

# Isabela Capeto Isabela Capeto Rio de Janeiro, BR

'Do you want to see the view from my house? Are you ready?' Isabela Capeto spins her laptop around towards the window, which frames an image of Brazil that is so iconic, with such pinpoint precision (there's no mist today), that it looks like a postcard. But then you hear the sea and the waves rolling in. It's real: Rio de Janeiro's Sugarloaf Mountain, rising from the water's edge at Guanabara Bay.

A virtual tour of her apartment in the neighbourhood of Flamengo reveals white walls, with splashes of turquoise, covered in picture frames; large green plants offset by veneered mid-century furniture; pots and pans in reds and blues hanging above a breakfast bar; a small library in the corner; every surface occupied. Much like her self-named fashion label, Isabela Capeto's house is not one for minimalists.

Isa, as everyone calls her, founded her womenswear brand in 2002. 'I needed to do something that reflected my style, that mixed craft and handmade with something more human; with social responsibility,' she says. 'That didn't exist 18 years ago – it existed before that, but not since. I come from a family who, for birthdays and Christmas presents, would make everything, or we'd buy trainers and embroider them. I don't think I thought about it in that way back then, but launching my own brand was something I needed to do for me.'

After graduating from Accademia Italiana in Florence, Isa returned to Brazil to take up roles with established Brazilian brands Maria Bonita, Maria Bonita Extra and Lenny Niemeyer. But the pull of striking out on her own remained strong. Working from a small room in a friend's office, with the equivalent of £1,000 in the bank, Isa reconnected with the seamstresses and embroiderers she'd known before university (back when she made her own clothes for fun), who continue to adorn her handmade pieces today. Then, one day, an agent showed one of her jackets to London boutique Browns, which would become the first international stockist of

Isa's brand. From that point, many more followed, including Barneys and Jeffrey in the US, and Colette and Le Bon Marché in France.

Isa's timing was perfect. Just a year before the brand's launch, Goldman Sachs named Brazil in an international group consisting of Russia, India and China – the BRICs – as countries predicted to step up and play a leading role in the world economy. Accordingly, by 2010, Brazil's economy had grown at its fastest rate in 14 years, propelling millions of Brazilians into the country's middle class. Their love of shopping, combined with a tendency to pay in instalments, helped fuel the growth of many national fashion brands.

'As I started to make more and more pieces, I was able to give the seamstresses more work. These are women who have to work at home because they have children to look after,' Isa explains. 'Even with Covid-19, I managed to keep them on with a bit of work. Because it's more than a source of income. They say to me: "Isa, for the love of God, I need to do something, I'm going crazy!"' Four months locked up at home... it's hard. I have a lot of love for them; they've never let me down. Even when I was doing fashion shows, they'd work nights to get everything done.'

Today, the brand is smaller: it makes only five or six pieces for every style. Isa no longer shows two collections a year in the Paris showrooms and business is, for now, largely domestic – international sales used to account for 60% of her brand's turnover. She admits to learning some hard lessons along the way, most notably when she sold a 50% stake of the company to the Brazilian retail company InBrands in 2008.

'We wanted completely different things,' she explains, the smile disappearing from her face. 'They wanted to move production to China and India. I wanted my brand to be 100% Brazilian, to keep giving these women work, to use Brazilian fabrics. After three years together, I then spent the next two in a legal battle to buy my name back. It was madness.'

