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THIS PAGE Samuel and Caitlin Dowe-Sanders are pictured in the Cyber Park, Marrakech.
OPPOSITE Many of the upper-floor rooms in the couple'sriad look down on to the main courtyard (left); the floor is tiled with their 'Zig-Zag' design. A horseshoe arch provides access from the entrance hall (top right), which has a sleek, painted runner up the stairs (bottom right). Samuel and Caitlin enjoy cycling in the medina (centre right).



LIFESTYLE

Having successfully restored an eighteenth-century riad, in the heart of Marrakesh's medina, an American couple founded a company making exquisite Moroccan tiles, modifying the traditional methods and incorporating bold and colourful, modern patterns

Saraal and Caitlin Dove-Saunders moved to Marrakesh three years ago, 'right careers'. Both American, they had previously lived and worked in Los Angeles – Saraal as a film-maker, Caitlin in public relations. 'I'd never even set foot on the continent,' says Caitlin, highlighting the courage – some might say naivety – of their move. But they were determined to seize the chance to live abroad, rather than just talk about it, having heard great reports from friends. 'We

figured if we saw a year-long adventure, and if we didn't like it, we could move on,' says Saraal.

Within eight days they had seen a suitable house, and bought it a month later. 'We had intended to rent, but soon realised this wasn't possible in the medina; they all have Turkish lines for a start, and we would have had to spend a lot of money to make them liveable,' explains Caitlin. The couple also discovered that the Moroccan housing market does not work in a familiar way: >





"There are no published listings or even a sense of something being on the market; it's a case of knocking on doors," Caitlin continues. "Many houses have been in the same family for generations and there are no records." Harmond of Finbakh, who was introduced to Samuel and Caitlin by an American contact, sees their "love" as unusual. "You hear horror stories, but we've had it very easy," admits Caitlin. "I guess we pulled with it a bit."

Their home, *The Nisari*, is in the neighborhood of Sid Ben Muzain, in the northern part of the mission, away from the main tourist beat and the heart of the souk. It is a traditional courtyard mad in an unrefined spot. To enter it, you pass through the main door of a mosque; the front door of the house is on the left, down a passage-way. Walk straight on, and you would arrive in the mosque's prayer hall. Built in the early 1780s, it was probably once the home of the imam.

The interior — with its white walls, carefully edited furniture, and crisp patterns and colors — is a wonderful surprise after the narrow alleys of the dusty, mud-walled medina. So totally unexpected, it is a haven of comfort, with an undeniable feeling of glamour — helped along by the solid-art-deco prop from a film Samuel worked on in Casablanca. From the narrow entrance hall, you enter a light-filled, double-story courtyard. Three handsome arches lead, from the left, into the kitchen and dining room, a day sitting room, and a study-television room, with a huge plasma screen; all are ringed in a typical of the traditional mad layout. Upstairs, there are three bedrooms — each with windows looking down over the courtyard below — and two bathroom.

When Samuel and Caitlin bought the house, it had not been touched for years. Almost all the rooms had lockable doors, making the layout feel very enclosed. They stripped it back to the bare bricks, "removed doorknobs of riddle", repainted and restored, and installed comfortable furnishings. "We moved windows, moved the arches, and opened the whole house up," explains Samuel. "As we really didn't think we'd be in Morocco for that long, we wanted to do it fast and inexpensively, so we could enjoy it." With Harmond as project manager, and 12 men on site every day, the building work took just three months.

Samuel and Caitlin started from scratch with the furnishings — everything from their previous life remains in storage in the States. From the outset, they were keen "not to have tons of Moroccan things", and gradually, as time goes by, have been adding items. "We've always liked our shopping mall,"

in the sitting room (top and far left), a turquoise, sea-on-square artwork by Martine Ripot, a series of paper cut-outs — entitled "Cross" — by artist Roger Sanders (Samuel's father), and a coin-made porcupine-quill mirror reflect Samuel's and Caitlin's artistic tastes. Caitlin enjoys cooking with local produce (near left)



The hanging lantern in one of the spare bedrooms (top left) was made in the souk. The wall tiles (centre left) are 'Curly-Branch Coral', another of Samuel's and Caitlin's own designs. Favourite Moroccan pieces include the thick, Beni Ourain rugs (this picture). Many of the couple's local friends (bottom left) work in creative industries. Caitlin discusses a new commission with Martine Bilot (bottom right)



THIS PAGE: Callin shops regularly at the food stalls in the Meleh Market. OPPOSITE She inspects samples (top left) of the small factory of Posham Design, the couple's cement-tile business; each tile is handmade using 'cookie-cutter' moulds (top centre) and is only traditional methods. The moulds are filled by hand (top right). Finished tiles are stacked to 'cure' for four weeks (bottom centre). 'Hex Arrow' (bottom left) and 'Fretwork' (bottom right) are two popular designs.



says Caitlin. They roamed the flea market, Bab el Ghernia, for vintage pieces they could spruce up, such as the French-style sofa and chair, which they stained black, and then re-covered with fabric brought over from the States. 'We also tried to make the most of what craftsmen do well here,' she says, 'such as mirror-glass furniture, which is brilliant for opening up small spaces.'

There are Moroccan pieces, such as the white Beni Ourain rug in the main bedroom, and the wonderful hanging lanterns, which were made in the week, to fit couple's specifications - 'playing with the Moroccan idea, exploring the patterns and painting them white to make them slightly different', explains Caitlin. Pictures by Sammiel's father, who is an artist, hang throughout the house, and it is clear that both Caitlin and Sammiel are artists - they made several of the pieces in the house, including the porcupine-quill mirror that hangs over the sitting-room chimney-

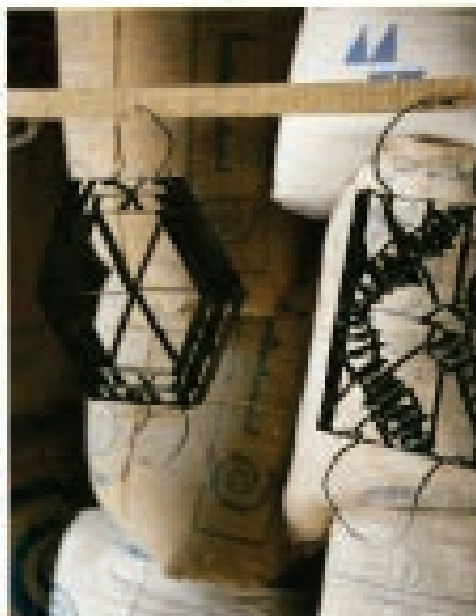
piece. 'We found a couple of beautiful quills in the week, and the next time we visited, the shop owner handed Sammiel a dead porcupine - he had to pluck them out one by one,' laughs Caitlin.

With the renovation complete, this intrepid couple did not just slip languidly into expat life. 'Every day, we walked past craftsmen in the medina and we felt we had to join in,' Caitlin recalls. 'They work on such a small scale, it all seemed very doable.' Their idea was to find a craft that Moroccans do well, but which could be adapted to their own designs and sensibility. 'We love bold, graphic patterns, but realised that people tend to add accents in their houses through textiles. We liked the idea of introducing it with surface materials,' explains Caitlin.

And so their cement-tile business began, named Poplain Design, after the Marrakech where they married. Every tile is carefully hand-made to order, using traditional methods that

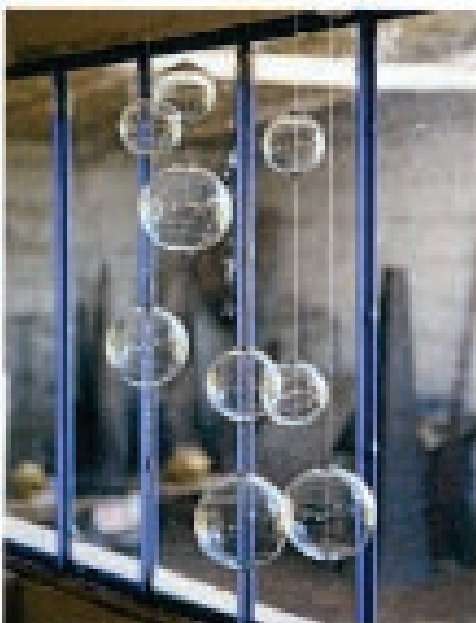
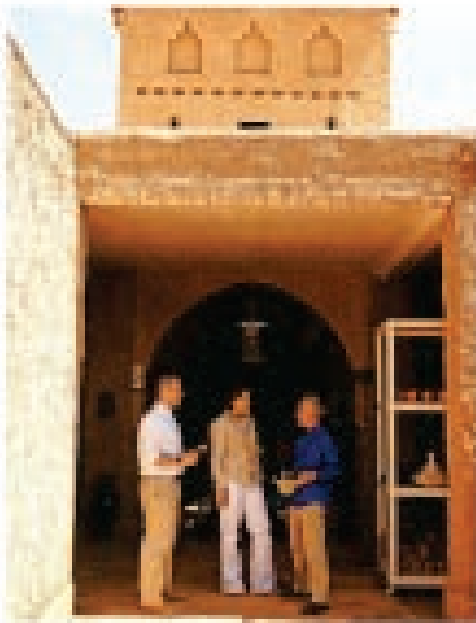
have been revealed slightly to ensure a stronger and more durable product. They began by using subcontractors, but realised quickly that they could neither experiment nor control quality in the way they wanted. Six months later, they opened their own small factory under the management of Mamoud, by now their right-hand man and a stickler for doing things properly.

Their striking, playful designs - which now adorn virtually every room of their home, from the coral branches on the wall of a spare bedroom to a single but effective zigzag pattern on the courtyard floor - take their inspiration from a multitude of sources, ranging from an abstract tree to a doodle on a piece of paper, or an architectural motif. Significantly, no one else is creating anything quite like theirs, in terms of their boldness of pattern and colour, and it is little surprise that they are being lapped up, in the States and elsewhere. There are plans, too, to



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Calligraphic posters outside Mammoth Film gallery, and writer local good artist (combining pictures). The image shows a woman crouching in a field of flowers, and a man standing in a field of flowers. The image shows a woman crouching in a field of flowers, and a man standing in a field of flowers. The image shows a woman crouching in a field of flowers, and a man standing in a field of flowers.



to apply their designs to posters designed by John Miranda Thiel, who brings a bit, from your eye to a range made by Moroccan artists.

Indeed, Samuel and Caitlin — enticed by ‘the allure of the exotic’ — came here to be visually inspired, and have found themselves surrounded by creative individuals, providing endless potential for collaborations and new ventures. Though are drawn by the romance of the place, which I think is all very much in evidence, ‘meets Caitlin,’ whose Florida home includes fashion designers, writers, artists and people in the film industry; at a recent dinner party, the group conceived a plan that every couple would write and shoot their own short film, to be screened at a later gathering. Meet Swokorak, Samuel and Caitlin drive into the nearby countryside or mountains in their Renault 4 to scout, betraying the Thier-Swokorak touch, are upholstered in lime-yellow linen, with white piping. Both gastronomes, they enjoy discovering new restaurants and eating at the stalls in the main square — number 51 is a favorite — but it is the produce piled high in the markets that excites them the most. ‘We mainly like things, like beans, proper Cheddar cheese and being able to buy books. But it’s fun, as certain things are hard to get you find other things to amuse,’ says Caitlin, still obviously thrilled by it all. And the arrival of an exquisite Irish Labrador puppy, Cricket, surely suggests they will be here for a few years yet. | Piphan Design, 80-212-80-771-4372; www.piphan-design.com | John Miranda Thiel, at the MGM Grand City Club, 80-212-30-458-3330; www.bellemeyspot.com | Morris Dept, enter 80-212-80-328-3873; www.morris-figs.com | Mariane Island Creative, plus enter 80-212-30-458-3330; www.marianeislandcreative.com | The House & Garden, enter 80-212-42-412-6183; www.houseandgarden.com. He was writing, call 80-212-42-412-6183, or e-mail mariane@mariane-island.com

