

cubes

space . furniture . people . life: this is design made accessible



Flight of Fancy

/ **BO REUDLER**

Advocating the slow approach to design

/ **SASKIA HAVEKES**

A look into the world of a floral designer

/ **THEATRE DESIGN**

The supporting role that set and costume design plays

/ **SWAROVSKI CRYSTALLIZED**

A new concept that celebrates individuality



Issue 039 2009 | \$48.00



88863851903073

Rug Love

Spanish designer Nani Marquina is passionate about changing common perceptions towards the humble rug.

Interview by Michelle Tan Images courtesy of nanimarquina

For her entrepreneurial spirit, novel methods and observant ways, Nani Marquina is an exemplary figure in the textile design world. And it isn't by chance that the designer from Barcelona has turned her name into a brand that has achieved enormous success. Right from the very start, Marquina believed in herself and her vision and had the guts to take the plunge in trying times to set up nanimarquina in 1987. The rest, as they say, is history. As an opponent of mass production, Marquina, together with her team of eminent designers, painstakingly makes hand-tufted rugs that possess very tactile, colourful and rich qualities, lending a vibrant voice to the humble rug.

Apart from that, all nanimarquina rugs made in India carry the Care & Fair logo, which guarantees no child labour was involved during the manufacturing process. It is no surprise then that Marquina has nabbed numerous awards, including the National Design Award and the Premi Cambra a la Gestió Empresarial (Chamber Award for Design Management) in 2005, the National Culture Award of the Generalitat de Catalunya (Design Modality) in 2008, and most recently, the International Women's Entrepreneurial Challenge Award from the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce. Cubes caught up with the Spanish designer when she was in town and heard her thoughts on changing people's perceptions towards rugs, and as it were, creating a new sort of religion.



"Our mission
is to convert your way of thinking.
It's somewhat like a religion.
Rugs don't just provide a protective
covering you lay out on the floor.
Really, they are what bring
soul and spirit
to a house."

You studied industrial design at the Escuela Massana of Barcelona. It's a broad discipline and you could be designing many different kinds of products. Why did you choose to specialise in designing rugs?
Nani Marquina (NM): When I was done with my studies in Barcelona, I saw that there was a lack of contemporary rugs in the market. So I started out printing fabrics. And from there, I moved on to designing carpets. I wanted to show that rugs are a way to create moods in the home.

How have your textile designs changed over the years?
NM: I won't call it a change. It's more a matter of evolution. And that's because of trends. So our designs adapt to changing trends. When I started off, the designs were geometric and, now, they move towards the organic style. But all the same, I'm driven to create rugs that surprise.

nanimarquina is based on "the passion for designing rugs". Where does this passion come from?

NM: The passion comes from the opportunity to do new things every single time, of being able to create something new that didn't exist before. For me, it's more the passion of doing something new, rather than rugs per se, that keeps me going. Nonetheless, I'm also passionate about carpets because they are avenues of creative expression and they add a lot of richness to the home. Our mission is to convert your way of thinking. It's somewhat like a religion. Rugs don't just provide a protective covering you lay out on the floor. Really, they are what bring soul and spirit to a house. If you were to look at prehistoric civilisations, wherever nomads move to, a rug is the first thing they put on the floor in the desert because it marks their territory and defines their space.

So how have you sustained this passion for over 20 years?
NM: This passion is sustained by getting to know new cultures, new places



1

and stumbling upon new discoveries. When I travel, new experiences continue to feed my mind. It's like filling up a fuel tank. I get very inspired by Asian countries, where there is a mix of cultures. And I also admire Latin American cultures for being so connected to the earth, land and nature in general.

"Observation" is one of the values you go by. Could you elaborate on that?

NM: It's always through understanding the culture of the country that the idea is taken from that we create new designs. There's a collection called *Rangoli*. The patterns on it represent a wellness symbol that Indian people make at the entrance of their houses with flower seeds and rice to welcome guests. And for the *African House* collection, it takes inspiration from drawings that women do in Africa on their houses. With their fingers, they use clay to make drawings on the exterior walls as a form of decoration. So that's the idea behind it.

At the same time, it's essential to observe our surroundings, the present context and how society has developed and from there, create designs that are relevant. For example, the *Bicicleta* collection is made of recycled bicycle inner tubes. And that idea came about because of the times we're living in, where recycling takes on great importance in the name of sustainable living.

You are also driven to make traditional craft contemporary again, yes?

NM: Yes, we maintain the old ways of handcrafting and handtufting the rugs but the contemporary element comes in when designs are given a little twist. In the *Folk* collection, we blew up and oversized what is a very typical Argentinean or Mexican pattern. Cutting materials in a totally different way is another means. For the *Roses* collection – created to resemble a field of roses and petals – felt material is cut perfectly and it's the technique that transforms the rug with contemporary aesthetics. Making craft traditions contemporary also means bringing across a clear message that expresses current concerns, such as our *Global Warming* collection, which speaks for itself. Also, a drawing can be classic but colours can cause it to be contemporary too.

You started your business during hard economic times, not unlike our current one. What challenges did you face then?

NM: Given that I'm a designer, it's normally the case that I would be the one doing the design so other people can produce my designs. But at that point in time, the suppliers and mainly the manufacturing companies didn't want to invest or didn't find the prospect attractive. They didn't believe that rugs would make good business. Since no one wanted to produce for



2



3



me, I decided to do it myself. Though it was real that times were hard, it was in fact beneficial because there were no competitors. But mostly, it was a matter of believing in it. Back then, existing suppliers for carpets tended to copy what was out there in the Italian and other foreign markets. There wasn't any internal creativity at all. I strongly believe that when a person is really willing to do something, difficulties are not a problem. Besides, I was young and full of ambition. (Laughs)

You decided to move the manufacturing facilities to northern India after six years. Isn't it risky to be producing in a country where it is difficult to oversee and manage the business?

NM: Yes, it's risky. But it'd be worse to stick with the only system, technique or technology that we have in Spain and not seek anything new outside. With the mechanical production in Spain, there was a huge limitation to innovation because everything had to be done in big quantities using machines. The breakthrough came when I discovered the method of using handicraft to create rugs and it allowed me to be creative and innovative in terms of design.

What are your thoughts on working with other prominent designers for your brand?

NM: I thought that it would be fruitful to collaborate with other well-known designers as this opens up the range of creative works. We learn from one another, and share and exchange styles, techniques and ideas. So this feeds both ways. More importantly, the intention has always been to go international and now, we are already exporting 60 per cent of our rugs to over 45 countries.

Who do you enjoy working with on your team, and who are the Barcelona-based designers we should know about?

NM: I enjoy working with people like Javier Mariscal, one of the first outhouse designers to join us, Martí Guixé, who is very conceptual, and Tord Boontje, who is introspective. Some Barcelona-based designers to look out for include Martín Azúa, Ana Mir and Emili Padrós, to name a few.

Tell us about the new nanimarquina 2009 collection.

NM: Those that we've mentioned earlier on are part of the new collection and we're pleased with every rug. However, we're especially proud of the *Kala* collection – a term that means "art" in Hindi. The concept was conceived in India and created together with a group of school children. We asked them to draw whatever that comes to mind for a carpet. The drawings were simple but interesting and we adapted them for the collection. What is great about this is that the sales from this collection will be invested in a new Care & Fair school in India to benefit the children.

What are you currently working on?

NM: I'm working intensively on designing furniture now. But these are just small pieces of furniture meant to accessorise the house, like seats and side tables. These follow the same model as what we're doing with carpets – that of using traditional manufacturing techniques to produce contemporary designs. And they would complement the carpets that we're selling! ■

1. Rangoli collection
2. African House collection
3. Roses collection
4. Folk collection
5. Topissimo collection
6. Little Field of Flowers collection