



Designer Gloria Cortina at home in Mexico City.

PRIDE OF PLACE

Decorator Gloria Cortina channels the mythology and majesty of her beloved Mexico in a debut array of furniture

When she was 14, Mexican interior designer Gloria Cortina discovered her calling by redecorating her childhood bedroom. First came an Art Deco–tinged scheme in the spirit of *Miami Vice*, then a floral mash-up of Laura Ashley and Ralph Lauren, and finally full-force classicism, with parchment wall coverings and marquetry-inlaid antiques pilfered from her grandparents’ Arturo Pani–decorated manse. Set atop Mexico City’s tony Lomas de Chapultepec neighborhood, that villa now serves as the home base for Cortina’s thriving practice, which ranks among Mexico’s most influential but remains largely unknown north of the border.

This stands to change. Following the release of her 2016 monograph, *Gloria Cortina: Mexico* (Editorial RM), the designer will have her first furniture exhibition, at Manhattan’s tastemaking Cristina Grajales Gallery. On view from November 3 to December 23, the show includes exquisitely rendered pieces in bronze, obsidian, and quartz. (It will travel to Mexico City’s Galería de Arte Mexicano next year.)

Sconces riff on the silhouettes of hummingbirds, a sculptural side table features pyramids stacked tip to tip, and a gleaming bench comprises cantilevered blocks. The pièce de résistance is a cabinet covered in 17 layers of black lacquer and embellished with bronze inlay that mimics the impact of a bullet.

“It’s like there’s a whole cosmos in that bullet hole,” says Cortina, explaining that the doors’ effect was inspired by a 2013 hit-and-run skiing accident that left her with a broken arm and three dislocated ribs. “It’s about a very small thing having



The Bullet, a lacquer cabinet in Cortina’s show at the Cristina Grajales Gallery in New York.

CABINET: COURTESY OF CRISTINA GRAJALES GALLERY



Cortina crafted the brass cocktail table in her living room.



A pool of Cortina's design at her country house in Mexico.

a huge impact. That concept raises a lot of issues—not only personal but also cultural.”

Though Cortina studied at Manhattan's Parsons School of Design, her sensibility remains firmly rooted in her homeland. After graduating she returned to Mexico to work for the legendary architect Ricardo Legorreta, later joining forces with four other rising stars to launch the avant-garde firm A5 Arquitectura. Seven years ago she started her own studio, which is known for mixing Mexican antiquities, bespoke artisan-made pieces, and contemporary artworks by such local legends as Abraham Cruzvillegas, Gabriel Orozco, and Damián Ortega. Recent projects range from Cabo San Lucas vacation homes for tech and finance giants to a new pent-house suite at the Sebastian resort in Vail, Colorado.

It was Grajales who encouraged Cortina to create a whole collec-

“We just laughed for hours,” Cortina says, recalling their immediate connection. “She's Colombian, I'm Mexican—we're an incredible match.”

Cortina, meanwhile, has been playing matchmaker with ancient mythology and local craft, forging connections between the two in an effort to capture what she calls “a unique Mexican language.” These investigations often influence her choice of materials. To her, obsidian represents the “diamond” of Mexico's volcanic terrain, and gilding nods to the capital's distinctive light. “Because

of the altitude and the mountains, the reflection you get from gold leaf is amazing,” she says. Many of the forms and patterns Cortina employs in her work were sparked by regional folklore. The pyramids are based on a symbol—used in weavings by the Huichol tribe—that was said to allow people to see the unknown. And the feathered flourishes of a bronze room divider reference the Aztec eagle warrior *cuāuhtli*.

But even as Cortina's international influence grows, her mind is never far from home—nor from the lessons she learned as a teenager, when she incorporated her family's (and country's) aesthetic traditions into her bedroom. “It was the first time I understood what style is,” she says. “Not just my style—but style in general.” cristinagrajalesinc.com

—MICHAEL SLENSKE



Her Synergy bench, another exhibition highlight.

EXTERIOR: MICHAEL CALDERWOOD; BENCH: COURTESY OF CRISTINA GRAJALES GALLERY