

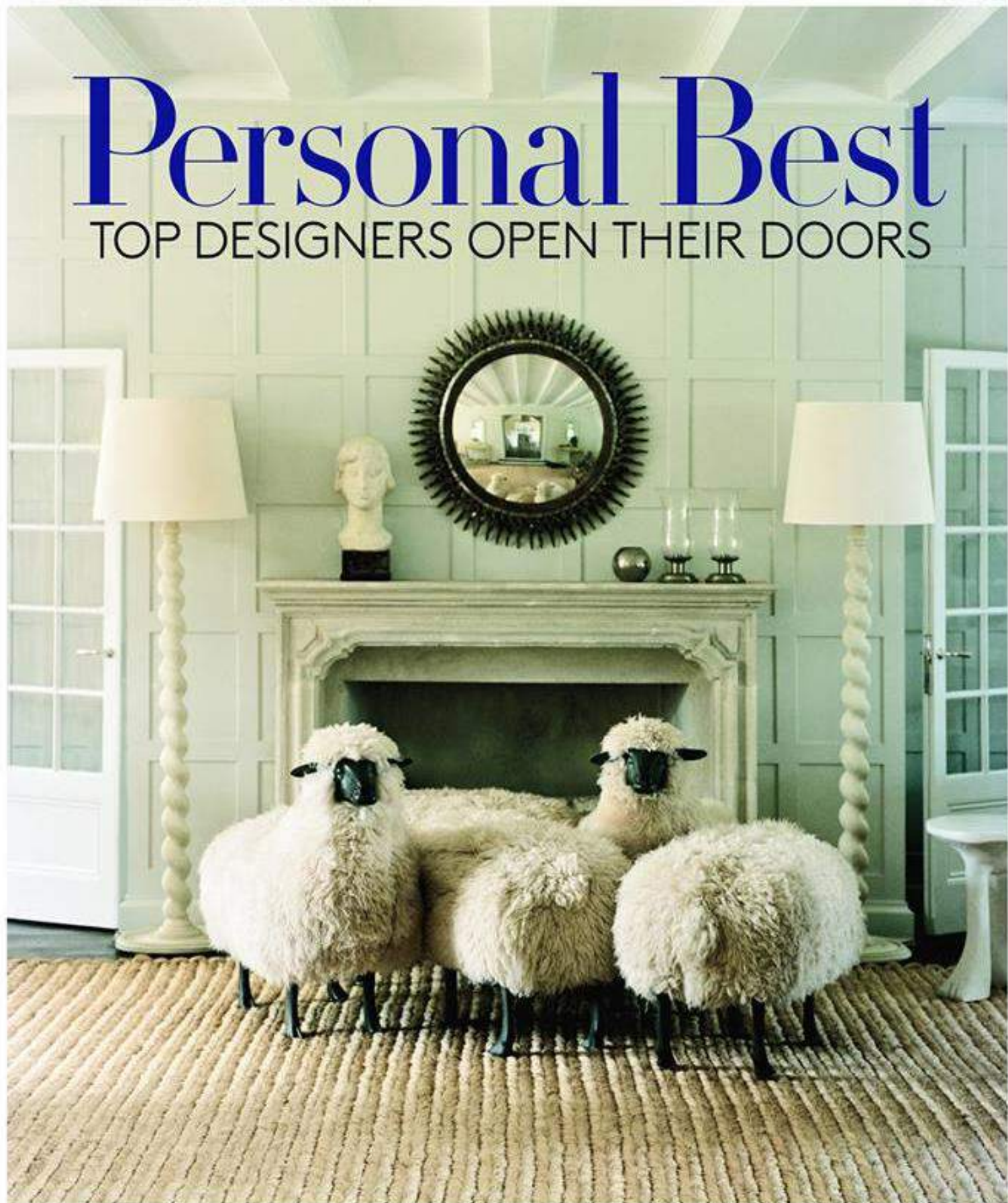
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AUTHORITY

APRIL 2016

Personal Best

TOP DESIGNERS OPEN THEIR DOORS



TRAVELS

Las Bóvedas, a market housed in a former prison in Cartagena, Colombia's old walled city.

LATIN LUXE

The Colombian city of Cartagena works its magic with enchanting Spanish Colonial architecture, cultural riches, and a sophisticated international crowd

To walk the sultry streets of Cartagena de Indias, the vibrant Caribbean port on Colombia's northern coast, is to feel a Gabriel García Márquez novel come to life. The 16th-century walled center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is dense with sherbet-hued Spanish Colonial buildings, their carved-wood balconies erupting in cascades of flaming bougainvillea. The Baroque domes of the Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria and the San Pedro Claver church rise above the city's



From top: Cartagena's Bocagrande beach. Vera, the Italian restaurant at the Tcherassi Hotel + Spa. A fruit vendor costumed in the colors of the Colombian flag.



narrow lanes like Neapolitan confections. Women dressed in ruffled skirts of red, blue, and yellow—the colors of Colombia's flag—sell fresh fruit from baskets perched atop their turbaned heads. Traditional musicians and dancers take to the shady palm-filled Plaza de Bolívar, flanked by the whitewashed Palacio de la Inquisición, housing the **Museo Histórico de Cartagena de Indias**, on one end and an outpost of Bogotá's gold-themed **Museo**

del Oro Zenú on the other. "There is a real sense of romance and mystery here," says Colombian-born, New York-based designer Richard Mishaan, who maintains a Cartagena residence and has overseen several projects in the area. "It's still authentic and pure."

Cartageneros invariably use one word to describe the city's ineffable charms: "Magic," says Chiqui Echavarría, a social fixture known for hosting swanky parties at her home in the *centro histórico*. Fashion designer Silvia Tcherassi, who owns the stylish **Tcherassi Hotel + Spa**, agrees. "It's magical, with a feeling of old-fashioned Caribbean glamour." For decades, though, the city languished like the rest of Colombia. Violent conflicts among narcotraffickers and Marxist guerrillas caused nervous Colombians to

move abroad, and it's only in the past few years that the tourists have arrived. Moda Operandi founder Lauren Santo Domingo recalls the city's ambience at the time of her storybook wedding in 2008, celebrated in the 16th-century Iglesia de Santo Domingo and attended by a jet-set crowd. "Cartagena was much sleepier then. There weren't a lot of international visitors." But as peace and prosperity have taken root, thanks largely to the ongoing success of U.S.-backed anti-drug-trafficking efforts, Colombia has flourished—and Cartagena, its pride and joy, is booming. "It's become a very cosmopolitan city," says Echavarría, whose shop **Casa Chiqui** is a trove of treasures she's brought back from her travels through India, Thailand, Mexico, and other far-flung destinations. →

TRAVELS

From top: The dining room at the fashionable La Vitrola restaurant. Artesanías de Colombia sells *sombreros vueltiaos*, traditional hats made of regional *caña flecha* grass. A street lined with bougainvillea-draped homes.



New high-rises are shaping the oceanfront Bocagrande neighborhood into a Miami-like crescent of hotels and condos. Within the historic center, restored Spanish Colonial mansions with arcaded courtyards are being fashioned into appealingly intimate boutique hotels, such as the gracious **Casa San Agustín**, the homey **Anandá**, and Tcherassi's seven-room jewel box. The latter, Mishaan says, is "the chicest and most elegant hotel in Cartagena." He is currently collaborating with Tcherassi on a new 42-room property around the corner, slated to open late

Castaño spent eight years in the U.S. cooking with Mario Batali and now has several acclaimed restaurants in Bogotá. Juan Felipe Camacho, an alumnus of Spain's multi-Michelin-starred **Arzak**, runs **Donjuán**, focused on seafood with an imaginative twist, while Alejandro Ramírez, a veteran of Gordon Ramsay and Daniel Boulud kitchens, helms the farm-to-table **María** next door. Bogotá's Rausch brothers, proprietors of the Cartagena seafood joint **Marea by Rausch**—Mishaan suggests booking one of the waterfront tables overlooking the walled city—have

this year. Meanwhile, the original hotel's sleek restaurant, **Vera**, is one of the best spots in town for high-end Italian fare.

Indeed, the city's culinary scene is thriving, as young expat chefs return to Colombia to start their own ventures. Vera's Daniel

also opened **El Gobernador by Rausch**, in the Bastión hotel.

The most sought-after dinner reservation in town is **La Vitrola**, where Santo Domingo likes to take visiting friends for mojitos and seafood carpaccio, surrounded by musicians strumming classic boleros. "It looks and feels as if you're in Cuba in the 1940s, like you might run into Hemingway," notes Mishaan, also a frequent diner. "But the ceviche is excellent everywhere you go," offers Santo Domingo, who's partial to **La Cevichería**. Echavarría recommends tiny **El Boliche Cebichería**, whose chef, Oscar Colmenares, an alum of Michelin-starred Martín Berasategui in Spain, serves exotic coconut- and tamarind-flavored spins on the traditional lime-cured fish.

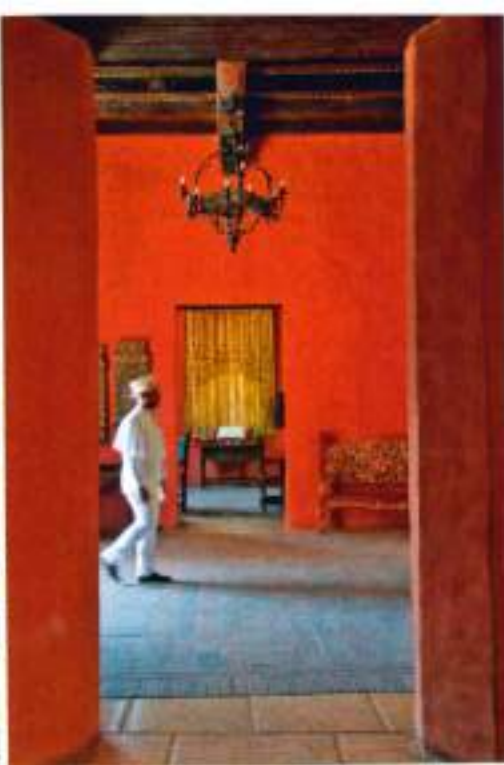
After dinner everyone in Cartagena—from socialites to backpackers—heads to the up-and-coming Getsemani area for late-night salsa dancing at **Café Havana** or **Quiebra Canto**, both favorites of Santo

TRAVELS



Domingo and Colombian-born, Paris-based fashion designer Esteban Cortázar. The neighborhood, just beyond the old city's walls, is rapidly transforming from a once-dangerous slum into a bustling enclave of artists' studios, trendy restaurants, and hopping bars. "Getsemani has come up so much over the last two years. I couldn't believe the energy there," enthuses Cortázar, remembering a recent visit. Adds Echavarría, "It's more bohemian than the old city, but with the same incredible architecture."

Cartagena's retail scene is also evolving. The city's most upscale shops are clustered near the **Charleston Santa Teresa**, one of two large hotels built within former convents in the historic city (the other is the **Sofitel Legend Santa Clara**). St. Dom, a two-year-old concept store in the vein of Paris's Colette, sells a smart mix of fashion, design objects, books, and jewelry. The inventive women's wear at **Silvia Tcherassi** and the playfully patterned swimsuits and bikinis at **OndadeMar** are the height of Cartagena fashion. And government-owned **Artesanías de Colombia**, which has several outlets



around town, highlights hand-carved furniture, wicker baskets, and delicately painted ceramics, some crafted by indigenous tribes. "There are fantastic things to buy there," Mishaan says.

Cartagena takes great pride in its prominence as a cultural destination, with annual music, literary, and film festivals that draw visitors from around the globe. "The city has a real soul to it," says Bogotá native and Manhattan gallery owner Nohra Haime. Her Cartagena outpost, **NH Galeria**, is the local contemporary-art hub, where well-heeled collectors from Colombia and abroad come to see works by international heavyweights such as Niki de Saint Phalle and Sophia Vari and rub shoulders with Colombian artists like Natalia Arias, Ruby Rumié, and Olga de Amaral. "All of the art and culture is part of what makes it such a magical city," Cortázar says.

Yet for all its newfound sophistication, Cartagena remains a place to enjoy simple pleasures. Locals and tourists alike take to open-air cafés—such as **El Baluarte San Francisco Javier**, set atop the colonial ramparts—to watch the sun set over the Caribbean Sea. People gather in the parks and squares to soak up the atmosphere of a different time and place. "Cartagena has changed so much," Santo Domingo says. "But in many important ways, it hasn't changed at all." —RAUL BARRENECHE

CARTAGENA DETAILS

CULTURAL VENUES AND GALLERIES

Museo Histórico de Cartagena de Indias Palacio de la Inquisición, Plaza de Bolívar; +57-5-664-4570; mhca.gov.co.
Museo del Oro Zenú Carrera 4 #33-26, Plaza de Bolívar; +57-5-660-0778; banrepcultural.org.
NH Galeria Callejón de los Estribos; +57-5-664-0561; nhgaleria.com.

SHOPS

Artesanías de Colombia Carrera 2A #31-46; +57-5-660-0435; artesaniasdecolombia.com.co.
Casa Chiqui Calle de la Universidad #36-127; +57-5-668-5429; casachiqui.com.
OndadeMar Calle Santa Teresa #3-13; +57-5-668-5226; ondademar.com.
Silvia Tcherassi Plaza Santa Teresa #31-11; +57-5-664-9403; silviatcherassi.com.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS

El Baluarte San Francisco Javier Calle San Juan de Dios; +57-318-530-8802; baluartesfj.com.
El Boliche Cebichería Calle Cochera del Hobo #38-17; +57-5-660-0074.
Café Havana Calle de la Media Luna, corner of Calle de Guerrero; +57-314-556-3905; cafehavanacartagena.com.
La Cevichería Calle Stuart #7-14; +57-5-660-1492; lacevicheriacartagena.com.
Donjuán Calle del Colegio #34-60, Local 1; +57-5-664-3857; donjuancartagena.com.
El Gobernador by Rausch Calle del Sargento Mayor #6-87; +57-5-315-741-7642.
Marea by Rausch Centro de Convenciones #8A-34A; +57-5-654-4205; mareabyrausch.com.
Maria Calle del Colegio #34-60, Local 2; +57-5-660-5380; mariacartagena.com.
Quebra Canto Calle 24, Media Luna. 8B #25-100; +57-5-664-1372; quebracanto.com.
La Vitrola Calle Baloco #2-01; +57-5-660-0711.

HOTELS

Anandá Calle del Cuartel #36-77; +57-5-664-4479; rooms from \$163/night; anandacartagena.com.
Casa San Agustín Calle de la Universidad #36-44; +57-5-681-0000; rooms from \$400/night; hotelcasasanagustin.com.
Charleston Santa Teresa Plaza Santa Teresa #31-23; +57-5-664-9494; rooms from \$880/night; hotelcharlestonsantateresa.com.
Sofitel Legend Santa Clara Calle del Torno #39-29; +57-5-650-4700; rooms from \$300/night; sofitel-legend.com.
Tcherassi Hotel + Spa Calle del Sargento Mayor #6-21; +57-5-664-4445; rooms from \$280/night; tcherassihotels.com.