

KONFEKT

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1.
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4.
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CONTENTS

HOSTING. Provençal recipes plucked from a kitchen garden and a frisky dinner party in Zürich
LOOKS. Chic autumn daywear and the finest jackets for city strolls and mountain trips
WINE. An Austrian vineyard pioneer and the fiery revival surrounding Mount Etna
TRAVEL. Modernist concrete curves in Tenerife and revitalising swims in Copenhagen
DISCUSSIONS. In Munich, mulling over creative space and Angela Merkel's exit

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3

FREE STYLE

DESIGN — RESIDENCE — Switzerland

Photographer — Younès Klouche
Writer — Simone Ott

DESIGN

Collector and interior designer Cecilia Maresea brings her irrepressible blend of Brazilian and Italian joie de vivre to a Swiss family house in the woods. Here she mixes modernist furniture and bold tapestries that offer a taste of her soon-to-open studio in Zürich.



It is an unusually grey summer day and Cecilia Maresca is standing at the bottom of her driveway in a long flowing dress, worrying that her guests might miss the main entrance. She is right about that. This cottage-like villa is shrouded in a thicket of green. Fog swirls around the forest surrounding the home she shares with her Swiss husband and their two young sons in a fairy-tale glade at the end of a small winding road. The hustle of Zürich's city centre is only a short drive away but it seems like another world. "My husband grew up in this house," she tells *Konfekt* as we walk up the path. "His family built it about 40 years ago."

As she opens the front door, the murky grey outside is replaced by a warm palette of reds, browns and creams. Maresca was born and raised in Genoa, to a Brazilian mother and an Italian father – and her home is a world full of wood, leather and handwoven textiles. Two huge bouclé-wool sofas sit in the dining room around Italian Willy Rizzo low coffee tables. Contemporary art by Swiss artists, such as Olaf Breuning and Peter Hauser, hangs on the walls. But most striking are the collections of furniture and objects from mid-century Brazil in every corner. In the living room, a 1950s tea trolley by Polish-born Brazilian designer Jorge Zalszupin is a vehicle for lacquered boxes gleaned from trips to Myanmar and China. By the window, two Oscar lounge chairs by Brazilian modernist furniture designer Sergio Rodrigues exude warmth with their woven covers and rich jacaranda-wood tones. "These were originally designed in 1956 for the São Paulo Jockey Club," says Maresca. "The sinuous lines mimic those of Brasília's iconic buildings by Oscar Niemeyer."

Over a *cafezinho* – "little coffee" in Portuguese – served at a glass table supported by a vast Brazilian tree trunk, Maresca remembers how she fell in love with Brazilian modernism. After a successful career in fashion PR in London, working for Vivienne Westwood (and a stint as *Vogue Italia's* UK correspondent), Maresca moved to Brazil in 2011. It was a country she knew well from her regular childhood visits to her mother's family and she was instantly seduced by the furniture and interior design. "My devotion to detail was definitely inherited from my mother, who is a sculptor, archaeologist and restorer of Japanese lacquer."

She began perusing the antique shops of São Paulo and marvelled over the curved low-slung chairs and tables in rare Brazilian hardwoods, especially sweet-smelling jacaranda. "It's as warm and rich as Italian *ristretto*," she says. "And it often has the sought-after striations of spider webbing or landscape grain." After some research and a lot of conversation with dealers, she began to form her own



"For the artists, weaving was the best way to express themselves. These tapestries are their masterpieces. And the more I look at them, the more I find in them"

collection, just before international interest exploded. "When I started to collect these pieces, they were cheaper than the contemporary furniture," she says.

On her return to London in 2015 she decided to join forces with her sister Elena to open an interior-design studio and deal in modernist Brazilian furniture. She drew on the relationships that she'd formed as a collector, particularly with Graça Buena, director of *Passado Composto Século XX*, an influential design gallery in São Paulo, with whom she established a partnership that lasts to this day. "It felt like a natural step," says Maresca. "My sister had worked for the interior design firms Waldo Works and Russell Sage Studio, and I brought in all the connections I made with Brazilian antique dealers."

Some of these pieces now adorn her Swiss house in the woods. The light-filled rooms feature items by designers such as Jorge Zalszupin and Joaquim Tenreiro, who drew on indigenous weaving traditions and colonial-era cane furniture. "These designers used string or woven elements as well as rattan and leather but their geometric and linear designs borrowed from the Bauhaus," says Maresca as she shows *Konfekt* two Zalszupin armchairs. "All those influences mixed with the typical Brazilian character – that laid-back *joie de vivre*. The designers were relaxed in the way they approached the design process too because there was no pressure to industrialise it. They were left on their own to create something unique." As we muse on details of





1. Brazilian glass and tree-trunk table
2. Giuliano Cesari Travertino lamp
3. BBPR Elettra armchairs and a Michelangelo Pistoletto mirror
4. Cecilia Maresca at home
5. Corner of the well-stocked bar
6. Jorge Zalszupin's modernist JZ Tea Trolley

South American modernism, a couple of shy sunrays land on a tapestry hanging on the wall over the dining table where Maresca loves to host small supper parties. "This is a work by Bahia-born artist Genaro de Carvalho," she says enthusiastically. "After stumbling upon a tapestry at an exhibition in São Paulo in 2016, without much knowledge, I wasn't only smitten but instinctively thought that there could be a market for these stunning and unique handmade pieces in Europe."

It's this coup de foudre that ushered in a new episode to her career: when she began selling modern tapestries to art and design collectors in Europe. "People are starting to look at tapestry not as the poor sister of painting but as art in itself," says Maresca as she shows us some of the works in her home: hand-embroidered abstract motifs featuring tropical plants, trees, birds and indigenous objects in vibrant colours. "For the artists, weaving was the best way to express themselves," she says. "These are their masterpieces. And the more I look at them, the more I find in them."

Influenced by their Italian-Brazilian roots and their passion for mid-century furniture, the Maresca sisters have an unusual and compelling approach to their projects. As in Maresca's home, they mix the elements of Brazilian modernism with the timeless elegance of Italian design. "People are fed up with overly polished and perfect design," she says as the sky brightens and we take a stroll in the garden where two sleek Swiss fibre cement 1954 Loop chairs by Willy Guhl for Eternit sit invitingly on the patio.

This enclave of South American tapestries, Brazilian modernism and chic Swiss design is also a living, breathing family home filled with Lego, collections of lacquered objects and Russian dolls featuring the Chicago Bulls players. It's also a house full of books and magazines – a relic perhaps of Maresca's former life in fashion. "To this day I have a penchant for lifestyle magazines," she says of the stack of colourful titles that contrast with the bright white bookshelf. "My favourite is *Cabana*, edited by my close friend Gianluca Reina. Its joyful opulence is captivating."

Maresca is intent on importing her own brand of joyful Brazilian opulence to this corner of her adopted home in Switzerland. When we meet, she is on the cusp of opening a gallery and shop called Il Guaio in Zürich, with Brazilian mid-century tapestries, art, vases and lamps. "Switzerland definitely needs a bit of Brazilian-Italian joy," she says, as she escorts *Konfekt* out into the bright sunshine. "I can't wait for the exuberant mood it will create at the opening party." — K

