

WHAT BEGAN AS A BREAK FROM THE URBAN BUSTLE OF LOS ANGELES, LED TO A NEW LIFE AND CAREER PATH FOR A COUPLE WHO RENOVATED AN OLD RIAD WITHIN THE FORTRESSED WALLS OF THE MARRAKESH MEDINA

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RED ALERT



THIS PAGE Gervasoni cushions, Maison Rouge Moroccan-style embroidered cushions and Scene de Lin cushions add a playful edge to the black and white theme. Bold red ceramic tables from Akkal and Chinese lanterns bought from both Ikea and Casa, spraypainted red by the couple, add red attitude

PREVIOUS PAGES The black and white tiles in the central courtyard were the feature most loved by the couple on purchasing the riad. Wing wire chairs found at Bab el Khemis create kaleidoscope shapes around a marble coffee table with chrome legs designed by Samuel



THIS PAGE The red dining room off the courtyard adds a striking contrast to the black and white tiles. A print by Samuel's father, Roger Sandes, titled 'Nude with Bird', hangs against the wall
OPPOSITE Spraypainted Chinese lanterns dry festively in the sun

SAMUEL AND CAITLIN DOWE-SANDES SET OUT FOR A SABATICAL TO MOROCCO TO escape city stress within the calm walls of a rented riad – a traditional Moroccan house – in the richly historic Marrakesh medina. What they didn't know at the outset was that within a couple of weeks they would own their own riad and face major renovations in a foreign land where the pace of life, values and culture are far removed from their life in Los Angeles.

Add to that their relative revamp inexperience ('The only renovation we'd done before Dar Noury,' laughs Samuel, 'was refinishing some floors and installing French doors in our Los Angeles bungalow.') – and the challenge was on.

Working with an entirely Moroccan crew gave the couple authentic insight into Moroccan living. 'There was a lot of miscommunication at first,' explains Caitlin. 'One of the first Arabic words we learnt was *bleti*, which means "Stop what you're doing, hold it right there!"'

The couple carefully balanced the challenge of being true to a place and remaining true to themselves. The result is a home that complements and contrasts with the 'Rose City' of Marrakesh within which it resides.

White walls create oversized canvases for strongly graphic displays of black and white – cues taken from the original tiles in the central courtyard. Bold sweeps of colour add drama and attitude – from a turquoise feature wall in a guest bedroom to the glossy vermilion dining room. 'We've always had a red room wherever we've lived,' explains Samuel. 'We wanted to give the small dining room an intimate, almost bistro feel.'

Samuel and Caitlin enlarged doorways to give the riad a sense of space, reshaping these into keyhole-shaped arches that mirror the adjacent mosque. They added windows and

created an arched balcony on the guest wing's second level, remaining sensitive to the need to preserve the simple riad architecture. The furnishings, mostly local fleamarket finds, are a selection of styles that dialogue subtly to create a unique aesthetic: mirrored side tables, oversized lanterns and a marble coffee table with chrome legs (designed by Samuel and made by local craftsmen) complement the Moroccan architecture in original and artistic ways. 'One of the things we love about Marrakesh is looking into little shops seeing artisans at work – every neighbourhood has its metal worker, carpenter, wood carver and tile maker. You don't see this in the United States anymore – we find it very inspiring,' says Caitlin.

This inspiration and the first-hand experience with Dar Noury led to the idea for Popham Design, Samuel and Caitlin's tile business. While revamping, they wanted to use a bold, graphic wallpaper in the bathroom, but because of the moisture in the walls of medina homes it wasn't an option. Instead, they tiled the whole room in a classic black and white design.

While there is a long history of using decorative tiles in Europe, the concept is less established in the United States. Their Popham Design Collection features patterns ranging from a calligraphic loop-di-loop to more organic coral and leaf patterns to a geometric variegated stripe, a Greek key and a design they've named 'wink'. The designs have proved popular with the American market and the young company is growing steadily.

'We bought our house because of its tiles,' says Samuel, 'and this creative renovation project led to our business idea – a perfect circle. Our lives have been transformed here in Morocco.' ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON POPHAM DESIGN VISIT WWW.POPHAMDESIGN.COM

THIS PAGE Glossy vermillion was chosen for the dining area. Eero Saarinen chairs sit around a lacquered dining table top commissioned in Sidi Ghanem - the table base found at Bab el Khemis. The light fixture was designed by Samuel and Caitlin in Estantul fabric from Scene de Lin

OPPOSITE A black painted stripe on the second-floor staircase leads you from the guest room balcony to the terrace





THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT A dramatic black wall has been stencilled with a coral design taken from the couple's Popham Design tile, Branch Coral; the lounge features the couple's Loop-di-Loop tile from their Popham Design collection. Displayed on the fireplace mantle are Akkal vases and a tortoise shell bought from a vendor at the Marche des Esclaves

OPPOSITE A feature wall in Designers Guild turquoise creates a striking backdrop in one of the guest rooms. The large Moroccan lantern, spraypainted white, was found in the souk

