

BALANCE & BEAUTY

A fine grasp of volume and void, culture and art defines Gloria Cortina's interiors and furniture. **Marisa Bartolucci** meets the Mexico City-based designer.

When it was time for college, Gloria Cortina desperately wanted to go to architecture school, but her fiercely conservative father forbade it, so adamant was he that she become a stay-at-home wife and mother. Ironically, marriage proved her liberation: "My husband Santiago introduced me to a world of possibilities," says Cortina, now a much sought-after interior designer. Santiago's great aunt was Inés Amor, the legendary founder of the Galería de Arte Mexicano (GAM), Mexico City's first gallery of Modern art. Amor became Cortina's role model. "I saw that being a woman could be extremely powerful," Cortina explains. After the young couple moved to New York, Cortina studied at Parsons School of Design and worked for architect David Ling. Returning to Mexico City, she joined the architecture studio of Ricardo Legoretta and, some years later, opened her own interiors firm. Two years ago, she met New York design dealer Cristina Grajales, a native of Colombia, who recognised in Cortina a budding creator. Last autumn, Cortina introduced her collection of sculptural furnishings crafted from bronze, obsidian and quartz to great acclaim at Grajales's gallery. The show then travelled to Mexico City's GAM, bringing Cortina full circle to the institution whose founder first inspired her. Marisa Bartolucci caught up with the designer at this exciting point in her career.

The relaxed living room created by Gloria Cortina for a home in Sierra Itambe, near Mexico City.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL CALDERWOOD



(This page) Gloria Cortina at home, with her Mathias table in the foreground.
 (Opposite, from top) Art and furniture are perfectly balanced in the bar area of the Sierra Itambe house and in the living room of a city apartment.



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WHEN DID YOU FIRST BECOME INTERESTED IN DESIGN?

I've lived and breathed design since childhood. When I was fourteen, I redid my bedroom three times. I can remember visiting houses as a girl and questioning how the owners came up with their arrangements. I'm incredibly interested in the relationship between people and space.

YOU HAVE WORKED FOR TWO ACCLAIMED ARCHITECTS, DAVID LING AND RICARDO LEGORRETA. WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THEM?

David showed me that if you have the correct approach, you can design anything – colour, size and scale do not matter. Legorreta worked with such passion on expressing his Mexican aesthetic language that every minute I spent working by his side made me understand things more profoundly. Culture and aesthetics became my priorities.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR APPROACH TO DESIGN AND YOUR STYLE?

My understanding of how people relate to their surroundings allows me to translate my clients' needs into an aesthetic language. I believe this process, along with an awareness of cultural heritage, brings greater meaning to what I do. As to a particular style, I am not sure I have one. I'm more about the pursuit of balance and beauty. What engages me most is how people feel and how well they are represented in my designs.





ONE OF YOUR FIRST DESIGNS IS A COFFEE TABLE, CALLED MATHIAS. WHO IS MATHIAS?

It is named after Mathias Goeritz, an icon of Mexican art, who in the past was defined more as a designer than as an artist. This distinction is irrelevant. Goeritz erased the line between art and design and questioned how light affects objects and perception. Several years ago, the sun was shining through the windows, and I started seeing three-dimensional light forms. I began drawing in my head and thought of Goeritz. This table is my connection to him.

YOU OFTEN USE MATERIALS WITH A STRONG MEXICAN HERITAGE. WHAT IS THEIR SIGNIFICANCE?

I always designed furniture for clients. But after meeting Cristina Grajales, I went on a creative journey and started listening more to myself and to my culture. I probed Mexican mythology, explored native materials and worked on a new expression of Mexican design. I think culture is what defines us. In this incredibly connected world, how can we have a clear voice? Only by being authentic.

HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE YOUR CLIENTS' ART COLLECTIONS INTO THEIR INTERIORS?

Art is the ultimate expression of human vision. It really reflects the character of the space, so it is essential in any

design concept. We work with existing collections, but we also build them and work with all sorts of commissions.

IN THE PAST, YOU'VE SAID THAT YOUR WORK OFTEN STARTS WITH A "THREE-WAY CRACK." WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THIS?

As in the letter Y, the three-part system represents the perfect balance for me: if you only have two parts you are missing the fundamental element. Working with a "three-way crack," you can't miss the relevance of the relationship between volume and void. The presence of materiality allows for the presence of negative space. It's just a perfect balance.

WHAT IS KEEPING YOU BUSY THESE DAYS?

I'm currently working on very ambitious, mainly residential projects. I've been incredibly fortunate in getting my clients to think of their homes as an aesthetic journey. Looking ahead, I am also developing a new concept for Cristina's gallery for The Salon: Art + Design fair in New York this November, which has me working with butterflies as symbols of hope. ■

Marisa Bartolucci lives in New York, where she writes about art and design.

(Above) The sophisticated living room of a Mexico City residence.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL CALDERWOOD



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