

# SOUTHERN

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Whether crafting her signature printed dresses or decorating her Cartagena vacation home, fashion designer **Johanna Ortiz** puts her own stamp on Colombian chic.

BY VANESSA LAWRENCE

Fashion designer Johanna Ortiz (second from left) in the salon of her 16th-century Spanish Colonial villa in Cartagena, Colombia. She and her colleagues—from left, Johanna Isaac, Paola Ortiz, Catalina Londono, and Maria Isabel Guzman—are all wearing dresses and kimonos from Ortiz's collection.

# CHARM

“She captures the sultry, sophisticated South American spirit,” says Lauren Santo Domingo.

ON A GRAY JUNE MORNING in New York, the sepia-toned, buzzy French bistro Augustine was aglow with tropical warmth, thanks to Colombian fashion designer Johanna Ortiz, who chose the restaurant as the setting for the presentation of her 2019 Resort collection. The tables were set with baskets of mini *pandebonos* (Colombian cheese bread), *buñuelos* (South American fried dough), quinoa arepas, and bowls of *uchuvas* (gooseberries). Each seat had a panama hat and a floral silk pouch of lipsticks, a collaboration between Ortiz and Aerin Lauder that drops this November. And as the models ambled by wearing artfully draped dresses and separates in marigold, terra-cotta, and green prints, you couldn't help but be captivated by Ortiz's talent for seamlessly infusing her Colombian aesthetic into any environment or garment she touches.

Ortiz's love of fashion actually stems from her passion for interiors, which is evident in both her clothing creations—she is known for her pattern choices and often sources fabrics from vintage textiles—and her Cartagena vacation home of 13 years. Born and based in Cali, Colombia, an hour-and-a-half flight away, she grew up around her decorator mother's reams of fabrics. Even today, she always begins her collections by first selecting materials—say, a floral Italian silk—before transforming them into her signature flirty silhouettes.

“She captures the sultry, sophisticated South American spirit,” says Lauren Santo Domingo, a family friend and founder of the fashion site *Moda Operandi*. Five years ago, Santo Domingo spotted Ortiz's designs on Instagram and promptly picked up her line, exclusively launching her brand globally (Ortiz founded her company in 2003 but had previously sold only domestically). “What struck me about Johanna's collection was its authenticity,” Santo Domingo adds. “She stays true to herself.”

That sense of genuineness permeates every corner of Ortiz's house in Cartagena, the picturesque Colonial town she travels to seven times a year. It is also where she met Santo Domingo—whose husband, Andres, comes from a prominent Colombian family—more

than a decade ago. Ortiz and her husband, Cesar Caicedo, president of the candy brand *Colombina*, had been vacationing in Cartagena for years when they purchased the 16th-century Spanish Colonial-style house in 2005. At the time, Ortiz was pregnant with their second son, Joaquin (they also have Lukas, 18, and Lorenzo, nine). The two-story, high-ceilinged villa of carved wood and painted concrete is situated in the city's walled Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site that dates back to at least the 1500s.

“Because Cartagena is so near the [Caribbean Sea], things get ruined in such a short time. Something will look old, but it's actually new,” says Ortiz, who spent 11 months working with architect Patricia Mejía on the renovation. The home's original hand-painted tile floors and wooden details were restored, while a swimming pool was added to the terrace.

In the salon, Ortiz enlisted Eloin Rivera, a muralist from Cali, to paint a stunning palm-landscape tableau inspired by the local botany, which Ortiz had researched. A menagerie of chairs from Spain, India, and Vietnam—products of her love of travel and furniture shopping—mix with white porcelain vases from Casa Chiqui, the impeccably curated Cartagena boutique owned by Chiqui de Echavarría, the legendary Colombian hostess.

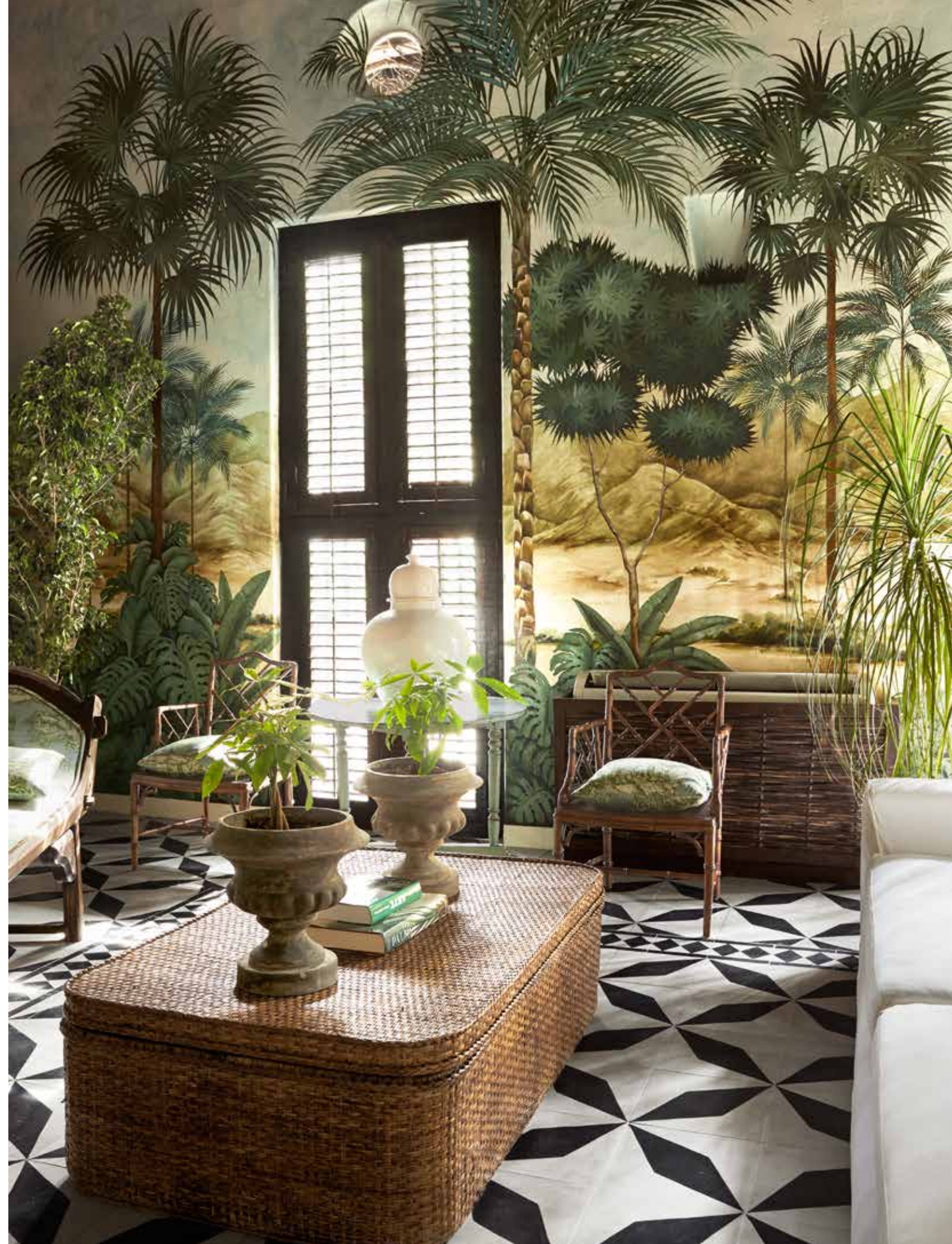
The master bedroom, which is a fantasia of blue and white (“blue is peaceful, and you never get bored of it,” Ortiz notes), is crowned by a raffia-and-seashell pendant. Printed ikat, suzani, and Otomi textiles mingle in the room. Venezuelan artist Mariet Vergara painted a mural in a corner based on a tropical fabric that Ortiz used in her spring/summer 2016 collection; Vergara also created a trompe l'oeil bamboo motif for a guest room's headboard.

Ortiz loves entertaining and invites close friends over for poolside barbecue lunches on her terrace, featuring the catch of the day. Afterward, she often goes for meandering walks with her kids. For her, the appeal of Cartagena is not unlike the charm of her flirty, colorful ruffled dresses—which, despite their refined beauty, are meant to be lived, eaten, and danced in. As she puts it, “Cartagena is a real city. It has this magical sense of not being perfect that I love.” ■



Ortiz, in one of her own designs, gets a visit from a basket artisan outside the Colonial carved-wood door to her home.

In the salon, the faux-bamboo chairs are from the 1960s, the rattan trunk is vintage, and the side table and ceramic vase are from Morocco. Colombian artist Eloin Rivera painted the mural.





< The master bedroom's headboard is covered in a Brunswig & Fils fabric, the built-in side table is custom, and the vase is Chinese.

▲ In the entry, the Colonial table is from El Arcon, and the mirror has a frame made from an antique window. The custom chandelier incorporates 16th-century French crystals, the floors are Mexican cement tiles, and the artwork is by Miguel Böhmer.



The guest room's chaise longue and Uzbek print pillows are from LP Decor; the red pillows are from Hechizoo. The headboard mural is by Mariet Vergara.



In the master bedroom, the chaise longue is in a Johanna Ortiz print from her spring 2018 collection.



On the original vaulted terrace, the Spanish Colonial dining table is from the antiques shop El Arcon, the slipcovers on the chairs are of a silk ikat, the table linens are by Ortiz, and the fan is from Fanimation.



**“Blue is peaceful, and you never get bored of it.”**

The master bedroom's chaise seat cushion is covered in a French fabric. The Indonesian shell pendant is from Casa Chiqui, and the recycled-plastic rug is by Mad Mats. For details, see Resources.

