



At left: The Marrakech home of Caitlin and Samuel Dowe-Sandes. On the cover: Rose Anne de Pampelonne's dining room in Paris. "Grand Entrance," page 154. Photography by Roger Davies; styled by Carlos Mota. See Resources.

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Facing page: Caitlin and Samuel Dowe-Sandes in the courtyard of their house in Marrakech. This page: The chairs were found in a souk, and the cushion fabric is by Waverly; the giclée print on the mantel, *Pearl Diver #1*, is by Roger Sandes, Samuel's father. See Resources.



# RELIGIOUS *experience*

PART OF A MOSQUE COMPLEX,  
CAITLIN AND SAMUEL DOWE-SANDES'S 18TH-CENTURY HOUSE  
IN MARRAKECH GETS A HEAVENLY NEW LOOK

Written and Produced by Mitchell Owens · Photography by Roger Davies

Styled by Carlos Mota

If you get an invitation to visit Caitlin Dowe-Sandes and her husband, Samuel, in Marrakech, leave the travel alarm at home. Thanks to the sound system of the mosque next door, the *adhan*, or call to prayer sung by a muezzin, reverberates through their house's gleaming white rooms and the slumbering neighborhood of Sidi Ben Slimane just before dawn. But the expat Americans welcome the interruption. "Whoever is on morning duty has a beautiful voice," Caitlin says of the melodious exhortation, one of five broadcast daily from the city's dozens of minarets. "We lucked out on that front."

They got pretty lucky in real estate too. Little more than a week after moving from Los Angeles to Marrakech on a whim two years ago—"We had never lived abroad together and realized if we just kept talking about it, we'd be 65 before we actually tried," says Caitlin—the former public-relations executive and her filmmaker husband found the perfect perch: Dar Noury, a traditional courtyard house in a decidedly nontraditional location. Rather than opening onto a bustling alley like most houses in the clay-walled medina where they live, the Dowe-Sandes residence can only be accessed by walking into a centuries-old mosque, heading down a long corridor, and opening a discreet nail-studded door adjacent to the prayer hall. Dating from around 1760, the three-bedroom, two-story house behind the door was likely constructed for "an imam or someone who worked for the mosque," Samuel says, which helps explain the curious placement of its entrance within the house of worship.

Aside from that unexpected feature, Dar Noury (dar means house in Arabic, while Noury is the surname of a former owner) was standard medina fare when the Dowe-Sandeses found it, equipped with



hole-in-the-floor toilets, high, narrow rooms, and a sunny courtyard. With the guidance of project manager Hamoud El Foukahi, the couple renovated the structure in three swift months. Samuel says, "It took longer to build our deck in Los Angeles!"

Architectural authenticity was a key consideration, so the owners chose to respect and refine where others less sensitive might have cheerfully gutted. (Modern plumbing, however, was a must.) Masonry walls were resurfaced, and the ceiling of a corridor was opened to expose the picturesque cedar-and-bamboo structure behind it. The couple also preserved the old-fashioned cement tiles in the courtyard, primarily because the black-and-white motifs were as

surprising as they were fortuitous. "We love color and pattern, but Marrakech is famous for its incessant pinks," Caitlin says. "After a while, all you crave is white."

Since the paints in the local hardware stores come in either matte or high gloss, the couple hand-mixed a crisp white that has sheen but not too much shine. Smooth finishes, it turns out, are highly practical in a city known for housekeeping challenges. The dust churned up by donkey carts and speeding mopeds—and the occasional sandstorm—makes its way indoors with regularity, but "it doesn't seem to cling so much to slick surfaces," Caitlin explains. Not every wall in Dar Noury went snow-white, however. The master bedroom got dramatic coats of elephant-gray, the tiny dining room is nail-polish-red, and a dashing black stripe snakes up the new white staircase that leads to the roof terrace.

Weeks were spent trolling the Bab El Khmiss flea market for vintage furniture because the Dowe-Sandeses moved to Morocco with little



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A staircase with a painted racing stripe leads to the roof terrace. Facing page: Loop-di-Loop cement tiles by Popham Design pave the living room, where flea-market furniture predominates; the crow paintings are by Roger Sandes, and the silkscreen of a veiled woman was a gift. See Resources.



Clockwise from left: The kitchen and dining room open to the courtyard. A mirror console and metal candelabra, both custom made, in the entrance hall. The roof terrace, with built-in seating and traditional Moroccan tiles. In the study are large cushions made of embroidered fabric and smaller graphic cushions covered in a Duralee cotton duck; the Wink-on-One tiles are by Popham Design, and the cocktail table is a former movie prop. Facing page: In the dining room, a barrel light made by Henry Cath, Saارين-style chairs, and tiles by Popham Design. See Resources.







From top: One guest room features lamps with Fez-pottery bases, embroidered sheets, and Roger Sandes's *Sting Ray*. Another guest room is walled with Curly Branch Coral tiles by Popham Design, and the bed is dressed with Frette Hotel Collection pillow shams. Facing page: In the master bedroom, the gesso-on-paper works are by Roger Sandes, the headboard is a 1960s door, the embroidered bed linens are from a local shop, the metal lanterns are custom made, and the love seat is upholstered in a Waverly fabric. See Resources.

more than cargo pants, laptops, and some guidebooks. (Emboldened by their intrepidness, Samuel's sister, Lulu Sandes, moved here last summer to teach at the American School.) Sofas would take up too much space in the narrow rooms, so they focused on slimmer seating, such as Art Deco armchairs and Saarinen look-alikes. As the couple began to intersperse these with pierced-metal lamps and painted-wood tables ordered from artisans, they found themselves yearning for creative outlets of their very own. And though they enjoyed do-it-yourself projects—one of which involved fringing a mirror with quills that Samuel gingerly plucked from a porcupine carcass he bought in a souk—their ambitions were loftier.

"All these incredible craftsmen are within arm's reach, so we thought if we could combine our ideas with what they do well, it could be fun," Caitlin says. A year ago she and her husband launched Popham Design, a company that makes artful encaustic-cement tiles and whose name refers to the beach in Maine where they wed. The firm's whimsical patterns are showcased throughout Dar Noury, from lazy squiggles on the living room floor to coral branches on a guest room wall. Like the house they ornament, the handmade tiles are a labor of love turned into a sprightly statement of personal style. As any foreign resident of the Red City will attest, the first months of expat life are all about relaxing on your terrace and sipping chilled Moroccan rosé. "But when you see people making things everywhere around you," Caitlin notes, "you just have to join in." ■



