business gave Pia the chance to interact directly with craftspeople from all over the world, and she began to appreciate the workmanship of handcrafted pieces, which inspired her to pen two books, *Paris: Made by Hand* and *Amsterdam: Made by Hand*. "I've always reacted very strongly against consumerism," she says. "I know, I know – I'm a stylist! It's my job to make products look beautiful to entice people to consume. But mass-production doesn't appeal to me; I think it's awful when people aren't aware of where things come from and who made them." >



In her houseboat, Pia {opposite} potters from one workspace to the next. "I'll go from writing at my desk to styling a food shoot at my dining table to playing the piano {top}. Sometimes I hear something beautiful outside and record it, or spy something striking and set up the tripod and snap away."





Pia's penchant for seeking the beauty in everyday life can be seen throughout her home. Her ceramics collection {left} includes platters from Dinosaur Designs and Mud Australia pieces teamed with vintage finds from Paris and Amsterdam. Living in a houseboat {right} is "so peaceful," says Pia. "I love being surrounded by water and water creatures, to see the ducks and ducklings visit."



"When I was WRITING MY BOOK, I PURPOSELY LEFT OUT A FEW ATELIERS SO THAT WHEN PEOPLE WALKED PAST THEM, THEY'D FEEL AS IF IT WAS THEIR SPECIAL DISCOVERY"

< Swapping her beloved Aussie beaches for the bright lights of Paris, Pia discovered she was not alone in her quest to keep the time-honoured tradition of handmade alive. There, tucked away in the graceful curves of winding alleyways and clandestine courtyards, were hundreds of ateliers – tiny studios – in which artisans, young and old, devote their lives to the art of *fait main* (handmade). "I'd never seen anything like it," Pia recalls. "Shoemakers, ceramicists, milliners, dressmakers, umbrella restorers. And not just people creating new objects by hand; the concept of *fait main* includes the act of restoring, restyling and reinterpreting a found object, breathing new life into it."

It was a similar scenario when Pia later moved to Amsterdam in the autumn of 2007. "The best thing about writing the books was that initial discovery. It's so much fun to wander down a street and suddenly, without warning, come across a hidden atelier. I wanted to pass on that feeling, so I wrote each chapter as separate little 'wanders'." Pia's ability at unearthing treasures has thousands of people logging on to her blog ([blog.piajanebijkerk.com](http://blog.piajanebijkerk.com)) to delight in her newest discoveries.

Made up of little corners of inspiration filled with handmade treasures, Pia's houseboat is an ever-changing space. "I keep it fairly neutral so that I can use the space as a blank canvas for my ideas. Right now I have a wall filled with pages of text, images and illustrations for my upcoming book."

As the ducks quack away and the rain drums against the steel roof, Pia makes her second cup of tea for the day and settles at her desk, pencil in hand, paper at the ready. There's a new story to be told, a hidden studio to be discovered, a picture to be captured. "It sounds simple, but it's all about enhancing the everyday," she smiles. **fb**

Look to Pia's books, Paris: *Made By Hand* (\$35, *Random House*) and Amsterdam: *Made By Hand* (\$32.95, *Random House*), for shopping finds.

## Pia's guide to unearthing the handmade in your own city

1. "Wander down streets that are off the beaten path. The leafy, quiet streets that we tend to by-pass because we're in a hurry are where the hidden treasures lie. Step out of your comfort zone and you'll be amazed by what you find."
2. "It sounds obvious, but check out your local craft and farmers markets. The Australian Farmers Markets Association has a wonderful website ([farmersmarkets.org.au](http://farmersmarkets.org.au)) that lets you find your closest farmers market. Design markets like The Finders Keepers ([thefinderskeepers.com](http://thefinderskeepers.com)) are a brilliant way to connect with craftspeople from all over the country."
3. "Live handmade. Once you start to think about all the things you can buy that have been lovingly made by hand, you'll start to come across more and more fabulous hidden treasure troves. Don't forget to share your findings with your friends, family and community – it's without a doubt the best part of the discovery!"