



## CASA *Custom*

Designer Mariana Postlethwaite solves an age-old design sourcing frustration: When there's no perfect solution, she designs it herself.

By Jackie Bryant

After spending time in Casa Duhagon ([casaduhagon.com](http://casaduhagon.com)) on Tijuana's Avenida Revolucion, it's impossible not to feel the creative spirit emanating from San Diego's sister city. Interior designer and architect Mariana Postlethwaite's flagship showroom is eclectic, bright and highly curated, reflecting the creative process she employs with her clients on both sides of the border. Postlethwaite's clients in the United States are mainly in La Jolla, with a smaller number in Chula Vista and Del Mar. She places a high priority on Mexican-made art, accent and materials, traveling throughout the country to source artisans who she will eventually use to outfit her clients' homes. Aside from her residential design business, which she estimates makes up 80 percent of her work, she also has commercial and hospitality clients, like the design-forward Lomita winery in the Valle de Guadalupe. "I don't necessarily have a signature style. It really depends on the home," she explains. "I always work according to the existing architectural style and the client. If you look at my portfolio, you cannot even imagine that one person designed all of it," she says. (For example, she designed one home entirely inspired by the colors of one season of Zac Posen's fashion, and conceived of a sophisticated



From top: Mariana Postlethwaite relaxes in a room she designed that harnesses her signature blend of natural elements and neutral, textured pieces; an indoor/outdoor room in her client's newly finished Eastlake home.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERICA LARA; INTERIOR PHOTOS BY BECCA BATISTA; POSTLETHWAITE BY MARIANA



PHOTOS BY ERIKA LAMA PHOTOGRAPHY

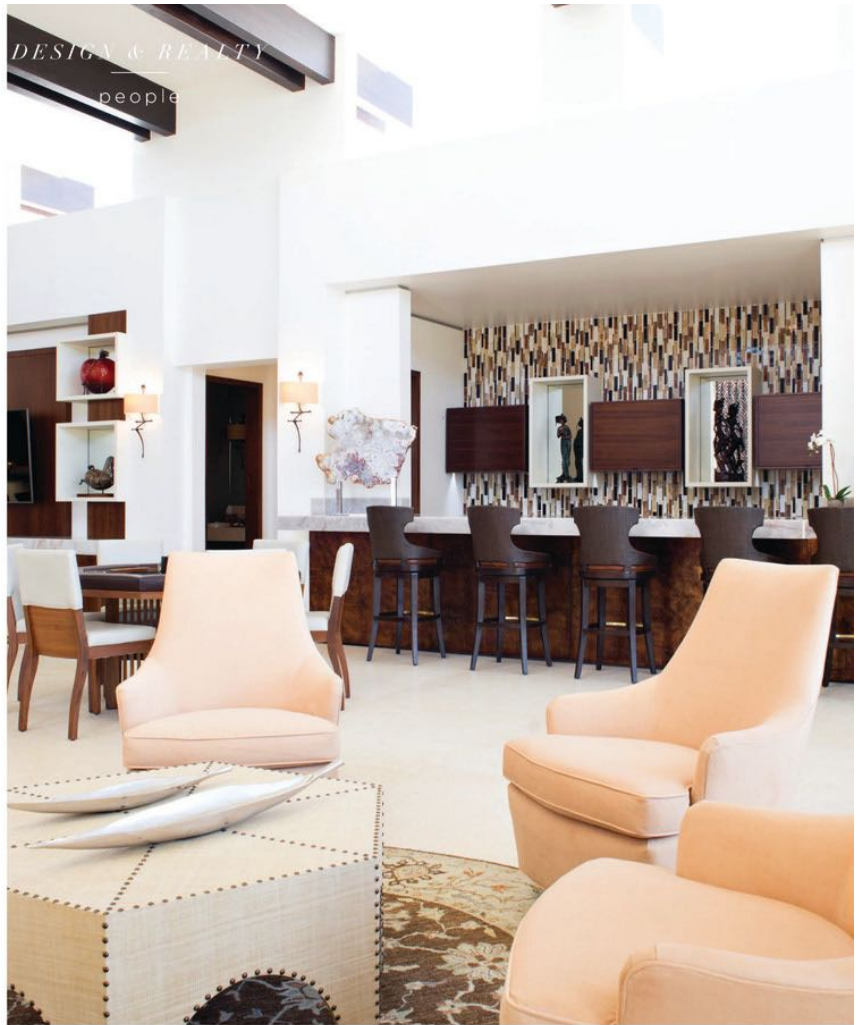
maritime theme for a home in Mission Bay to take advantage of spectacular ocean views.) The challenge, as any designer knows, is being able to materialize a client's sometimes hazy vision—which is where a bit of aesthetic therapy comes in. "I try my hardest to respect what the client envisioned, but they don't always know how to piece all of their tastes and ideas together. So that's where I come in. I have to act as a psychologist—I take trips with my clients, spend time with them, get to know them." Mexicali-born and bred, Postlethwaite recalls that she wanted to be an interior designer from an early age, but that her father didn't think it was a serious profession. Meeting him in the middle, she received her bachelor's degree in architecture

at the Ibero-American University in Guadalajara before embarking on a master's in interior design at the Boston Architectural Center. She later moved to San Diego, where she met Vista-based custom furniture maker Andrew Morgan Furniture, and never looked back. He still produces the custom furnishings and installations she is known for. She estimates that about 60 percent of what she uses to decorate is custom-built, adding that bigger spaces are almost entirely bespoke, save linens and accents. Her most recent project was a large home in Eastlake that she completely outfitted. "[The client] wanted a big, Mexican, elegant, modern mansion in San

Clockwise from left: Soaring ceilings and windows allow the outdoors into the home's dining room; natural elements and heritage Mexican finds lend interest to a lounge area; Postlethwaite's designs are known for clean lines that celebrate San Diego's natural beauty.



Diego,” recalls Postlethwaite. “So we traveled all over the place: San Miguel de Allende, Mexico City, Guadalajara and Las Vegas. I also looked in Madrid and Paris. But the majority of the pieces are Mexican, from San Miguel, Mexico City and Guadalajara.” Her favorite rooms are the master bedroom and the den, which she admires for their organic design features and the master’s unobstructed view of the lake and its hybrid indoor-outdoor feel. She filled the den with custom installations made from parota wood found in Nayarit, Mexico, individual art pieces from Mexican artists and a lamp fashioned out of tree branches. For Postlethwaite, it all comes down to being able to make what can’t be sourced, and her architectural chops give her an edge. “Everyone always says, ‘Oh, that’s not doable. It will be impossible,’” she says, adding, “Of course it’s doable! And I can do it.” ■



Clockwise from top left: A bright bath features custom built-in cabinets and “floating” marble counters; the bar and lounge area bring the outdoors in with clerestory windows in the 20-foot-tall room; the outdoors blends minimalist elegance with handcrafted rusticity.

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