



April Cornell

April Cornell was born in Montreal, Canada, and has made her home in Vermont since 1992. For over 35 years she has traveled the world as an artist, designer, businesswoman, and philanthropist. Her colorful, floral table linens and romantic, feminine apparel reflect her love of nature and joyful style. She practices a one-world philosophy: embracing the common concerns and common joys of women, men, and children worldwide. She has headquarters in Canada, the USA, and India. Two of the buildings are pink, and one is yellow. She has three grown sons and is married to Basil Stetson.





I started drawing when I was 4. My mother used to give me the cardboard from my father's dry-cleaned shirts; it was white, clean, and saved just for me. I can't remember if I started with a pencil or crayons, but I loved having a tool in my hands and making markings on the page. My mother was an artist as well; she drew fashionable women. I thought she was so talented, so I tried to copy her.

I remember when I recognized that grass continued under the legs of people, and finally drawing that in was an "aha moment" in kindergarten. I remember recognizing a profile and trying to draw one, and how shading was a tool other than a line. At 13 my neighbor gave me oil painting lessons; I learned to mix colors and understand a new medium. We copied Degas, we did still-lives ... it was exciting!

When I was 15 I owned my first blouse from India; it was a single color and heavily embroidered in multicolor. It was so different and confoundingly beautiful that was the first tug at my eye for things Eastern, mysterious, and unknown. When I was 18 I had my first apartment. I was always conscious of my setting: yellow rug, pink quilt, Brown Betty teapot, and orange and green enamel pans. I tried Grandmother's recipes, including plum loaf and biscuits, adding these bits of things I loved and noticed into my independent life. These things — a love of my home, color, ambiance, and art — eventually formed the basis of my business and brand.

In 1974 I traveled overland to Afghanistan with my former husband who became my business partner for 30 years. Afghanistan was so hospitable, like a large family of merchants, and as we traveled, by bus, from town to town, the next group of merchants would take care of us. We were making deals and learning trade. The brown and almost barren land, the nomadic women in their rich red and blue chintz patterned dresses, the dark red carpets,



Tips

- I first organize by color, theme, and item, and then by practicality, function, fit, and price. You need to create your own hierarchy or you will be a slave to the outcome. Art first, results second.
- Put one foot in front of the other; good ideas will stand the test of time. Receptiveness creates expertise, but being inexpert and trying new things is very creative and exciting. Do both.

and the brass samovars — all this was rich and new to my eye. The mixture of people — Uzbeks, Turkmen, Hazars, and Baluch — each had different crafts, different faces, and different beliefs, and they mingled at this ancient crossroads. Here was history, here was beauty, and here was expression formed over the passage of time, twined together yet separate. The nomadic culture intrigued me. Nomads were moving a home seasonally and carrying their lives in a tent — recreating a home with hangings, carpets, and embroidered pillows wherever they went. I took a sip of this world, and it warmed me, fed me, and intrigued me.

That point was when our business began. The Russian chintz fabrics of the Kuchi women, with vivid painterly roses with embroidered yokes imbedded with precious cowrie shells, spoke the juxtaposition of art, nature, and contrast that I love. The color was as a savior, a balm, and a mood and ambiance; color was my friend.

We opened a second-floor retail shop in Montreal, and the next 20 years included a series of new stores, wholesale shows, warehouses, and eventually a factory in India. India, with its vast textile history and colonial and traditional needlecraft, printing, and weaving, was a natural partner. I started exploring Victorian clothing and nightwear for inspiration. An antique blouse from Canal Street in New York became the first vintage-inspired style we made. Delicate laces, crochets, shell buttons, and fine pleating became my leitmotif, my expertise, and my love. I learned to decode art into screens: to move watercolors and paintings into designs that could be printed.





Life moved forward, in a natural progression, from one shop to two shops, from two shops to 5 shops, and eventually from five shops to over 100 shops. And from one baby to two babies, from two children to three children, there were three sons to journey around the world with, to hold on my hip, to mother on airplanes, and to nurture. Through my children I developed a deeper understanding of the world of women and families, the importance of our roles and our responsibilities, the importance of home. Worldwide, we all have the same desire — the best for our children.

I saw the child in the face of an old man, I saw the breath in the life of a plant, I thanked the trees for their shelter us. I saw beauty in the commonplace, common action, common grace. Nature wherever I was, lent her guidance in shape, color, variety, and wisdom. I tried to pass all these messages through our product to our customers.

In 1992 we opened our own factory in Delhi. The process from design to delivery manufacturing is captivating. Each step is a creative endeavor, touched by many hands, including dying, printing, washing, pattern-making, cutting, and embroidery; selecting threads, colors, collar shapes, and buttons; and finishing, packing, and tagging. To take art and truly use it in a way that enters the lives of women and becomes a part of their days is a very lucky and blessed job.





Favorite Quote
"One never knows what one is going to do. One starts a painting and then it becomes something quite different."

- Pablo Picasso



In 2005 the business and the marriage came to an end. It was a difficult, struggling time, but with it came a bright outcome. When my husband and I split up, I looked around my home and decided to make it mine. Instead of hanging paintings by others on the walls, I painted the walls with poetry, my own words, nurturing trees, and a giant candelabra above the fireplace. Today I find painting on walls without borders or edges one of the most joyful things I do. With some faithful employees I restarted the April Cornell business; I repurposed an old factory building in Vermont, painted it pink, laid bamboo floors, and put couches and armchairs throughout. It is artistic and studio-like. I met a man — a laughing, funny man — who loves me. Today the business is again taking off, and our open spaces are sometimes too open! I struggle with the leap from intimacy to organization, from behind the scene to public eye, but I am not afraid. I know what I do, what we do, is sincere and therefore worthy, and that is validation enough.



WHERE WOMEN CREATE would like to thank April Cornell for her involvement in our summer issue. To learn more, visit aprilcornell.com.