



out of africa

And back to the world

BY KERRY ANNE DUCEY

IN AFRICA, Chris Gay is known as *Ayindisa* (pronounced eye-in-DEE-suh), a tribal name from the Fra-fra dialect in Ghana that means “God’s hand is in the work you do.” Folks in Ridgefield, where Gay grew up, know him as proprietor of an upscale boutique, also called *Ayindisa*.

“The name *Ayindisa* was given to me by the artisans,” explains Gay. The artisans Gay refers to are the talented individuals who create one-of-a-kind, fair-trade goods that fill the *Ayindisa* store at 18 Prospect Street. Gifts for the home, clothing, jewelry, Yoga bags, hand-crafted animal masks, and natural grass baskets are just some of the beautiful, functional products for sale.

Each purchase helps create sustainable living in places like Nepal, Thailand, India, Vietnam, and small villages of Africa; and with each item comes a brief story about the artisan who created it. “My goal is to have products from all over the world,” says Gay.

The concept for the store took root when a traditional December celebration close to home turned into helping

those less fortunate far away. “In 2002, my mom brought us to Ethiopia for Christmas. The experience I had meeting such amazing, talented people—poor and humble—profoundly changed my life, and I made a promise not to forget and to be of service in any way I could,” explains Gay.

Traveling back to Africa to perform missionary work, he also began a philanthropic effort in America to help African artisans. His venue: a blue Chevy pickup truck parked at SUNY Purchase, where he was a student. His products: African drums and masks. Gay was able to help disadvantaged folks from around the globe by selling their products.

One such artisan, Ghanaian drum-maker Dagando Dramani, who is known as Peter, has become the backbone of Gay’s philanthropic work. “He is basically the co-founder of *Ayindisa*,” Gay says of his partner, who visits artisans on a daily basis and collaborates with Gay back in Ridgefield.

Through *Ayindisa*, Gay has generated a sustainable income for people who would otherwise live homeless and hungry. “They tell me it’s huge, more than I could ever fathom,” says Gay. “When the artisans are making money, it trickles down to the whole community. My goal is to open more stores, but this is a good start.” ■

DRUMMING IT UP
Chris Gay in his Prospect Street shop that supports artisans around the world.

