

WALKING IN MEXICO

For more than two decades, Cancún-based interior designer Paulina Morán has been garnering acclaim for her fearless eclectic style. She has left her mark on some of Latin America's chicest hotels, including Ikal del Mar on the Mayan Riviera, Hotel Esencia in Tulum, Casa San Agustín in Cartagena and Capella Ixtapa in Zihuatanejo, plus a clutch of fashionable restaurants and stand-out private homes. Drawn to beautiful historical buildings and the opportunity to mix the old with the new, her design philosophy is one of authenticity and joie de vivre.

Growing up in Mexico City, she was a child of the Sixties. Early influences included the playful prints of Emilio Pucci, the unusual shapes of Jacobsen-style furniture, geometric wallpaper and the white ceramics of Cuernavaca. Works by artists including Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo left a lasting impression on her, as did holidays in Acapulco and the energetic rhythms of the Bossa Nova.

Her father loved Brazilian music and her mother had a keen eye for art and antiques but, above all, Morán was captivated by the vibrant hues of the Mexican landscapes surrounding her. "It was natural for me to inhabit that world: the markets, the colours, the Mexican crafts," she explains. "Today, I love the work of Yabu Pushelberg [an American design firm] and the designer Paola Navone. They inspire me."

Having graduated from Ibero-American University in the '90s with a degree in Graphic and Textile Design, she headed to Barcelona to study fashion design. A stint at the Ermenegildo Zegna factory fanned the flames of her passion for textiles, giving the fledgling designer a distinctly European perspective on colour and pattern. Her first interior design project saw her working under none other than Philippe Starck on the launch of Theatron restaurant in Mexico City. Of working with Starck, she merely states, "He has very high standards." A trait she has clearly inherited.

INTERIOR DESIGNER PAULINA MORÁN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE MOST STRIKING HOTELS AND VILLAS IN MEXICO. LEO BEAR VENTURES TO THE DENSE WILDS OF THE YUCATÁN TO EXPLORE HER LATEST PROJECT AND FIND OUT WHAT FUELS THE TALENTED CREATIVE

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Describing her current approach to interiors, Morán says: “I think colours should be mixed without rules, without measure or concept. I am lucky enough to travel all over the world, and I find inspiration in every corner.” Her no-rules remit is a formula that works. Last year, her company juggled 18 different projects, including the recently opened Chablé Resort in Yucatán. A wildly luxurious jungle retreat, occupying a crumbling hacienda – formerly a sisal factory – it is perhaps her strongest work to date. With 38 casitas, a spa specialising in shamanistic rituals, a restaurant lined with more than 3,000 tequila bottles and one of the most beautiful gardens in Mexico, it is an escape like no other.

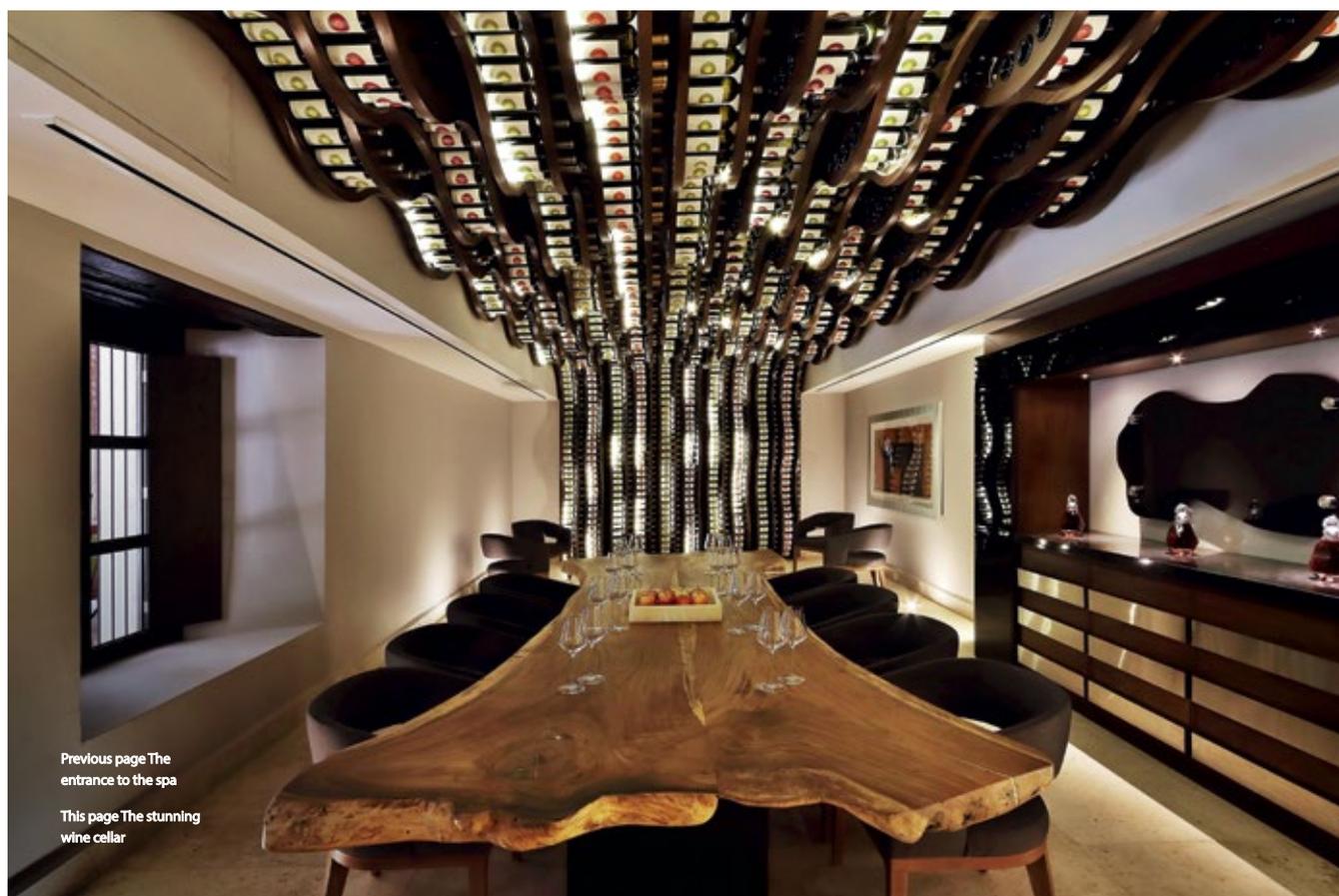
IT IS EASY TO BE STRICKEN BY BEAUTY, THE ONLY THING YOU MUST DO IS TO OPEN YOUR EYES

The resort’s centrepiece is an ancient cenote which, according to the Mayans, was a place of spiritual enlightenment and healing. “The place itself is magical, so I tried to be as respectful as possible to the surroundings,” says Morán, although what she has created – a temple to modern luxury with Mayan cultural influences and original period details – is nothing short of spectacular.

Awards are already flooding in for her work at Chablé, but despite her moment in the spotlight, Morán’s proudest achievement remains her textile company, PM Linos, which supplies fine linens and textiles to some of Mexico’s smartest boutique hotels (including Chablé). As a child, she’d spend hours doodling on pieces of printed fabric and coming up with her own designs, and later, as an adult, she learned how to embroider by hand using the traditional methods of old Italian design houses.

Teaching these skills to her team of seamstresses in Mexico was important to her, a means of preserving the tradition, and although she imports Egyptian cotton from Europe, linen from Belgium and cashmere from Loro Piana, all of her products are made in her home country.

Morán’s unique flair, her ability to reinterpret the past with positive energy and her commitment to excellence are to be applauded. With a raft of new projects in the pipeline, including a new Chablé hotel coming next year, she has certainly got her hands full. The secret of her success? “I have the capacity to find something beautiful everywhere. It is easy to be stricken by beauty, the only thing you must do is to open your eyes.” 



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