

A DESIGNER'S EYE

For one intrepid lenswoman, an emerging career in design inspired a journey to capture Ethiopia's most diverse tribal region.

portfolio by JENNY J. NORRIS



Photographer Jenny J. Norris captures a young member of the Karo tribe while villagers assist in finding the best angle for the backdrop of Uroko linen from Zak + Fox.

At the end of 2015, New York photographer and interior designer Jenny J. Norris traveled to the Omo River Valley region of southwestern Ethiopia to photograph its tribal communities. A love of nature and wildlife had brought Norris to East Africa before, to Kenya and Tanzania, but it was her interest in capturing nomadic tribes that landed her in the remote area where

many of Ethiopia's more than 80 recognized ethnic groups live. "In a way, my entire life is guided by beauty," Norris says. "Whether it's creating or admiring spaces or traveling in search of beautiful landscapes and cultures."

Her "Aha!" moment came when she selected 30 yards of her favorite fabrics to use as backdrops. She knew that without them the intense African sun might wash out the beau-

tiful details in, say, the large lip plates of the Mursi tribe. She pulled from a wide range of textiles, such as William Morris vintage-looking florals and the bold, contemporary lines of Zak + Fox. "Given our environment, the language barrier, and other unforeseen challenges," Norris says, "the portraits took a lot of planning, adapting, and improvising."

Norris, 36, studied fashion photography at



An Arbore tribesman stands before an Arden velvet from Duralee.



A cotton Gibbie from Duralee hangs behind an Arbore tribeswoman.



A woman from the Mursi tribe in front of the Lodden pattern from Morris & Co.



A Bana tribesman sits with the About Flowers linen blend from Dedar.

New York's Fashion Institute of Technology and fell into interior design five years ago after decorating a Brooklyn home for a growing family ("my most DIY project to date"). Since then, her practice has snowballed to include designing commercial spaces such as a coffee shop in the Bronx, the gut renovation of an

Upper West Side apartment, and styling a home on Shelter Island, New York.

During her two weeks in Ethiopia, she made hundreds of portraits. When it was time for her exhibition at Brooklyn's Art + Method Gallery in November, she chose the shots in which she felt a connection in the subject's

eyes. "We couldn't speak to each other, but there was this harmonious, warm feeling," she says. "Wherever you go around the world, people are very much the same." —*Joe Harper*

Prints, from \$500, are available at jjnorris.com; 917-207-4908.