

VERANDA

THE Instant Heirloom ISSUE



Handcrafted textiles, painted tagines, and zellige tiles are part of the rich color story woven through the Medina.



Shopping Marrakesh

Designer Katie Leede digs into the riches of the city that just keeps getting better and better.

MARRAKESH WAS HAVING A MOMENT, I THOUGHT. The epiphany hit me with the bright, North African sun as I emerged from the opulent interior of the **Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech**, the stunning modernist complex that opened two years ago this fall and is dedicated to the designer who'd inhabited and loved this city. I surveyed the buzzing throngs of visitors and felt like I did during the early days of Art Basel in Miami: We were all onto something.

It had been seven years since I'd first set foot in the labyrinthine byways and palm-lined boulevards of Marrakesh, and

what had then felt a bit fixed in time felt suddenly very now. Outside the warrens of shops in the Medina's souks were new outposts of the arts (the YSL museum in the famous **Majorelle Garden**, but also new galleries and museums featuring African artists), new shops showcasing hip local designers, and new restaurants in modern districts like the French-influenced Guéliz as well as the reimagined industrial Sidi Ghanem. New, new, new.

I was rediscovering Marrakesh at the brink, and in fine company: I was there with a group of landscape and interior designers on a trip offered by the Madoo Conservancy, Robert Dash's historic (now

public) gardens in Sagaponack, New York. In the hands of our artful guide, Sofia Barroso, we peered inside private gardens and homes and were deftly ushered among mercantile riches new and old.

And make no mistake, Marrakesh may be the world's ultimate shopping city. The experience is unparalleled: from discovering hidden, shoulder-wide alleyways leading to artisans weaving rattan, to being invited into a textile merchant's back rooms, where the really good stuff lies. Locals in caftans and turbans hustle past, the smells of jasmine, newly tanned leather hides, and marinating street food wafting in the air. It's alive. It's habit-forming. I stayed an extra three days just to shop, buying for clients and myself, but I could have stayed a month. Here's what's at the top of my must-hit list.

If the shopping gods give you but one stop, make it **Amazonite Antiquités & Objets d'Art**. Renowned for its Berber jewelry and antiquities, this treasure trove in Guéliz is the magical place it is because of co-owner Sabah Idrissi. Drift toward an item and you'll see what I mean: In perfect English, Sabah weaves a tale of the object's provenance and its soul. For myself, I



CLOCKWISE FROM HERE:
A hidden alleyway in
the old Medina; an
Islamic mosaic tile
pattern; illuminated
lanterns; handcrafted
wicker in the souks.



TRADE SECRET: SIT FOR TEA

The drinking of hot, minty, slightly sweet tea is an integral part of life in Morocco in general, deeply bound to traditional notions of friendship and hospitality, and intrinsic to the shopping experience. **Be prepared for shop owners to offer you tea, and be prepared to accept.** While some travelers think this ceremony leads to strong-arming a sale, veterans like Katie Leede believe it's the opposite. "It's hospitality," she says, "and by settling in and taking your time with the owner, you're showing interest and good faith." And, as Leede has discovered, this can build the kind of trust that often leads to wares that other visitors are not being shown. Take the slender glass, inhale the fragrant notes of spice and mint, and enjoy shopping, Marrakesh-style.



bought a Boucherouite ("scrap") rug, made by the poorest of mothers, Sabah told me, who want to make something special for their children using their best recycled rags as fiber. I took it between my fingers and imagined the soul—the Tuareg souls—alive in the piece.

Not far from Amazonite lies another of my favorites, **La Porte d'Orient Marrakech**. The posh wonder world has an extraordinary collection of carved and painted Moroccan doors and ceilings, plus antique glass pieces and Art Deco furniture. (I snagged some 19th-century pottery I'll be making into lamps.)

Brush up on your French before visiting the marvelous owner of **R'Bati**, a jewel-like little shop on the outskirts of the Medina, as that's his sole language. After sharing two rounds of mint tea (and employing his cousin as translator), owner Abdelsultah R'Bati judged me to be truly interested, and into his back rooms we went (see "Trade Secret: Sit for Tea," left). We sat on the floor



A sublime courtyard outside the spa at La Mamounia

together, poring over his museum-quality 18th- and 19th-century textiles.

In the Medina is a favorite lantern stop: the funky but fantastic **L'Art Marocain**. This is where the French designer Jacques Garcia had La Mamounia's lanterns manufactured, and they will customize a lantern any way you like. Inside tip: Upstairs there's a stellar collection of well-curated pottery.

For Berber rugs, I love the loft-like showroom of **Soufiane Zarib**, with its overdyed vintage and modern, one-of-a-kind designs by Soufiane Zarib himself. I also recommend heading to the salmon pink storefront of **Ben Rahal**, which has been on Rue de Liberté in Guéliz for more than 60 years, and has great vintage textiles along with tribal and Berber rugs.

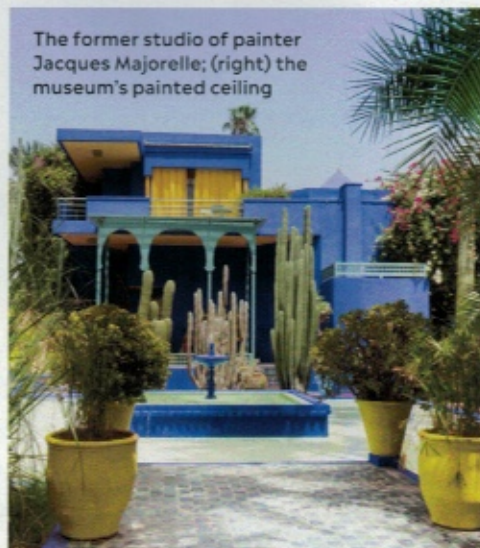
A final word: If you're a fiercely dedicated shopper like I am, it may be tempting to run at high speed all day. But stop: One of the greatest lessons I've learned in Marrakesh is that it is imperative—for body and soul—to pause and take in the deeper beauty of the place (and rest your feet). Pick a marvelous restaurant—I love sitting by the pool at **La Mamounia**, or in the courtyard of **Dar Yacout**—and indulge in a long, lingering lunch. Listen to the symphony of French, Arabic, and other languages bouncing off the tiles, sit with your tagine and revel in the spices drifting from that ceramic pot. And imagine all the treasures that await discovery after dessert. —As told to Tracey Minkin ♦

THE DETAILS For more on **Madoo Conservancy** and its garden- and design-focused trips, go to madoo.org. To learn more about Sofia Barroso's trips in Morocco, Portugal, and Spain, visit her company **Around Art** at aroundart.es.

Katie Leede's Favorite

MARRAKESH ESCAPES

Recharge from the sensory blitz of the bustling souks with a visit to the city's extraordinary gardens and museums.



The former studio of painter Jacques Majorelle; (right) the museum's painted ceiling



JARDIN MAJORELLE

The Garden's 2017 opening of **Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech** sealed its reputation as the Taj Mahal must-see attraction of Marrakesh, renowned for its urbane architecture, Yves Klein blue fountains, specimen succulents, and extraordinary **Berber Museum**.

LE JARDIN SECRET

This quiet botanical haven sits inside the Medina, making its newly reimagined palace and gardens an ideal stop for tea and arresting lessons in 15th-century Islamic art and architecture.



RIGHT: Le Jardin's rooftop terrace offers an unmatched view of the city.



ABOVE: The dining room at Beldi Country Club is flanked by an airy lounge and, beyond, lush gardens.

BELDI COUNTRY CLUB

A 20-minute ride into the countryside, this luxurious outpost is a mini Garden of Eden. The hotel, spa, and restaurant are coupled with beautiful boutiques (stocking unmatched carpets) and centered around charming gardens. Stop for a few hours or linger all day.

