

Ditch kitsch for craftsmanship

Latin American tastes are making their way into our homes as well as our restaurants, writes *Emily Brooks*

Casita Andina is a restaurant that wants to transport you to the foothills of the Andes. The Peruvian picanteria not only serves some of London's finest ceviche, but goes the extra mile on the interiors, with textiles made by traditional Andean weavers, folkie tin-framed mirrors and a turquoise-walled patio hung with terracotta pots.

The trend for Latin American flavours has found a place in homeware, starting with the strong link between the visual flair of the food itself and the tableware in which it is served. Searching for a theme for a summer dining collection, Sainsbury's Home tapped in to the fashionable food of Peru and Mexico, launching "an eye-catching range that's all about sharing, tasting plates and experimenting with new flavours," says Rona Olds, Sainsbury's Home's head of buying and design.

With rhythmic geometric patterns and saturated colours found in South American street food trucks and restaurants, the tableware allows customers to "mix and match the patterns or just go with one look," says Olds. "We are a nation of food lovers and the rise of street food has allowed us to play with presenting food in a different way."

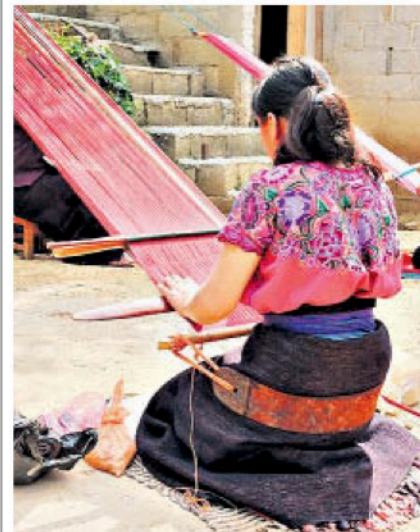
The sizzling bright palette and joyful patterns are exactly what you might expect from Latin American interiors, but there is a different side to the design of this region. Look beyond the kitsch tropicália of cacti and palm tree motifs and you will discover the beautiful craftsmanship that countries such as Peru, Mexico and Bolivia have to offer. London-



Peruse: Sainsbury's Home's South American tabletop range, above; backstrap loom weaving, below, is common across Latin America

based design studio A Rum Fellow, which supplied the textiles for Casita Andina, specialises in handmade fabrics from Guatemala and Peru, notably highly labour-intensive brocades woven on a backstrap loom. "We were amazed at the quality of what we found," says co-founder Dylan O'Shea, about the first sourcing trips he made to the region in 2012 with his business partner Caroline Lindsell. "If you go to Peru or Guatemala you will see lots of amazing textiles but you won't necessarily see the kind of thing they do for us, because it's not for the tourist market. It's beautiful, detailed, incredibly skilled work."

The interior designer Jo Berryman uses A Rum Fellow's textiles as part of an eclectic style that mixes Seventies vintage with contemporary rugs and lighting. "I marvel at the way full-spectrum colour is employed, the nuance of shape and stitch," says



Berryman. "Their cushions always add bite to our schemes. We recently ordered about 30 of them for a retreat centre in Somerset. Not only do they amp up the kaleidoscope, they also add a spiritual edge that's perfectly in keeping with the new home."

While these textiles are aimed at the luxury market, Berryman thinks there is also room in other markets. "There's an endearing earthiness and authenticity that comes with less refined interpretations of this kind of work," she says. Yonder Living's frazadas (versatile blankets-cum-rugs, woven in the Andes), for example, are much more chunky and uneven than A Rum Fellow's brocades, but that's part of the charm. You might even find a blob of wax on them, says Yonder co-founder Sophia Leppard, as the makers often weave by candlelight.

"It is the little traces and marks left by the makers that give a product its stamp of authenticity," says Leppard. "Each one is unique and an expression of the craftsman's own colour choice." The same could be said of the region's tiles - try east London's Milagros for fantastic Mexican examples, including hard-to-find unglazed terracotta, prized for its subtle colour variations.

Although certain techniques are used across South America - backstrap weaving is still practised in many countries, with regional subtleties - it would be a mistake to distil a whole continent's design traditions into a few objects. Caracas-based Jessica Macias knows differently: she set up Maison Numen last year as a way of bringing handmade homewares from Latin America (and beyond) to the attention of the high-end interiors market.

Much of it is sophisticatedly muted and neutral, a contrast to the bright colours you might expect. She pinpoints "Peru for its alpaca textiles, Mexico for barro negro and Talavera de la Reina pottery, Guatemala for hand-woven wool textiles and Venezuela for marvellous Amazonian basketry" as just a few of the country-specific treasures worth seeking out.

The remote areas from which many authentic objects are sourced is perhaps why they have remained a design secret. "One of the most difficult and interesting aspects of our job is to find highly-skilled makers," says Macias. Take the Amazonian baskets, sourced in Venezuela: "They are so special. The indigenous people spend days in the jungle searching for the material to make them, and most of them come with knitted or painted figures that narrate their cosmopolitan. But access to those regions is very difficult. You can only go there

Rainbow effect: Jo Berryman designed an office in Mayfair, main, with PET Lamp's chandelier of recycled Colombian lights

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ADRIAN BRISQOE



FOR SALE GET THE LATIN LOOK

Katalox wood cutlery made in Mexico £60 per set (maisonnumen.com)



Tahual brocade bolster cushion £280, by A Rum Fellow (arumfellow.com)



Mexican Mezcal glass £6, Tea & Tequila Trading (teaandtequilatrading.com)



Kenet chair in Andrew Martin's Las Salinas fabric £520 (balmmainandbalmmain.com)



Moja Atlantic fabric £135 per m, by Mark Alexander (markalexander.com)



Hand-embroidered Mexican wall hanging £740, Montes & Clark (montesandclark.co.uk)



Yox table runner £110, by Maud Interiors (maudinteriors.com)

through mighty rivers and there is no access during the dry season." As well as the knowledge that you have bought what Macias calls "a soulful piece" when you acquire an authentic bit of handwork, there is usually a further feelgood factor. Sourcing is often done through co-operatives and social enterprises that help to improve the lives of the people (often women) who make them.

Just as the trend for Peruvian cuisine has opened our eyes (and stomachs) to previously unheard-of ingredients, so design offers up its own intriguing raw materials. The barro negro ceramics that Macias reveres are a case in point: translated as black clay, they come from Oaxaca in Mexico and are known for their dark colour and unusual sheen. Maison Numen sells barro negro from contemporary Austrian-Mexican maker David Pompa, who is reinventing this centuries-old craft with flask-shaped pendant lights and large wavy-rimmed centrepiece bowls.

Pompa's work also features in a new Mexican hotel being styled by British interior designer Tara Bernerd, as do backstrap-loom textiles. She is a fan of Mexican design, from Pompa's modern take on traditional craftsmanship to the mid-century furniture that's currently sending collectors wild. "I'm drawn to the work of Mexican architect Luis Barragán, for his bold use of shape and colour, and his furniture designs are equally inspiring. The original Butaca chairs he created in the Fifties epitomise mid-century chic," she says. "Similarly, Equipale chairs by Ramírez Vázquez capture a moment within Mexican design history. The modern reinterpretations by Kresta are worth noting."

Handmade South American textiles often have short widths, restricted by the size of the loom. If you want to go wider, many European fabric houses have created their own versions. Andrew Martin's Las Salinas stripe is a more subdued version of a traditional frazada, while Mark Alexander's Origin collection filters both Latin American and African influences through a modernist lens.

In the comfort of your own home you are free to mix and match Latin American-inspired objects with pieces from other far-flung places. This is perhaps where this style finds its niche, offering that spot of joyful colour and optimistic exuberance amid a bohemian look that might also embrace Moroccan rugs and dark-timbered Indian furniture. Latin American design brings the sunshine, wherever it ends up.



Property of the week The home where Spitting Image was dreamt up

This house provided an artistic base for a family with an entrepreneurial flair, writes *Isabelle Fraser*.

It was in a cottage in the garden that the grotesque *Spitting Image* puppets were dreamt up by its creator, Peter Fluck. He lived there with his wife, Anne, a member of the famous de Bruyne family.

Her father Norman was a notable engineer-entrepreneur who designed the Ladybird monoplane and invented Araldite glue, building a business worth millions. He lived in the main six-bedroom house, in Duxford near Cambridge, until his death in 1997.

Pynes House's current owners completely gutted it in 2005 to create a light and airy interior, with luxurious details such as a roll top bath. They also left many original features, including a recess in the sitting room floor which was built for Norman's wife, the cellist Elma de Bruyne, to practise in.

The separate two-bedroom cottage, where Fluck is believed to have come up with the gruesome puppets, can be bought for £325,000. He now lives in Cornwall with his wife, where they both work as artists.

The cottage has been used for holiday rentals, and the current owners run two businesses from the converted barns. It has large gardens with a three-bay cart lodge. It is Grade II listed and dates back to the 18th century.

The house is on the market for £1.5 million and both are with Cheffins (01223 214214).

