

# GRAND DESIGNS



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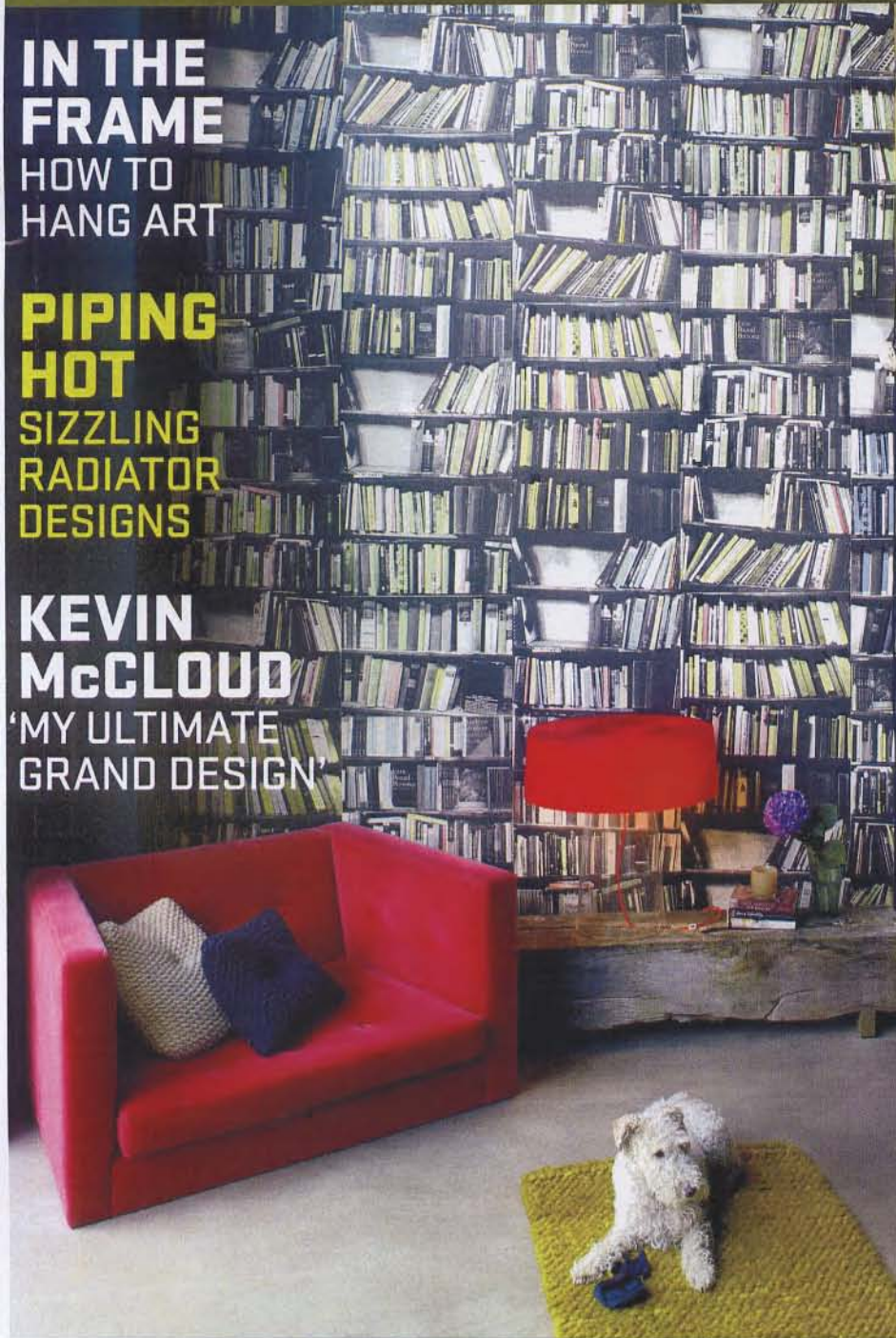
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# Super nani

In the days of Spain's fledgling free economy, textile designer Nani Marquina broke ground with her bold rugs. Now, she's the doyenne of a thriving scene, supporting new talent at home and abroad

WORDS TRISH LORENZ  
PHOTOGRAPHY ALBERT FONT

Spanish textile designer Nani Marquina is not well known in the UK, but at home she's an industry superstar who has been creating striking rugs for over 20 years, whilst supporting many of the country's young designers in their early days.

Spain has a buoyant and booming design sector today, with luminaries like Jaime Hayon and El Ultimo Grito flying the flag, but it hasn't always been that way. When Marquina began her career in the Seventies,

General Franco still ruled and Spain was politically and economically isolated. Her father, architect Rafael Marquina, was a pioneer of design in the country and she concedes that his influence was pivotal in her career choice. 'In Spain, only architects were interested in design until the early Eighties,' she says. 'It wasn't seen as a proper profession, most people had more important issues on their mind – the bare necessities of life and freedom of speech. Spain was a very closed economy.'

When the economy began to develop in the early Eighties, she teamed up with her father and opened a design store in Barcelona selling homeware – furniture, lighting and accessories. She noticed there were no contemporary rugs available and started to create her own, working nights on her designs and supporting herself by running the shop by day. In 1982, she launched her first rug, a graphic piece featuring the silhouette of the Manhattan skyline. It was hard work for the next few years. 'Right up to the late Eighties, manufacturers in Spain didn't want to invest in contemporary design,' she says. 'The country just wasn't economically developed enough.' But by the early Nineties things were changing, and the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 kick-started the development of this vibrant Catalan capital.

Marquina was at the forefront of the city's nascent design scene, and over the last two decades has collaborated with a host of designers. In particular she's supported

**this page** These fabric Potten vases are a nanimarquina collaboration with Dutch designer Renske Papavoine. They're made by Bhopal Rehabilitation in India, who give support and employment to those affected by the devastating chemical leak at the Bhopal factory **opposite** Nani at home in Barcelona



# Upfront Grand master *Nani Marquina*

who Nani Marquina

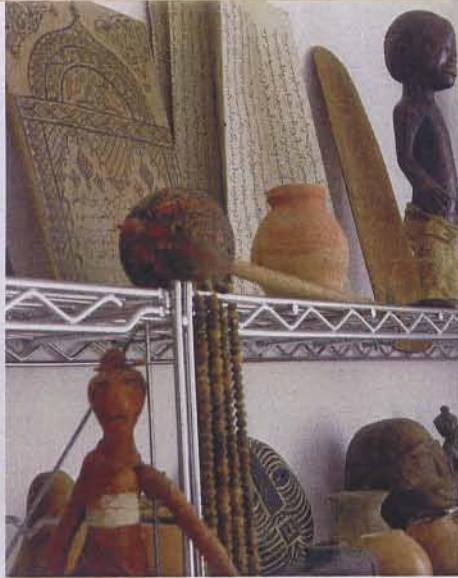
lives Barcelona

background Graduated in 1971 with a degree in industrial design from Barcelona's Massana School. In the Eighties she opened a homeware store in Barcelona, and realising no one was creating stylish contemporary rugs started designing them herself, launching her first rug in 1984 and the nanimarquina brand in 1987 famous for Tactile, textured and beautifully coloured rugs; supporting new designers and demanding ethical standards in her business



# Upfront Grand master Nani Marquina

**below left** The living room in Marquina's home is minimal, except for the very organic Little Field of Flowers rug **below and right** The white scheme is the perfect backdrop for her trinkets and travel finds that line the shelves



young designers, both local and international, encouraging innovation and freedom of expression. Her website talks of the company's 'commitment to integrate new voices into our reality', such as her Little Field of Flowers rug designed in collaboration with Tord Boontje (see image above), which was a big hit at the design shows last year.

But this isn't a recent trend for Marquina. As early as 1988 she commissioned Javier Mariscal to design a rug, at a time when he was at the very beginning of his career (the outcome was *Lonely Lion*, one of the company's best sellers). 'Working with young designers is very important,' she says, 'I find it more inspiring as they have great ideas and interesting concepts.' Marquina is also happy to commission designers who don't have a background in textiles; in fact she positively relishes it. 'I'm looking for people that have never made a rug before, but who understand our way of thinking,' she says. 'They arrive with bold ideas of what a rug can be. It might be quicker and easier to design everything ourselves but (working with other designers) enriches our collection.'

When she began manufacturing rugs in north India in 1993, she did so because the local craftsmen are legendary, and she

wanted to retain this skill whilst achieving greater productivity (without resorting to mechanisation). This steadfast use of traditional techniques led to experimentation with design that wouldn't be possible in mass production. And it's not just the Spanish design community that have benefited from Marquina's vision, her company has Care & Fair's seal of approval, an organisation working to eradicate child labour.

Marquina looks closer to 40 than her real age (55), and there's a ready warmth about her that makes it easy to see why designers of all ages enjoy working with her. 'You have to have fun while you work,' she says and this exuberance spills over into her creative ethos. Her designs play with material, colour and composition; the end result looks simple but usually offers a surprising twist on closer inspection. 'My designs have really evolved since I first started,' she says. 'In the early stages I was interested in graphics, by the Nineties that had evolved to colours, textures and experiments with materials. What's consistent is that the designs are simple but have an element of surprise. It's like cooking: if you take a traditional recipe and change one ingredient, you have an unexpected result.' In the past she's worked mainly—



*'Working with young designers is very important. I find it inspiring as they have great ideas and interesting concepts'*

## Upfront Grand master Nani Marquina



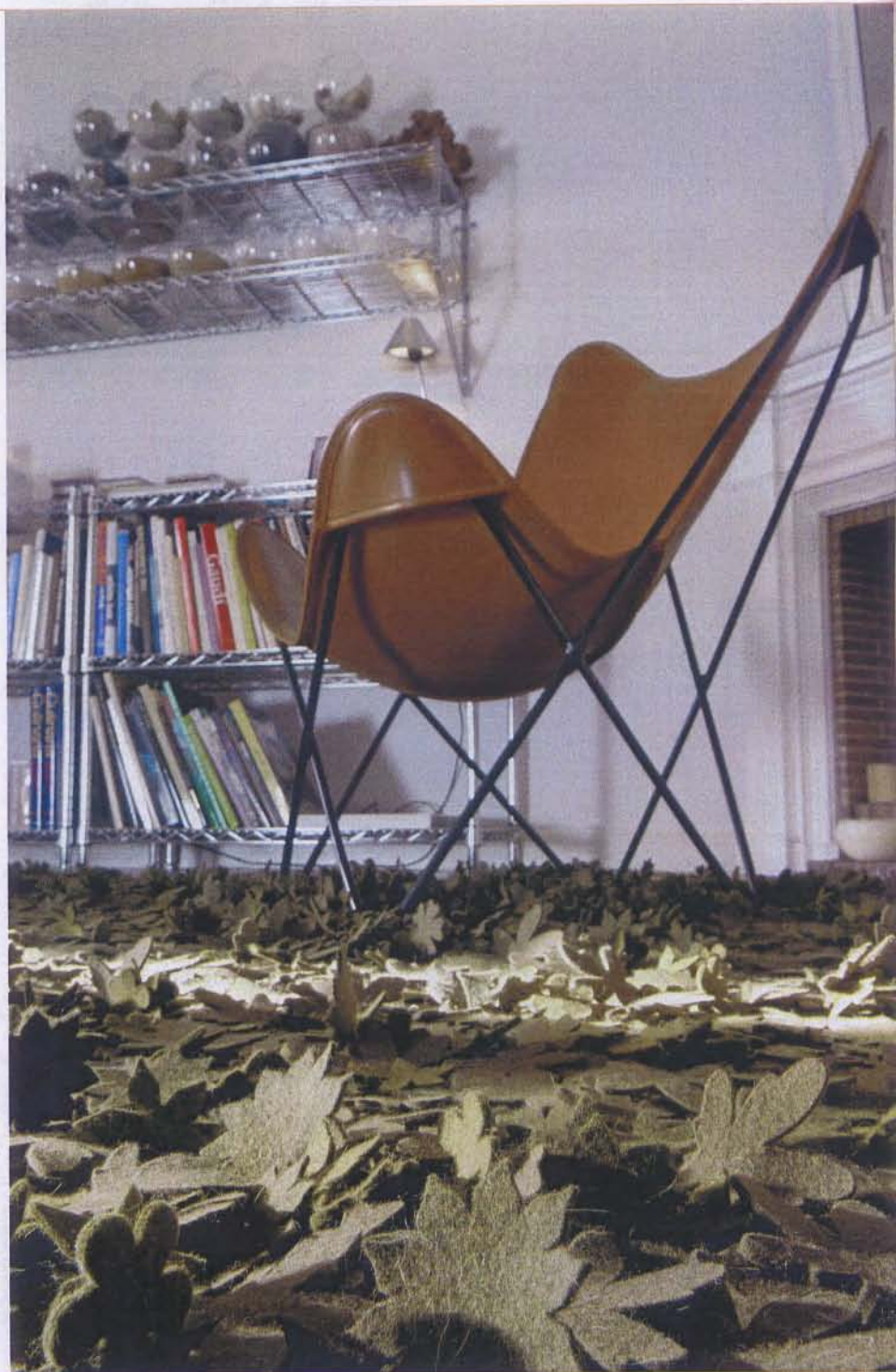
**left** Marquina teamed up with Spanish designer Ricard Ferrer to create the Moroccan art-influenced Tapete table, made from lacquered wood and iron **below** Up close, the Little Field of Flowers rug brings a forest floor inside

Barcelona studio just won't do; Marquina owns a home in the Pyrenees, and it is there she finds her creative muse. 'I've always gone to the mountains to work,' she says. 'In the past, I'd borrow a house from friends for a few days each month, but now we have our own place I go for a month every year, just on my own. It's almost a necessity for me.'

Her work is inspired, she says, by 'bucolic scenes' - the landscapes of Spain and Patagonia, India and the deserts of Africa. She's also inspired by painters, and her favourite British designer is Ron Arad. 'He takes risks. There's often an ingenious use of materials in his work, and he plays around with colour and shape,' she says.

It's a measure of her stature that she's worked with Arad, creating a series of rugs for his hotels in Madrid and Rimini, and her rugs have also been bought by customers as diverse as a Spanish princess and the chairman of Barcelona Football Club. Her 2008 collection is available now and it's her first major launch in the UK, so keep an eye out for the Indian-inspired Rangoli series. She's also working on a project for a new UN building in Geneva, creating a series of wall hangings totalling more than 300sqm.

Today, Barcelona has a buzzing local design community, as does the rest of Spain; it's certainly a long way removed from the stark reality of the Seventies and early Eighties. And it's probably fair to say Marquina's influence and commitment have played a part in shaping this thriving Catalan scene. ★ **Nani Marquina** ([nanimarquina.com](http://nanimarquina.com))



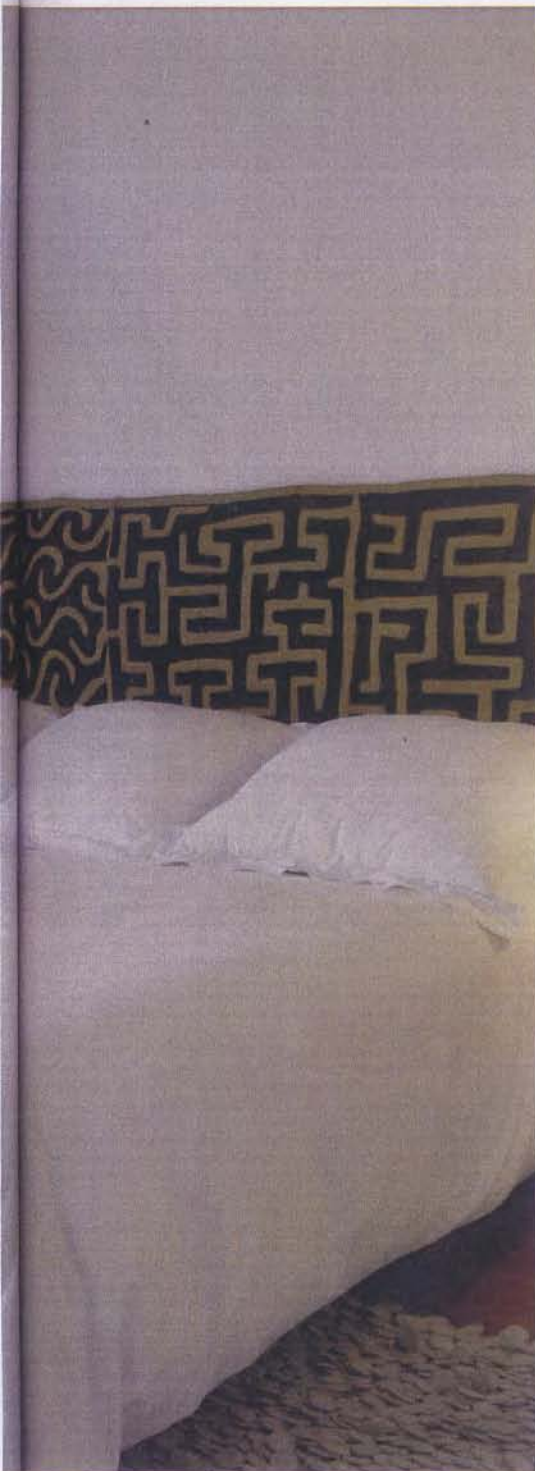
Upfront  
**Grand master**  
*Nani Marquina*

*'The house is really a container for all the stuff I like. From one window I can see the mountains when I lie in bed. I could spend all day there'*



**below** The couple's bedroom is subtle and relaxing, with the Another Bed of Roses rug adding texture **clockwise from right** Marquina's love of natural, organic shapes is evident throughout her home; using colour and shape

in new ways defines her work, and is apparent in touches such her collection of pretty necklaces hanging on a mirror; the Rangoli rug takes its name from an Indian floor-painting method, and it's new for her 2008 collection



with wool but a recent collection featured a rug made of recycled bicycle inner tubes, and next year's collection includes one in a cotton waxed cord, 'like shoelaces', she says. 'It's interesting to work with traditional materials, but play with how you use them.'

Marquina's home is designed in a similar vein – what looks like a classic interior is full of interesting details. She lives with her photographer husband Albert Font in a Forties house in a peaceful suburb of Barcelona, with a huge terrace to catch the afternoon sun and windows that face both east and west. On the first floor, the entry level to the house, are two bedrooms, a study and an open-plan living and kitchen space, while downstairs is a studio that leads onto the terrace. The couple have lived in the house for 13 years and haven't made many major changes, except in the kitchen and living room. 'In the Forties, kitchens weren't important because only the maid used them, so we opened it up and put in some big windows to let light in,' says Marquina.

The house is simply decorated, with rugs providing colour. Her decorating style is about achieving balance, she says, between the objects she loves to have around her and a minimalist style. 'It's crucial not to have too much furniture,' she says. Light is also key, the couple installed a series of internal windows to let light flow through the house all day, and have used lighting in the rooms for a peaceful atmosphere in the evening.

Marquina is an inveterate collector,

everything from hotel teapots to sand from the deserts she's visited are displayed around the house, necklaces hang decoratively in the bedroom in front of a mirror. 'The house is a container for all the stuff I like,' she says. The bedroom, a peaceful white on white space, is her favourite room. 'From one window I can see the mountains when I lie in bed. I could spend all day there,' she says.

She doesn't work at home, preferring to keep it as a serene bolt-hole. Instead she has a light-filled studio in what was formerly an old textile mill, some ten minutes away. The studio's white walls and floors and huge windows reflect her interior design philosophy. 'I like to keep it simple and let the colour come through in my rugs,' she says. But for real design inspiration the \_\_\_

