

# HOUSES OF LOS CABOS







# CASA ÉTNICA

## A VILLA WITH A TOUCH OF MUSEUM

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They are villas with different dimensions. With seven, five or three bedrooms. They accommodate guests from the Hotel Cabo San Lucas, and each one is adorned with ethnic Mexican artesanry. They offer almost formal lessons in the cultures of different indigenous groups, respectful teachings of their heritage, a tribute to the arts of people still devoted to nature as a universal Mother.

The structure itself is lost among the palms, the road that leads to it barely announces its existence. From a distance one sees only the red roofs among the green. From the beach, one sees its terraces, open to the sea; some along the murmuring sands, others above the steep rocks and crashing waves.

«The project tries to rescue the Mexico of Mexico; to show the tourist that indigenous art is not only in the Museum of Anthropology or in books and magazines, but that indigenous art of Mexico is alive,» says the U.S. designer, Katherine Nidermaier.

To complete the project took four years. «First I did research: in books, professional journals, the Internet. Then followed the selection of ethnic groups for the different themes of the villas. To make the selection, we had to come up with sufficient artesanry to fill various rooms. We had to speak directly with the artesans, in their own dialects. Romanticism? Perhaps. There is a certain magic in speaking to the past.»

Katy speaks of her fears that the works would not be appreciated, or respected. «We placed literature about the culture and its art in each villa with the idea of helping the guest understand, and learn.»

### Filigreed Huipil

The Villa Maya welcomes its guests with ten clay ocelots, decorated in red, lined up under a window. The roof is covered with straw, it's two stories high, held aloft by a large beam across the apex. There are five habitations, aligned in



*Here are four formal lessons, concerning four indigenous Mexican cultures. They are respectful, and well documented. It is an attempt to recapture, and to raise autochthonous artesanry to the level of art. It is a response to the contact with people who still speak their native languages and communicate with their ancestors in their continuous search for knowledge.*



opposing directions, joined by a central module with living room, dining room, kitchen and service area.

Each space takes its neighbor into consideration; they share amicably, but keep a respectful distance. The terrace is a semi-circle looking over the sea. It has a stone floor and dark wood furniture. There are doors to the bedrooms, and a common corridor and small gardens here and there.

The main sitting room is illuminated by two enormous lamps of beaten tin and beveled glass. The furnishings are of textiles in natural colors: a covered armchair, a quarry stone table, a book on Mayan Culture. Above the fireplace there is a painting of an ocelot in the form of a man, or man in the form of ocelot.

Blue predominates in the picture, as it predominates in the textiles that adorn the villa. From intense cobalt, to pale sky blue embroidery.

*Mexican ethnic groups speak their word in these villas; accompanied by an ocean beach that does not contrast with the formality of their aesthetic proposals, nor does it lessen the mastery of their artesanry.*









### On Site Lessons

At the entrance to Villa Maya, the first huipil adorns the vestibule. It is by María López, from San Andrés Larráisar; it's behind acrylic and has an information card attached. It has been worked masterfully in colors of blue and pink. The dining room boasts a floor of circular stone. The table is made of four sections of marble. A fishing basket has been converted into a lamp and diffuse light casts playful shadows throughout the room. On one wall, a sun is reflected in a mirror whose frame is polished wood. There is a suspended ledge which holds various pieces of artesanía and basketry.

One bedroom of the central building is particularly privileged. One comes to it after encountering a stained glass of blues and yellows, and finds the bedroom decorated in beige, which sets off the collection of embroidered bedspreads, and a white huipil on the wall.

The other habitations repeat the basic elements. Color tones are different from room to room, some blue, others are various combinations of blues and reds. It's the textiles that make the difference.

### Pictures in Thread

A wide door, beneath a large beam and divided by a strong column, opens onto transparency via a network of glass. In front, a fountain on floor level and covered in round rock hides its true function. It's called Villa Pátzcuaro.

The sitting room seems full of rubicund color, festive shapes and bedspreads of bucolic scenery. The green clay pine cones are placed in niches in the walls, the blue tiles of the kitchen are handpainted. A painting dominates the space, an angel absorbed in the heart it carries in





its hands. A pair of rebosos are hung on walls, each from poles of worked wood. The dining room is of finished wood, painted with crowned cherubim as back rests; the comode has flowers, and the ample credenza speaks of forceful chisel work.

The seven bedrooms are like sitting rooms in museums: with special areas to view the white embroidered dress, winner of the National Artesanry Prize of 1997, to give but one example. Details are repeated without tiring the eye, objects surprise us not only by their craft, but by their placement: door handles in the form of snails and shells, bows and arrows in the bathroom, medals in lampstands, hats adorning the bedstead, photographs of Indians in antique frames one would use for grandparents.

#### Villas Tarahumara and Mitla

The figures and materials of these habitations warn immediately of a culture from unknown lands; it appears a little out of place in Los Cabos, a land of desert and sea. But it does not matter

that the murmur of the sea is nearby, that the sun shines brilliantly, that the beach is near to hand. What matters is the respect for the culture that pervades this place: wooden horses, simple and haughty; a human couple carved partly in wood, partly in stone; woolens and leather worked pillows. Force and rigor in everything, with waves crashing into rocks as background music.

The construction is basically the same in all the villas, but this one is more ample in its roofs and is gathered together in less space. There are three bedrooms which keep to the tarahumara motif in textiles, adornments, sculptures, baskets, wrought iron.

The Villa Mitla receives the visitor with a panel of worked quarry stone as an outer wall, accompanied by a mermaid. Tiled floors, stones set even in the kitchen counter, fantastic figures carved in brightly painted wood, stone filigree over the fireplace. Mermaids abound, as well as beaten tinwork and baskets. The star of this enclosure is a dress from Gelaguetza, Oaxaca.

*Green clay pine cones from Michoacan, Maya huipiles, ceremonial dresses from Oaxaca. These precious and valuable works are on display not only as adornment but as part of an effort to share a profound and distant art.*



