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magical morocco

Writer *Emma Sloley* falls under the intoxicating spell of Marrakech and beyond

It would be easier to count the number of fashion designers and tastemakers who *haven't* drawn inspiration from Morocco than to count those who have. Diane von Furstenberg, John Galiano, Oscar de la Renta, Tory Burch, Nicole Miller, Canadian interior designer Patricia Gray, Jean Paul and Talitha Getty are a few who have—not to mention the late Yves Saint Laurent, who loved Marrakech so much he bought a house and one of the town's most beautiful landmarks, Jardin Majorelle.

Situated at the northern tip of Africa, with both ancient and new ties to Europe, Morocco is famous for casting a spell that's impossible to shake, thanks in part to a sense of otherworldliness that very few places in this rapidly homogenizing world can still evoke. On my second trip there (the first having left me with an undeniable case of *Maroc* wanderlust), I was determined to take the pulse of this fabled country through its wares. Just as food can give an insight into a culture's passions, customs and history, so, too, can discovering its markets, particularly in a country like Morocco, poised as it is between the traditions of a vanishing world and the high-tech allure of modernity. In the souks, the beauty of the country can be distilled down to

a series of colours and textures: the ingeniously cooling design of a djellaba (the long, hooded robe worn by both sexes); the hand-stitched embroidery on a caftan; the beading on a pair of babouche slippers.

So I began my journey in Marrakech at the heart of the medina, or old city. I checked into La Sultana Marrakech, a 21-room riad resplendent with intimate courtyards, ornate plasterwork, vibrant zellij tiles and African antiques. Sparrows swooped through Moorish arches while, nearby, water trickled gently in fountains. One of the hotel's most beguiling areas, though, is its rooftop, where guests can breakfast as they watch the city come to life in the streets below and the sun's rays hit the Atlas Mountains and the tiled minaret of the local mosque.

Located inside the casbah's ancient city walls, the riad is walking distance from Marrakech's main square, Jamaâ El-Fna—for my money, one of the world's best urban spectacles. There, Moroccans of every stripe mingle to haggle, tell stories, get henna tattoos, watch snake charmers perform and eat from the array of >

THE HAND
OF FATIMA
KEEPS EVIL
AT BAY

YVES SAINT
LAURENT'S
JARDIN
MAJORELLE

DIANE VON FURSTENBERG