

# “Ama Qhella” Quechua for “Don’t Be Lazy”

The Puchka Peru tour was all it promised and more! A textile tour that gave both insight into the cultural heritage and skills that support the current art and craft forms, and us, ‘turistas’, a glimpse into how hard they work to make it all possible.



Weaving that Stephanie followed



Stef weaving

There was so much to see and do we had no chance to ‘be lazy’ but the time spent with Maximo Laura was most precious. Eight days of cool rooms full of colour; Maximo’s tapestries lining the walls for inspiration, the floor heaped in a colourful pile of alpaca yarn of every conceivable hue, and four looms set up ready to go.

Aruna and I, having slightly more experience, were encouraged to try more complex designs, although you’d hardly realise it judging by the quality of the other’s work. All of us followed images and colour-ways detailed from Maximo’s own designs; the intent being that we would learn the key techniques he used including working with a double warp known as Anilado - vertical binding, colour blending through hatching, soumak, pick and pick, outlining, wrapping and use of supplementary warp and wefts, with lots of variations besides.

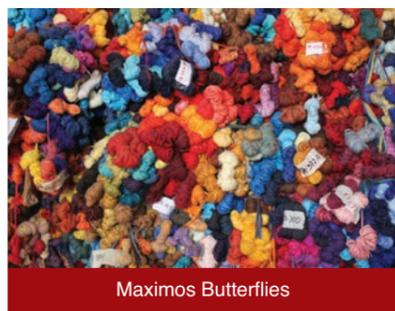
Planning was key to optimising the time available to us, to allow for as much weaving as feasible. Colours were sorted into ‘butterflies’ bundled together to correspond to sections of the design - everything worked out in advance as much as possible although there were always final



Maximo and Jimi

decisions at the point of weaving, as ever!

Maximo and Jimi showed us, with infinite patience and fingers that seemed to dance over the warps, how to transform jumbles of threads into mounds of colourful texture. Maximo writes “Tapestry-making requires a progressive, slow and irreversible system of work that allows for the miniscule, patient and intimate meeting of technical and visual solutions” but wow at what speed! We really did need to watch closely to be able to take it all in. However both of them were willing to repeat, over and over again,



Maximos Butterflies

those techniques that were both familiar yet different to us.

Technically the emphasis was always about evenness of technique, control of line to ensure it worked visually, that blending of colours flowed seamlessly, and the contrasts in textures balanced and unified the design as a whole. Emotionally it was about the magic of sharing with Maximo the pleasure (and occasional pain) of the technical and visual; the practical and the aesthetic elements of tapestry and those particular techniques that make his work so special.

Finally our experience of the tour was also about the generosity of all those who shared their knowledge and pride in their culture and skills with us, and who put in enormous amounts of time and effort into making sure we had a journey of a lifetime!

**Stephanie Edwards**

*Photos by Stephanie Edwards*

# Puchka Peru Trip September/October 2015

The Puchka Peru trip is worth doing just for the experience of Peru and its fabulous food. The highlight for us though was the weaving with Maximo Laura and his nephew Jimi in Arequipa. Eight long but wonderful days split into two sets of four with a casual throw away comment that we could finish a 60cm x 45cm piece of weaving within the allocated time if we were able to accomplish 6cm per day. So no pressure! We were in the studio at 8.00am until 6.00pm with breaks for lunch and tea/coffee.

Our first meeting with Maximo Laura was at his workshop in Lima where we privately viewed his collection of richly textured colourful tapestries. He talked about the imagery he used; birds, fishes, Andean iconography and more recently the female form and coca leaves, but most importantly his use of colour. For him colour is about light, contrast and emotion. We were given a demonstration of his colour blending technique and all invited to make a butterfly each to keep. We were then taken on a tour of his studio and saw all the hand-drawn cartoons scaled up to size. Then on to rooms where all his yarns are stored from the darkest dark to the lightest light and every colour, shade and tint in between; a feast for your eyes.

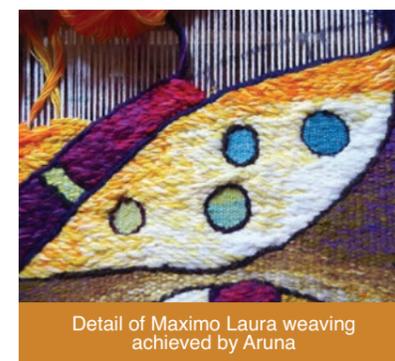


Hands closeup weaving

In his weaving workshop six weavers were busy on their looms. We witnessed the ‘cutting off’ of a tapestry, this caused lots of excitement, in Spanish! Finally, to his design room where he explained how his design process, iconography and sketches all combined to make the final image which is then coloured and scaled up. Then the technical aspects of weaving are

considered which is now done using computer generated software.

The next day we were off to Arequipa for the real thing!



Detail of Maximo Laura weaving achieved by Aruna

The day began at 8.00am with Maximo going through his colour blending theory, double warping and explaining that we had to work horizontally in a linear format on the loom incorporating texture, plain weave, outlining, and supplementary warp and wefts. Everything was prepared for us; the four-shaft floor looms were warped, marked up with a welt already woven. All the colours we would need were blended and made up into butterflies with the colour cartoon as a guide, so we began weaving.

There were four of us in the group, two beginners working with Jimi, and us two experienced weavers working with Maximo and he started us off on our weaving journey. As we had our target of 6cm per day it was heads down and no interruptions. There was no time for chit-chat in the first four days as we were determined to meet our daily target! The joy of this experience was that we just got on with weaving.

On this trip we were aiming to complete one weaving over eight days, so after four days of weaving a long weekend break in the Colca Canyon was a refreshing change and we returned with renewed vigour feeling less daunted by the prospect of our 6cm daily target. By midday on 2nd Friday we had completed our weavings and celebrated with lunch, music and dancing. After which we had to hem the ends in preparation for the ‘show and tell’ display in the afternoon.



Aruna finished tapestry

It was such a pleasure to see all the beautiful work from the embroiderers, knitters, braiders and gourd carvers as well as our tapestries!

**Aruna Reddy**

*Photos credit for both articles:  
Puchka Peru Textile Tours  
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