

PARADISE FOUND

IN HER MARRAKECH HOME, THE FULL BREADTH OF **MARISA BERENSON'S** CREATIVE TALENTS ARE ON DISPLAY.

BY VANESSA LAWRENCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN BECKER

Marisa Berenson, wearing an Etro dress from spring 2020, on the patio of her Marrakech riad, which she renovated and designed. The sofa and chairs at left are covered in kilim rugs, and the carved sofa is in a Pierre Frey fabric. The rugs are from Anatolie Kilim, and the fountain is clad in azulejo tiles from Seville, Spain.



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THERE IS A COMMON LITANY OF GLAMOROUS TIDBITS THAT TENDS TO accompany any story about Marisa Berenson. Her christening portrait was published in *Vogue*. Elsa Schiaparelli was her maternal grandmother. Gene Kelly taught her to dance. Diana Vreeland jump-started her modeling career. Andy Warhol was a dear friend. Yves Saint Laurent anointed her the “girl of the 70s,” thanks in part to her star-making roles in Luchino Visconti’s 1971 *Death in Venice*, Bob Fosse’s 1972 *Cabaret*, and Stanley Kubrick’s 1975 *Barry Lyndon*. Whether this collection of particulars constitutes anything close to an accurate portrait of Berenson as a model, actress, and general cultural icon is up for debate. But when considering the Marrakech riad that she has called home for the better part of the past few years, it does make you wonder why a woman whose life has been so publicly chronicled over seven decades would open up her personal sanctuary to more of the same.

“This place is my haven. I’m away from the world here, and I do like to keep it that way. So I don’t know why I did these pictures for ELLE DECOR!” Berenson admits with a laugh.

The motivation behind her decision to share her Moroccan home with an audience may be elusive, but we are unquestionably its happy beneficiaries: Berenson designed the house entirely herself, and it is a marvelous example of her multifaceted creative talent. About eight years ago, Berenson started spending more time in Marrakech while she was designing a spa for a Sofitel there and working on an eponymous skin-care line to be used in its treatment rooms. She fell in love with the city’s peaceful lifestyle; after renting a series of houses, she found out about a property for sale through word of mouth.

“It was completely abandoned—like a ghost house,” Berenson recalls. “But there was an energy about it. And I knew it was a place I wanted to transform.”

Berenson studied at London’s Inchbald School of Design when she was 16. “I’ve always decorated my own homes,” she says, adding that she had intended to become an architect before her career as a model took off. As such, she felt confident in reimagining the house into a Venetian-Andalusian amalgam, with help from a local architect who drew up a new set of plans.

The central patio, through which you enter, has a classic fountain covered in blue-and-white azulejos from Seville, Spain. The space is furnished with antique seating reupholstered in textiles by Pierre Frey—most of the home’s fabrics are Pierre Frey—and the tiled floor is strewn with kilim rugs. A fireplace features tiles Berenson salvaged from an old palace in Seville, and the hand-painted mural of angels was inspired by the inside of a church she saw in Spain. She also installed a retractable glass roof, making the patio comfortable even in the winter.

In a living room next to the patio, one finds leopard-print seating and yellow and red Venetian sofas, along with a hand-sculpted plaster fireplace that is as airy as lace. An adjacent dining room, separated by double-sided orange and

gold taffeta curtains, has antique light fixtures Berenson picked up at a Paris flea market and a black-lacquer Chinese panoramic screen that was originally in her New York apartment.

A nearby library is home to a pair of Napoleon III chairs she rescued from the Château de Ferrières, outside Paris. “They were being discarded, and I said, ‘No, no, no, I’m going to keep them!’” says Berenson, who has a knack for reviving abandoned treasures. “They’re all completely in their own juice, getting a bit old. But they have personality.”

The outdoor spaces are equally enchanting, with a wild, lush garden, an expansive terrace, a swimming pool (there is an indoor one, too, for colder days), and an organic vegetable garden and chicken coop. There are two guest-houses, and when you add in the five bedrooms radiating off the main patio and the two upstairs suites, that brings the total bedroom number to nine.

“I wanted this home to be a place where all my loved ones could come to stay for however long,” explains Berenson, who often has people over for festive lunches and cozy dinners. “This house can have intimate corners, or it can have a lot of people if one wants.”

Indeed, Berenson had a housewarming of sorts three years ago when she hosted more than 200 people for a party celebrating the opening of the Yves Saint Laurent Museum. It was an appropriate inauguration considering that Berenson first visited Marrakech as a model in the ’70s, when Saint Laurent held court in the city with Pierre Bergé and Loulou de la Falaise. Berenson’s modeling days are still thriving: She was recently the star of a campaign for the Italian brand Etro, whose cashmere fabrics she used in a beloved Parisian apartment she owned in the ’80s. And Berenson has a slew of film projects, about which she remains coy, on the horizon.

“I never expected any of the things in my life to happen. I dreamt about them. I had a desire for them, but it just came into my life as a sort of miracle,” she says of her long and rich career. “It’s great to be able to still make my dreams come true.” ■

OPPOSITE: A view of the swimming pool and gardens, which Berenson designed.





TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: A view of the outdoor pool. Berenson in Etro pants from spring 2020. A hand-painted wall with a butterfly on the patio. The living room. **MIDDLE ROW, FROM LEFT:** Berenson wears an Etro shirt and pants from spring 2020 in her master bedroom, where the bed is covered in a Pierre Frey print and the Syrian nightstands are inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Berenson, wearing an Etro dress and coat from spring 2020, reclines on a sectional covered in a Pierre Frey fabric; the Indian mirror was purchased at an antiques market in Marrakech. **LEFT:** Berenson wears an Etro jacket from spring 2020 on the lawn in front of her house. **OPPOSITE:** Berenson, in an Etro dress and coat from spring 2020, on the patio in front of a set of doors that are hand-carved and covered in gold leaf.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The dining room as seen from the living room. Berenson in an Etro jacket from spring 2020 with her hens, which lay organic eggs. In the dining room, the fireplace is made with antique azulejos from Seville, and the decor on the table includes mother-of-pearl swans and small silver vases from India, antique crystal candleholders from a flea market in Paris, green vases from Morocco, and colorful ceramic birds, fruits, and vegetables. The outdoor terrace. On the terrace, Berenson wears an Etro kimono from spring 2020 beside an outdoor table, which is set for lunch with vegetables from her organic garden. **OPPOSITE:** The indoor swimming pool. For details, see Resources.